NATIONAL VETERANS PEER SPECIALIST COALITION MONTHLY CALL
REGISTER FOR CEU’S
VA's Center for Women Veterans monitors and coordinates VA's administration of benefit services and programs for women Veterans. The Center advocates for a cultural transformation that recognizes the service and contributions of women Veterans and women in the military, and also raises awareness of the responsibility to treat women Veterans with dignity and respect.
Women Veteran Coordinators

There are Women Veteran Coordinator’s (WVCs) located in every regional office who function as the primary contact for women Veterans. WVCs provide specific information and comprehensive assistance to women Veterans, their dependents, and beneficiaries concerning VA benefits and related non-VA benefits. They may assist you in the claims intake, development, and processing of military sexual and personal trauma claims.
VA Benefits for Victims of Military Sexual Trauma

VA has special services available to help women who experienced military sexual trauma (MST), including free, confidential counseling and treatment for mental and physical health conditions related to MST. You do not need to have a service-connected disability or injury, and may be able to receive this benefit even if you are not eligible for other VA care. You do not need to have reported the incidents when they happened or have other documentation that they occurred in order to receive MST services.

Every VA facility has a designated MST Coordinator who serves as a contact person for MST-related issues. This person is your advocate and can help you find and access VA services and programs, state and federal benefits, and community resources.
How to Apply

The specific VA benefit or program web page will provide tailored information about how to apply for a particular benefit or program. Generally, Service members, Veterans, and families can apply for VA benefits using one of the methods below.

Apply online using eBenefits, OR
Work with an accredited representative or agent, OR
Go to a VA regional office and have a VA employee assist you.

You can find your regional office on our Facility Locator page.
What Is Military Sexual Trauma?

The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) defines military sexual trauma (MST) as sexual harassment that is threatening or physical assault of a sexual nature. These traumas occur when a person is in the military. The location, genders of the people involved, and their relationship do not matter.

Sexual harassment may include:

- A put-down of your gender.
- Flirting when you've made clear it's not welcome.
- Sexual comments or gestures about your body or lifestyle.
- Pressure for sexual favors.

Sexual assault can be any sort of activity that you don't want. It doesn't have to be physical. Sexual threats or bullying are sexual assault. Rape is not the only type of sexual assault. Sexual assault is any unwanted sexual act, including touching or grabbing.

People who have been sexually assaulted often feel that no one can help, that they have no power, and that it may happen again. People may tell you or indicate that it was your fault or that you just need to get over it. Your military experience may make these feelings more intense. This is because the person responsible or the person's colleagues:

- May work with and live close to you.
- May have some control over your needs, such as medical care.
- May have some control over your promotions and career.

The bonding within your unit can make it hard to report your assault. You may feel torn between loyalty to your unit and to yourself, and you may feel you need to keep quiet for the good of the group. You may feel forced to choose between your military career and continued contact with the person who assaulted you.
Who Gets MST?

- MST can happen during war, peace, or training. It can be man-to-woman, woman-to-man, woman-to-woman, or man-to-man.
- Among veterans using VA health care:
  - About 23 out of 100 women (23%) reported sexual assault when in the military.
  - About 55 out of 100 women (55%) and 38 out of 100 men (38%) have experienced sexual harassment when in the military.
What Happens?

- There is no set reaction to MST. You may feel fear, shame, anger, embarrassment, or guilt. You may have a response right away, or it may be delayed for months or years. You may feel sad or scared months or years after the assault.
- After MST you may:
  - Avoid places or things that remind you of what happened.
  - Avoid your friends, family, and other people.
  - Have trouble sleeping or have nightmares.
  - Feel numb or feel nothing at all.
  - Have relationship problems.
  - Think about death or killing yourself.
  - Some people try to deal with their feelings by pulling away from other people, working all the time, or using drugs or alcohol. They also may feel depressed or have panic attacks.
  - Posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) after a sexual assault is common. PTSD is more likely to occur after rape than after any other traumatic event in both men and women.
After a sexual assault, many veterans keep quiet. They worry what others will think of them, and that talking about the assault will hurt their military careers. But the VA can help.

The VA has qualified MST counselors at every hospital. Many Vet Centers also have an MST coordinator. This person can discuss treatment with you and help you find the services that best fit your needs. Many VA and Vet Centers offer services specific to men and women.

Counseling often is used to treat MST. Your doctor also may prescribe medicines that help with symptoms. Treatment can help you cope with trauma and regain confidence and self-esteem.
Sources

