

Military Sexual Trauma Fact Sheet – Veterans Health Administration November 2013

Military sexual trauma (MST) is the term used by VA to refer to sexual assault or repeated, threatening sexual harassment experienced during military service.

VA's Response to MST

VA is strongly committed to ensuring that Veterans have access to the help they need in order to recover from MST.

- Recognizing that many survivors of sexual trauma do not disclose their experiences unless asked directly, it is VA policy that all Veterans seen for health care are screened for experiences of MST. This is an important way of making sure Veterans know about the services available to them.
- All treatment (including outpatient, inpatient, and pharmaceutical care) for physical and mental health conditions related to experiences of MST is provided free of charge.
 - Veterans do not need to have reported the incidents or have other documentation that they occurred. Receipt of free MST-related services is entirely separate from the disability compensation process and service connection (a VA disability rating) is not required. Veterans may be able to receive free MST-related care even if they are not eligible for other VA care.
- Every VA medical center has a designated MST Coordinator who serves as a contact person for MST-related issues and can help Veterans access VA services and programs.
- VA offers a full continuum of mental health services for Veterans who experienced MST.
 - Every VA medical center provides care for conditions related to MST and must have providers knowledgeable about treatment for the aftereffects of MST.
 - Because MST is associated with a range of mental health problems, VA's general services for posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD), depression, anxiety, substance use disorders, and others are important resources for MST survivors.
 - In addition, some VA facilities have specialized outpatient mental health services focusing specifically on sexual trauma. Many community-based Vet Centers also have specially trained sexual trauma counselors.
 - There are also programs nationwide that offer specialized sexual trauma mental health treatment in residential or inpatient settings for Veterans who need more intense treatment and support.
 - To accommodate Veterans who do not feel comfortable in mixed-gender treatment settings, many facilities throughout VA have separate programs

for men and women. Residential and inpatient MST programs must have separate sleeping areas for men and women.

- Veterans can ask to meet with a clinician of a particular gender if it makes them more comfortable.
- In addition to its treatment programming, VA also provides training to staff on issues related to MST, including a mandatory training on MST for all mental health and primary care providers.
- VA also engages in a range of outreach activities to Veterans and conducts monitoring of MST-related screening and treatment, in order to ensure that adequate services are available.
- VA has established a national MST Support Team that monitors MST screening and treatment related to MST, oversees and expands MST-related education, training, outreach, and access to care initiatives, and promotes best practices in care for Veterans who experienced MST. The Team also provides consultation to VHA Mental Health Services on MST-related policy issues and responds to information requests from VA leadership and other stakeholders.

National Screening and Treatment Data

In FY 2012 (the most recent year for which data are available), 98.7% of Veterans seen for health care in VA were screened for experiences of MST.

In FY 2012, 72,497 or 23.6% of female Veterans and 55,491 or 1.2% of male Veterans seen for health care had reported a history of MST when screened by their VA provider.

In FY 2012, every VA health care facility provided MST-related outpatient care to both women and men. In total, over 725,000 outpatient MST-related mental health visits were provided to Veterans who had reported a history of MST. This is a 13.3 percent increase from the previous year (FY 2011).

MST and Satisfaction with VHA Care

VA data show that when Veterans were asked about the quality of the outpatient care they have received from VA, 78.5% of men and 72.3% of women rated the overall quality of care received from VA as “very good” or “excellent.”

Ratings of overall quality of care did not significantly differ among Veterans who did and did not report MST, after adjusting for patient characteristics.

How can Veterans get help?

For more information, 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. A list of VA and Vet Center facilities can be found at www.va.gov and www.vetcenter.va.gov. Veterans should feel free to ask to meet with a clinician of a particular gender if it would make them feel more comfortable.

Veterans can also learn more about VA's MST-related services online at www.mentalhealth.va.gov/msthome.asp and see video clips with the recovery stories of Veterans who have experienced MST at <http://maketheconnection.net/stories-of-connection/military-sexual-trauma>.

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