

# Military charity set to investigate sexual trauma



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 DAILY Mirror

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► Tony Wright from Forward Assist

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**G**ROUNDBREAKING research into “military sexual trauma” (MST) suffered by men while serving in the UK armed forces is to be carried out in the North East.

It is being done by the Veterans charity Forward Assist based in Dudley, North Tyneside.

Former Royal Marine Tony Wright, who heads the organisation, said: “Myself and our ‘in-house’ mental health therapist and an organisation called Baseline research will be designing a questionnaire and training for any veterans taking part in the study. We hope to have the report published on our website by January 2021.”

It follows a study published last year by Forward Assist called “No Man’s Land” into the impact of MST on women services personnel. For it, they interviewed 100 women who had been in the RAF, Army or Navy, and discovered 52 had been sexually assaulted.

Mr Wright said: “We know from our work with women veterans that military sexual trauma is an unaddressed issue for victims and survivors and our consultation groups with male veterans tell us that it’s an issue for men too.”

The term MST is recognised by the United States Department of Veterans Affairs but not by the Ministry of Defence in the UK.

In response to a Parliamentary question put in June this year about the MoD’s “understanding and acknowledgement” of MST, Defence Minister Johnny Mercer MP responded that he was aware of the term used elsewhere as a means of referring to cases of sexual assault or sexual harassment. “The Ministry of Defence has made no formal decision to do the same,” he said.

Mr Mercer added: “What we have done is make it absolutely clear there is no place for this behaviour in the armed

forces. All allegations are thoroughly investigated and appropriate support provided to the victims, be they serving or veteran.”

Mr Wright said he hoped Forward Assist’s work would throw a bit of light on a previously unresearched topic in the UK military.

He said: “We travelled to America last year to research the topic and we were told that one in four women and one in 100 men told the Department of Veterans Affairs that they experienced sexual trauma while in the military. We doubt it’s very different in the UK except it goes unreported.”

Mr Wright said participants will remain anonymous and confidentiality will be guaranteed.

“All of our interventions are gender-sensitive and our qualified mental health counsellor and social work staff are safeguarding trained and will offer ongoing support to anyone taking part in the research,” he said.

He added: “The reality is that several male veterans accessing our services have already disclosed sexual assault whilst in the military and this research hopes to explore how unresolved trauma impacts on work, relationships and life after service.”

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**Tony Wright**