

**SEXUAL HARASSMENT – PRECAUTIONS IN THE
MULTICULTURAL INTERRELATIONSHIP WITHIN THEATRE
OF OPERATIONS FROM AFGHANISTAN**

"With power comes responsibility"

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Abstract: Sexual harassment and the impact on the victim is part of the understanding the military culture, the responsibilities of the chain of command, the rights of the victims and the respect of the standard procedures in a multicultural environment, specific for a coalition operation. The article analyses the main causes of sexual harassment from working in mixed teams in hostile conditions, to alcohol abuse, stress and limitations imposed, to a leadership that is not prepared to recognize cultural differences, or to impose group barriers. It also takes into consideration the interaction from multicultural point of view like visual contact, minimum distance accepted, the way to address, gestures, comments, gossip all of them determining the victim to live with the shame to be judged and blamed, suffering restrictions in training and in taking part into missions, or affecting their carrier.

1. INTRODUCTION

Multiculturalism, cultural differences, differences in organizational and personnel policies generate frictions of varying degrees within multinational military coalitions. The way in which militaries of different armies perceive interaction varies from one society to another. Different forms of sexual assault are perceived and treated differently by the military of different nations, given the differences between national cultures and national laws.

The issue of sexual assault is actively addressed by states and armies participating in the multinational coalition, but national law and how to prepare staff for missions is different from army to army. Advanced armies pay special attention to the aspect of sexual assault. International, national policies, activation in multicultural coalitions are factors that have contributed to the increasing importance of this issue. Any form of sexual assault is against the law and policies of military organizations. The desire to manifest power weakens human spirit and can generate physical and / or emotional abuses, with various types of sexual assault, stereotypes, marginalization, etc. Forms of sexual assault are very diverse, ranging from verbal content with sexual connotations, contact and / or physical aggression to visual and auditory media, etc.

Existing elements in society also find correspondence in the army because it is a reflection of society. The military environment is predominantly male, "a world of men," a reflection of the social system to which the military subculture belongs. The international feminist current imposed changes in attitudes and rights granted to women. Moving from the "world of men" to a common world, where individuals have equal rights and obligations, is not suddenly done, but it is still necessary for a period when rules must be taught or imposed if the common sense does not work. Until recently, operational positions were occupied by men, women occupying administrative,

medical, technical posts. While preserving the social model, men were taught to "accept" women only in these roles, that is, the stage of social evolution.

2. SEXUAL HARASSMENT IN MILITARY ORGANISATION

Current generations are the product of the struggle to achieve equal rights for women, who know that there are laws and institutions designed to protect these rights. In the fight against sexual abuses, various attitudes adopted by military women in their careers have been recorded, attitudes generated by how they perceived they are helped by legislation and support bodies created in their support. At the beginning of this struggle, women were just victims of the war for treatment and equal rights. As the established institutions began to enforce the laws and procedures, the persecutors received their punishments, and the publicity that was made on the subject clearly translated the message of equal treatment of the sexes.

Sexual abuses do not just happen between women and men. Men can also be assaulted by their organization colleagues. The military environment is a particular one, in which during the training and functioning in common spaces and sustained stress conditions, negative character traits can be activated. The slogan "boys are boys" has created the opening for accepting jokes in boys' groups but these jokes brought to the extreme generate feelings of demasculination, reduction of personal dignity, respect and confidence within the group. Abuses are generally caused by those of higher rank than the victim, with the primary purpose of showing them who owns the power. Generally, aggressive actions escalate in amplitude as they evolve.

Various forms of sexual assault have been manifested and continue to manifest in modern armies. Two notions are often spoken on this topic: sexual assault and sexual abuse. These include unwanted treatments and/ or undesirable advances, of sexual nature culminating in non-consensual sexual relationships.

The reports have found that one of the main causes of unwanted sexual behaviors is alcohol consumption. Another favorable cause is the stress and limitations imposed by the operating space in theaters of operations. Another favorable case is unprepared leadership in recognizing cultural differences and imposing barriers in the group.

The annual reports drawn up by different armies have as common denominators the following causes for which victims choose not to report the different types of wrong sexual conduct: breach in the confidentiality of the process, shame, fear of being "condemned and judged" by colleagues, fear of unmerited disciplinary consequences, restrictions from the preparation and participation in missions, affecting the level of the Security Certificate, fear of re-victimization, etc.

Military organizations respect national laws but also apply their own culture with specific norms, practices and customs. The key to understanding the military culture and the impact that sexual aggression has on the victim lies in knowing the responsibilities of the chain of command, the rights of the victim, and the observance of procedures, which in the advanced states are very clearly stated. Without all these conditions being met, the punishment of the guilty cannot be achieved and the victim is the one that suffers emotional trauma, career pressures and social blame. For example, it is up to the commander to determine whether a case has to follow the legal course, who is part of the investigative team, etc. which allows the subjective approach of the whole process and raises the question of conflict of interest and / or abuse of power.

In some cases, the commander is not sure of the type of aggression, making confusion between indecent, physical or verbal behavior, directed against another person, sexual assault, sexual abuse, sexual harassment.

Lack of adequate training on this line generates decisions and courses of action which, for future research, are impediments to the research process and influencing its verdict.

Aggression, abuse, sexual harassment in all its forms affects the effectiveness of military missions. The military environment presents particularities generated by the preconception that "it is the world of men". Unfortunately, there are still cases in army interaction where women who are victims of sexual assault are accused of creating conditions favoring deviant behaviors in prolonged stress situations. Information protection deficiencies in staff training (reporting chain, time, responsibilities), continuation of activity in the same environment as the aggressor (often in a subordination position) to which the suspicion of co-culpability by provocation is often added, collectively projected on the victim, are elements that make it harder to investigate guilt, favor perpetuation of sexual aggression, and emotionally traumatizing victims. There have been countless cases where both victims and potential witnesses of various forms of aggression have suffered the group's revenge. All this is a powerful reason why many of the victims chose to silence the event.

In the US Navy, for example, the investigation begins when the victim's complaint is officially registered. From that moment on, the whole life of the aggressor becomes the subject of research, the organs accredited in the research have automatic access to the computer, to the personal and service telephone, can carry out inspection in the area where he lives, etc. and final punishment and stigma within the Military Body are relentless.

3. ASPECTS OF INTERACTION IN MULTICULTURAL CONTEXT

Unwanted sexual advances, preferential positions in staff schemes, disciplinary measures conditioned by accepting or not accepting these advances are just some of the issues in which women have their career and emotional status affected. When people with a higher rank thank the one of the victim claim sexual favors in return for benefits or advances in rank, it is a crime. Another form of sexual assault is represented by the hostile conditions at which staff are exposed to cause sexual concessions. There have been countless cases, even in the Afghanistan theater of operations, related to exposure to operational situations, subject to sexual favors. Persistent gazes, languros, flirting, comments about a person's sexual orientation, gestures and comments about specific physical traits, jokes related to pregnancy, unsolicited massage, embellishment, gossip, use of offensive diminutives, display of posters with sexually content, sending emails with masked or sexually explicit content, accessing sexual content from the computer, role comments, etc. can be interpreted as sexual assault if they are not wanted.

I will present some of the aspects of interaction in multicultural perspective and of different perceptions of sexual assault issues in the Afghanistan theater of operations.

Visual contact - for European countries, maintaining a visual contact during the conversation is a sign of attention and respect for the participants in the conversation. Similarly, greeting is accompanied by brief exchange glances. Italians, French, Romanians, etc. can accompany the greeting with a smile without any sexual connotation but just as a sign of politeness. The reaction of militants, especially women, from the coalition is a misinterpretation of this non-verbal language, amid an aggressive anti-aggression policy and a sustained premeditated preparation.

There were also complaints of US female staff against Afghans working alongside the coalition in the sense that they were too insistent.

In our opinion, most of these situations are only the result of curiosity, knowing that women in uniform or civilian feminine staff are a curiosity for Afghans resulting from a different way of perceiving the role of women in society.

Minimal accepted distance-represents another important cultural aspect that can be interpreted differently depending on the culture from which the military comes from. It is very interesting, for example, the observation made during informal meetings during which a true "dance" of interactions takes place.

Militants belonging to states where the accepted distance is more than one and a half meters (USA, UK, Northwest Europeans) feel "invaded", "suffocated" by the conversational partners coming from states (Italy, Greece, Afghanistan) whose minimum accepted distance in interaction is less than one meter. The minimal distance, accompanied by touch gestures, triggered obvious retaliatory reactions among the military, even degenerating into official complaints from the female staff within the mission. It is a negative experience that even the Romanian Army faced during several missions, materialized in reports of sexual harassment that affected both the image of our army and the evaluation reports of the personnel involved in these events.

Sexual jokes - they are generally part of the men's way of life. It is a behavior that is found in the groups from which the soldiers come (colleagues, sports teams, associations). These are seen as ways of integrating newcomers and have different degrees and connotations. In the army, overcoming boundaries generates degradation of group cohesion, creates a lack of confidence in leadership, and has disastrous effects on groups of soldiers. Under the stressful conditions of the theater of war, exposing a military to a degrading situation for him may trigger tragic effects on the other members of the group. The way of addressing, flirting - are generally non-characteristic aspects of the military environment. When someone is confronted with an "atypical, languorous" way of speaking, it is preferred to first determine whether it is typical and normal for the individual or is a type of addressing in order to get certain benefits from a situation or career. Flirt is forbidden in the military environment, the way of interaction between soldiers must be maintained at a fair and professional level. In a multicultural environment, gesture and smile, more common in the interaction of individuals in southern European countries, can easily be associated with flirting.

Comments about a person's sexual orientation - is an aspect that is associated with sexual assault. The acceptance by some states of the armed forces of persons with sexual orientation other than declared sex have generated immediate consequences. The living quarters in the mission headquarters, for example, are separated by gender. There have been countless reports of sexual assault, of various types, in male-occupied areas. The presence of homosexuals was considered "aggressive and demasculinating" and, although at declarative level, it is a measure accepted as a result of taxation imposed by international egalitarian policies, in reality it is considered as a factor that diminishes the efficiency of coalition functioning.

Gestures and comments related to specific physical features - referring to different specific anatomical parts are considered verbal sexual assaults and are amended by specific laws. Living in common, stress, sexual deprivation creates conditions conducive to unprincipled observations. There is no excuse for such events, especially knowing that the leadership of the mission has paid particular attention to creating conditions of distraction through sport and sufficient rest time plus the national staff rotation policies in theaters.

Touching and embracing - In some European countries (Italy, Romania, Greece, Turkey) it is a common behavior that people touch one another on the arm, on the shoulder, or to embrace when they revisit without interpreting it as a gesture of privacy

violation. These aspects of interaction are limited to the minimum in the coalition, possibly practiced only among members of the same culture, due to the negative experiences recorded.

The use of diminutives - also falls into the category of sexual assault at a verbal level. Using them to create a custom link only creates both a distorted image of the recipient person and a marginalization of him by the rest of the group, a target of group jokes. It is a discouraged practice irrespective of the military culture of the staff.

Displaying posters with sexually explicit or masked content - It's a point that does not require detail. It is forbidden in the theaters but often practiced in the spaces belonging mainly to men. Not allowed in common workspaces.

Sending self-masquerading or sexually explicit emails, accessing materials or text messages containing sexual content from your computer - it's common sense to avoid such practices at work. There have been no complaints about this subject in the theater of operations.

Comments or role-related behaviors - Extremist egalitarianism has created a strong reactivity to this topic. In Western cultures, the woman is accepted as an equal part of the workforce and is expected to be as competent and competitive as a man, adding to the roles of mother and wife, roles she is expected to be performing at. By contrast, in Islamic societies, women do not have an important role in the labor market. She is subordinate to her husband, and men in general, and her role is only within the family, "the woman's place is only in the kitchen ...". The divergent way in which women's role in society is viewed may generate frictions when forces participating in the mission, including women with rights and responsibilities identical to men, intend to act in a society that does not share the same rights for both sexes. Within male groups, roles are clearly defined, strength, common sense and performance are valued. This dimension has a major role in multinational missions where women are viewed differently in different cultures. Women, regardless of degree or position, because they come from societies where egalitarianism is promoted, have difficulty understanding their exclusion from meetings involving high-level participants in Muslim, traditionalist societies. Making unilateral concessions sometimes goes beyond the level of understanding the rules of the coalition.

Gossip with sexual connotations, compliments - are other ways a person can think that their image has been affected within the group and is entitled to express their disagreement with these unsolicited behaviors.

In the theaters of operations, where attention is focused on missions, there is a risk that sexual assault situations cannot be dealt with all due care, the victim's condition not being the important point of the respective stage of the mission. Being a victim in such situations is perceived by the group as an abdication from the general values of the group: respect, discipline, power and strength to move on even in the most difficult situations and breaking the cohesion of the group. This affects the process of investigation and punishment of the deed.

Victims of various forms of sexual assault develop a varied symptomatology, a consequence of physical and emotional trauma. Sometimes they can be misdiagnosed as being forms of mental illness, all of which have an impact on the victim's careers.

Another consequence of sexual abuse of any form is the total loss of victim's confidence in uniform and sense of isolation.

In 2005, the US Department of Defense set up a special program dedicated to sexual assault in the armed forces: SAPR (Sexual Assault Prevention and Response) in order to increase the effectiveness of the response and transparency of the actions undertaken in support of the victims. Another tool is the creation of a line 24/7 for military service they

can call and notify if their commander ignores the report of the victim. All of these tools are examples from the US military. I cannot assess the importance given by the Romanian Armed Forces to the issue of sexual assault, institutions and instruments created to comply with specific legislation.

Education, communication and awareness of the criminal responsibility of the offense committed are the tools by which the military subculture can minimize these socially and morally condemning facts.

The staff of the multinational coalition is aware of the fact that national laws on the subject have different content and, therefore, the risk of breaking them, resulting from ignorance, is great. For example, US legislation on the various types of sexual assault is very strict and a real psychosis has been created in its application. The culture of European countries is still a protective and polite way of intercourse. Gestures that Europeans are polite for Americans can be offensive.

One of the negative effects of this issue is the aspect of denial, until suppression, of natural roles. This is because of the fear of being "misinterpreted or amended by involuntary behaviors" or by exaggerating the desire for social equality promoted by extremist feminism.

Mutual respect, professionalism, trust, respect for dignity are essential elements for the healthy functioning of the groups. Operational theaters, real missions are the framework in which the validity of these elements is verified. The lack of a correct and active leadership generates group dysfunctions. Assigning time and attention to the problems in the group, following the correct procedures correctly, is part of the responsibilities of the command line staff.

Young soldiers pursuing a military career when faced with problems of the nature of sexual assaults of any kind lose confidence in the military institution and give up their careers in this field and these things only happen when acts of aggression are not punished when lack of leadership and tolerance of abuse create favorable incentives for this type of activity. Cohesion and mutual respect are one way of attracting professional values among the armed forces.

4. CONCLUSIONS

The inclusion of this theme in staff training programs has favored awareness of the legal consequences of such acts. Establishing specialized positions in unit-level process support is another measure of effectiveness in resolving such abuses. The cultural knowledge of the coalition nations is the favored factor of reinterpreting messages initially identified as unacceptable behaviors. Standardizing procedures for such situations is another way of effectively solving such incidents.

The various forms of sexual assault are not only a profound violation of military values but a disturbance of trust in this profession and in this life style altogether. Care and involvement in the relationship with other coalition participants, prevention of sexual assault are part of the objectives of army soldiers and are supported by coalition leaders. Those who notice such issues and do not interfere or report become part of the problem. The phenomenon of sexual aggression is not only characteristic of the army but is a reflection of society in general. The army does not give you morals or standards, they form before you enter this subculture. What the army does is to cultivate a set of values and is likely to amplify preexisting character traits. Sexual aggression can generate large deficiencies in the way the organization operates and contributes to lowering the morale of troops.

