

FORWARD ASSIST

FORCES - VETERAN - CITIZEN





ARMED FORCES
COVENANT

EMPLOYER
RECOGNITION
SCHEME

GOLD AWARD



ARMED FORCES
COVENANT

EMPLOYER
RECOGNITION
SCHEME

SILVER AWARD



ARMED FORCES
COVENANT

EMPLOYER
RECOGNITION
SCHEME

BRONZE AWARD

Who Am I ?

FORWARD
ASSIST
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My Name is Tony Wright

- **Tony Wright: Founder & CEO of Forward Assist. Qualified & Registered Social Worker–Probation Officer Former Home Office Adviser G.O.N.E (Drugs & Alcohol Team)**
- **Forward Assist is a Multi-Award Winning ‘Veteran Centric’ Support Charity and campaign organisation based in the North East of England with a geographical footprint across the UK.**
- **Registered Charity in England and Wales. Charity Number 1150408.**
- **Current Areas of Interest: Post Traumatic Growth, Military Sexual Trauma & Its Impact on Intersectional Military Communities.**

What Do We Do?

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Forward Assist Support Service

- **One-Stop-Shop / In-Person & Virtual IAG Service**
- **Veterans Health & Wellbeing Community Hub**
- **Engagement – Assessment – Care Planning – Assimilation**
- **Empowering veterans aged between 18- 101 years**
- **Inter-generational Action Orientated virtual 'Peer Led' Support Group for MST Survivors.**
- **Currently carrying out a consultation exercise with older isolated veterans with muscular skeletal difficulties & associated mental health issues.**
- **Veterans British Parliamentary Debate Training Project**
- **UK-USA Veterans Exchange Project**



How We Do It!

- **We Believe Veterans are the Civilian Community's Greatest Asset**
- **We Promote Post Traumatic Growth**
- **We encourage Community Engagement.**
- **We facilitate a bespoke 'Soldier to Citizen' journey.**
- **We campaign for better services for all Military Sexual Trauma Survivors**
- **We give a voice to hidden & marginalised groups by writing privileged access 'lived experience' research reports.**



Lived Experience Research

www.forward-assist.com





Invisible Wounds

Military Sexual Trauma & Moral Injury

Military sexual trauma, or MST, is not a term recognised by the Ministry of Defence or the Office for Veterans Affairs in the UK.

In the USA it is used to refer to experiences of sexual assault or repeated, threatening sexual harassment that a person experienced during his or her military service. MST includes;

- Any sexual activity during military service where an individual was involved against his or her will. They may have been pressured into sexual activities (for example, with threats of negative consequences for refusing to be sexually cooperative or with implied better treatment in exchange for sex)
- Unable to consent to sexual activities (for example, when intoxicated) or physically forced into sexual activities. Other experiences that fall into the category of MST include, unwanted sexual touching or grabbing, threatening, offensive remarks about a person's body or sexual activities and threatening and unwelcome sexual harassment and/or advances.
- If these experiences occurred while an individual was on active duty, active duty for training, or inactive duty for training, they are considered to be MST.



The Link Between MST & Moral Injury

- Military Sexual Trauma (MST), including sexual assault and harassment, can be a morally injurious event, leading to distress and mental health issues, and is often associated with betrayal, which is a key factor in moral injury.
- Moral injury, in the context of military service, refers to the difficulties people face after doing high-stakes things that violate what is right and just, or after being forced to experience others' immoral actions.
- Experiencing MST, whether as a victim or **perpetrator**, can be a morally injurious event, violating deeply held beliefs and causing distress.
- MST often involves betrayal, either by fellow service members or military leadership, which is a significant aspect of moral injury.



- MST can contribute to moral injury through various pathways, including betrayal, witnessing, or being a victim of sexual assault or harassment.
- Women and intersectional minority groups may be more vulnerable to betrayal-based moral injuries, given their higher likelihood of experiencing MST and the potential for marginalisation within the military.
- The effects of MST related moral injury can be a pathway to despair as it includes feelings of guilt, shame, anger, sadness, anxiety, and disgust. Beliefs about being bad, damaged, or unworthy is common as is suicidal ideation, completion, loss of trust or faith in people and avoidance of intimacy. Many experience a loss of religious faith, or loss of faith in humanity or a just world.



To Summarise...

MST & Moral Injury

Military Sexual Trauma (MST): Psychological trauma resulting from sexual assault or repeated, threatening sexual harassment experienced during military service.

Moral Injury: The deep emotional and spiritual suffering stemming from actions or inactions that violate a person's core moral beliefs.



Where They Intersect

- MST can *shatter moral frameworks*, especially in institutions built on loyalty, trust, and camaraderie.
- Victims often feel **betrayal by the very system and people meant to protect them** a prime trigger for moral injury.
- The experience is not just of harm, but of **moral disillusionment**, leading to spiritual, existential, and emotional wounds.



The Psychological Fallout

- **Guilt & Shame:** Survivors internalise the trauma, feeling culpable for the abuse.
- **Loss of Trust:** Trust in leadership, comrades, and even in self is often decimated.
- **Isolation:** Fear of disbelief or retaliation leads to silence, deepening the injury.
- These symptoms mirror and often *amplify* those seen in combat-related moral injuries.



The Institutional Dimension

- **Betrayal trauma:** When leadership fails to respond with justice and empathy, it becomes a second moral wound.
- **Cultural silence and stigma:** Perpetuates moral conflict and emotional suppression.
- *Healing becomes impossible in an environment where the moral compass is fractured.*



Healing the Dual Wound

- Addressing MST **without moral injury is incomplete**; the spiritual dimension must be acknowledged.
- Requires **trauma-informed, justice-sensitive, and morally validating care**.
- Peer support**, narrative therapy, and meaning-making are crucial in reintegration and healing.



A Call For Moral Courage

- Preventing MST is not just about policy, it's about preserving the moral soul of the military.
- *To confront MST is to engage in moral leadership, the kind that heals not just individuals, but institutions.*

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QUESTIONS?

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