

WOMEN VETERANS HEALTH CARE

*You served, you deserve
★ the best care anywhere.*



Citing a 2000 study, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention notes: one in six women in the United States reported experiencing an attempted or completed rape at some time in their lives. Sexual violence, or sexual trauma, can have a profound impact on a victim's physical and mental health. It is associated with an increased risk of a range of sexual and reproductive health problems and can lead to other long-term health problems, including chronic pain, headaches, and stomach problems. Victims of sexual trauma are more likely to abuse drugs or alcohol or engage in risky sexual behavior. In some cases, anger and stress stemming from such abuse trigger eating disorders, depression, and even suicide.

VA refers to sexual assault or repeated, threatening sexual harassment during military service as military sexual trauma (MST). Approximately one out of five women who visits VA facilities tells their VA health care provider they experienced sexual trauma in the military. To help veterans recover from MST, VA provides free care for related physical and mental health conditions. Veterans do not need to have a service-connected VA disability rating; they may be able to receive MST care even if they are not eligible for other VA care. Every VA facility has a designated MST Coordinator who serves as a contact person for MST-related issues. This person can help veterans find and access VA services and programs, state and federal benefits, and community resources. Every VA facility also has providers knowledgeable about treatment for the effects of MST. For more information about services available, Veterans can speak with their existing VA health care provider, contact the MST Coordinator at their nearest VA Medical Center, or contact their local Vet Center.

Women are now the fastest growing subgroup of U.S. Veterans. The number of Women Veterans is expected to increase dramatically in the next 10 years, and VA health care is expected to be in high demand by the Women Veterans of Operation Enduring Freedom and Operation Iraqi Freedom. The Department of Veterans Affairs understands the health care needs of Women Veterans and is committed to meeting these needs. Women Veterans served and they deserve the best quality care.

References:

<http://www.cdc.gov/ncipc/pub-res/images/sv%20factsheet.pdf> (CDC Fact Sheet citing National Violence Against Women Survey)

http://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/pdf/SV_factsheet-a.pdf

Kimerling, R., Gima, K., Smith, M. W., Street, A., & Frayne, S. (2007). The Veterans Health Administration and military sexual trauma. *American Journal of Public Health, 97*(12), 2160-2166.