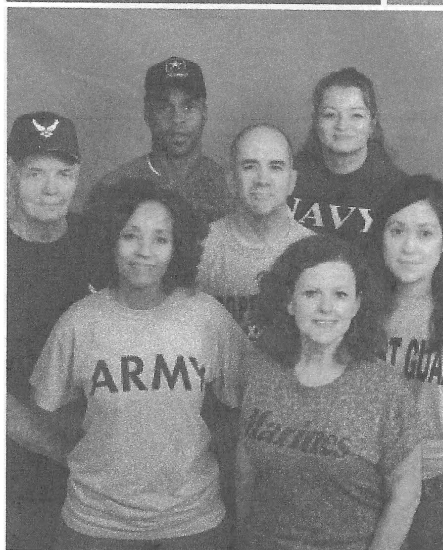


# You're Not Alone

in Recovering from  
Military Sexual Trauma

VA CAN HELP





## FACTS ON UNITED STATES MILITARY SEXUAL VIOLENCE

Statistics from the 2014 DoD SAPR Annual Report and the RAND Military Workplace Study  
[www.rand.org/nsr/projects/mwv/publications.html](http://www.rand.org/nsr/projects/mwv/publications.html)  
[www.sapr.mil/index.php/annual-reports](http://www.sapr.mil/index.php/annual-reports)

Sexual assault and retaliation persisted in 2014 for service members, with no overall improvements over 2010 levels.

### Sexual Violence Remains Pervasive

- **20,300** members (10,600 men and 9,600 women) were sexually assaulted in 2014. Junior enlisted members had the highest past-year rates (1.4% of men, 7.3% of women).
- **76%** of women and **57%** of men were assaulted at least twice in 2014, resulting in over **47,000** assaults.
- **90%** of assaults were in a military setting, mostly by a higher-ranking service member who knew the victim.
- **1 in 7** victims were assaulted by someone in their chain of command.

### Retaliation is the Norm

- **62%** of women who reported a sexual assault faced retaliation. The majority of these women faced reprisal from superiors and commanders.

### Vast Majority of Cases Go Un-Reported

- **86%** of victims did **not** report the crime in 2014.

### Low Trust and Satisfaction in System

- **1 in 3** victims who did not report believed reporting would hurt their career; that the process would be unfair; or that nothing would be done in their case.
- **1 in 4** feared retaliation from their chain of command or coworkers.
- Nearly half of survivors (**45%**) were dissatisfied or very dissatisfied with their treatment by their supervisor or chain of command.

### Sexual Assault is More Common in a Military Context

- Rates are **50%** higher among active-duty women, and over **100%** higher among men, than in the Reserves.

### Conviction and Prosecution Rates

- In 2014, of cases where the military could take action, only **19%** (588) were prosecuted and just **7%** (234) of offenders were convicted of a sex offense.

### High Demand for VA Care

- **1,027,810** outpatient visits took place at the VA for Military Sexual Trauma (MST)-related care in 2013.<sup>1</sup>
- **1 in 4** women and **1 in 100** men veterans who used the VA in 2013 screened positive for MST.

### Sexual Harassment is Alarming High

- **160,500** service members (1 in 4 women, 1 in 14 men) faced severe and persistent sexual harassment or gender discrimination in 2014. For most, the harassment persisted for at least several months.
- **60%** of victims were harassed by someone in their chain of command.
- Harassment victims were **50%** less likely to want to stay active duty if given the choice.

### Good Order and Discipline at Risk

"At such high rates, sexual harassment...could affect cohesion within military units, degrade mission effectiveness, and result in voluntary separations from service of qualified service members who find these behaviors to be an unacceptable condition of employment." – *RAND Corporation*

- A service member who was harassed was **49** times (men) and **14** times (women) more likely to be sexually assaulted than someone not harassed.
- Harassment was often **mishandled by the chain of command**: **44%** of victims were encouraged to drop the issue and **41%** said the person to whom they reported took no action.

*Definitions: Sexual Assault in the survey corresponds to crimes defined by the Uniform Code of Military Justice Article 120: rape, attempted rape, and non-penetrative assault involving private areas. Sexual Harassment in the survey is defined in federal law and military regulations, and includes a persistent and severe sexually hostile work environment that interferes with the ability to do one's job and gender discrimination which results in harm to one's career.*

<sup>1</sup> VHA MST Screening Data, FY 2013 Summary of MST-Related Outpatient Care, Department of Veterans Affairs.



## Some Common Reactions in Men

Some men recover on their own. Others struggle with some common reactions, even many years later. Many men say they are:

- Angry, especially when feeling threatened or betrayed
- Ashamed or feeling damaged or like a failure
- Worried about their masculinity or sexual orientation
- Having sexual concerns such as low sex drive or erection problems
- On edge, on guard, or having panic attacks
- Numb, flat, or unable to feel love or happiness
- Down, depressed, or thinking life isn't worth living
- Having fights or difficulty trusting
- Feeling isolated or avoiding reminders
- Having trouble with sleep, focus, or memory
- Having chronic pain or digestive problems
- Having eating problems or negative body image

If you can relate to some of these, that doesn't mean you're "crazy" or "weak." In fact, they are very understandable. However, it is also possible to feel better over time.



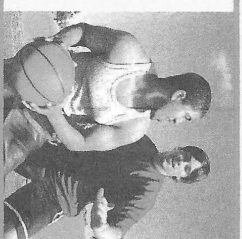
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## You Deserve a Better Quality of Life

- Many men have difficulties for years after MST. You may still blame yourself, for example. However, as you move forward, we hope you come to realize that **MST is never your fault.**
- Men are taught to be silent and show no emotion, but other men who experienced MST want you to know that healing is possible.
- No matter how long it has been, you can still get your life back and begin a new chapter free of anger, guilt, or despair.

*Fight the good fight. Even if you are doing well or choose to cope with MST on your own, find safe ways to take care of your physical and mental health. You'll be healthier and have a better quality of life.*

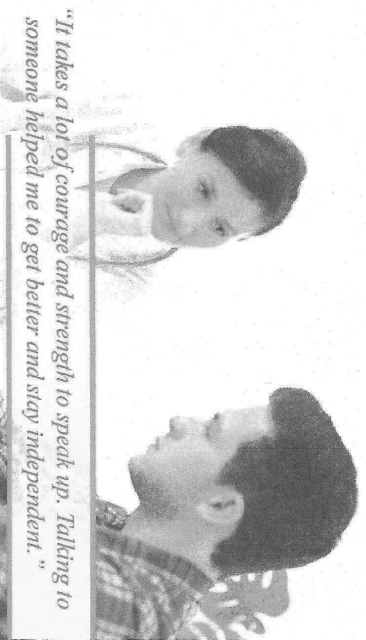




## It's Never Too Late, and It's Never Too Soon

VA is committed to helping all Veterans who are struggling.

- VA offers free, confidential counseling and treatment to Veterans\* for mental and physical health conditions related to MST.
- You **do not** need to have reported the MST when it happened or have documentation that it occurred.
- You **do not** need to have a VA disability rating and may be able to receive services even if you are not eligible for other VA care.
- You can ask to meet with a provider of a particular gender.
- All VA health care providers receive training on MST, including information about men's reactions and needs.
- Every VA health care system has an **MST Coordinator** who can help you access VA services and programs.



\*Note: Although this brochure refers to Veterans, individuals with Other Than Honorable discharges and current Service members can also receive certain MST-related services. Ask for the MST Coordinator at your local VA medical center to learn more.

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Strength and Recovery English MST May 20, 2008.indd 3



## You Are Not Alone

*Men often don't talk about sexual trauma, so survivors may think they're the only ones it's ever happened to. VA health care providers ask all Veterans about MST because of this.*

*Many men have taken the brave step to speak up. In fact, over one-third of all Veterans who tell a VA provider they experienced MST are men.*

## What Makes MST So Difficult for Many Men?

There are many reasons. Other male Veterans have said things like:

- "I can't believe this happened to me."
- "I felt like less of a man after; sometimes like not even a man at all!"
- "I tried so long to just move on. It's probably too late now."
- "I should have been able to stop it. It was my fault."



For many men, other issues are also critical:

- Men may have had uncontrollable biological reactions like an erection or ejaculation during MST. This does **not** mean that they wanted or enjoyed it. It also does not mean anything about their sexual orientation.

- Men's background and identity, like their age, race, sexual orientation, religion, and prior abuse or trauma, can also affect their reactions.

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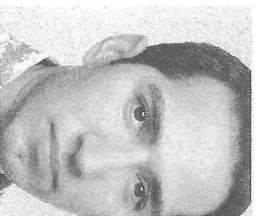
## What is Military Sexual Trauma?

Military sexual trauma, or MST, refers to sexual assault or sexual harassment that occurred during a Veteran's military service.

**MST can happen to anyone, regardless of gender, strength, size, age, race, sexual orientation, or branch or era of service.**

### MST can include:

- Being pressured into sexual activities, either with threats or with promises of better treatment
- Being unable to consent, such as when asleep or intoxicated
- Being physically forced or overpowered
- Unwanted sexual touching or grabbing
- Repeated and offensive remarks about one's body or sexual activities
- Threatening and unwelcome sexual advances
- Any sexual activity against your will or when you were unable to say no



Other things to know – MST also can occur more than once or by more than one perpetrator. The reason doesn't matter; even if it was called "hazing," it is still MST. Also, the perpetrator(s) may or may not be known to you, may be male or female, and may be Servicemembers or civilians.

*Veterans from many different backgrounds have experienced MST, and men and women may recover in similar ways. However, this brochure focuses on male Veterans' experiences.*

## Moving Forward in Your Recovery

There are many steps you can take to move forward after MST. At first, many men try to ignore it or cope on their own. However, if doing that isn't helping or you feel stuck, consider talking to someone.

- Telling a VA provider that you experienced MST can be a big step. You can do this even if you don't want or need treatment.
- If you are struggling, there are proven, effective treatments for many problems associated with MST.
- MST-related treatments can include medical care, outpatient, residential, and inpatient counseling, and medications.
- In treatment, you will partner with your provider(s) to set goals at your pace and build on your strengths. It's your choice whether to talk about your experiences of MST. You may also focus on learning new tools or skills that will help you build a better life.
- Keep trying and you'll find something that fits for your recovery.



## Resources to Help You Move Forward

- If you are struggling, call the Veterans Crisis Line at 1-800-273-TALK (8255) or visit [www.veteranscrisisline.net](http://www.veteranscrisisline.net). Operators are specially trained and experienced in helping Veterans, and many are Veterans themselves.
- Check out [www.maketheconnection.net](http://www.maketheconnection.net) to see and hear stories from other men. Click "Videos" at the top, then from the gender menu on the left check "Male," and then from "Advanced Filters" on the right check "Effects of Military Sexual Trauma."
- Visit [www.mentalhealth.va.gov/msthome.asp](http://www.mentalhealth.va.gov/msthome.asp) to learn about MST and VA programs and services.
- Speak with your VA health care provider or contact your local VA health care system at [www.va.gov/directory](http://www.va.gov/directory) and ask to speak to the MST Coordinator.
- Contact your local Vet Center at [www.vetcenter.va.gov](http://www.vetcenter.va.gov).
- Veterans can receive compensation for conditions that began or got worse in the line of duty, including injuries or disabilities related to MST. A Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA) MST Coordinator at your nearest Regional Office can explain more. Visit [www.va.gov](http://www.va.gov) for a list of VBA Regional Offices or call VA's general hotline at 1-800-827-1000.

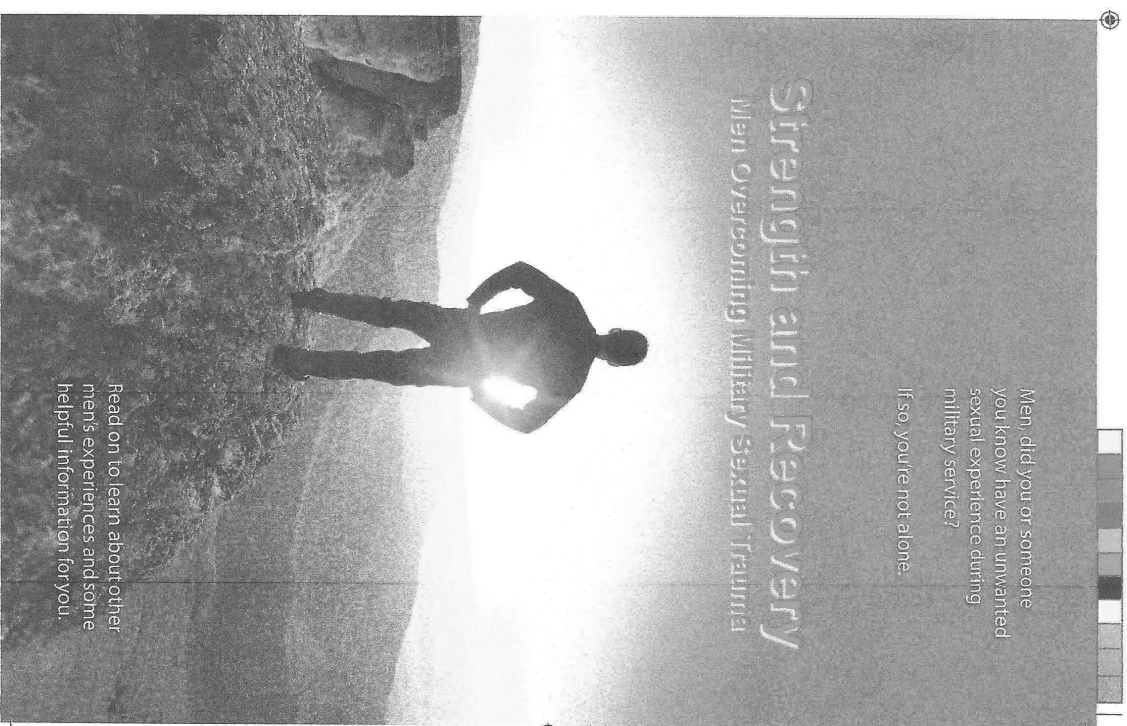


mst  
support team



U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs  
Veterans Health Administration  
Employee Education System

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## Military Sexual Trauma

Military sexual trauma (MST) is sexual assault or sexual harassment that occurred during military service, including:

- Being pressured into sexual activities, such as with threats
- Sexual activities without your consent, such as when asleep or intoxicated
- Being overpowered or physically forced to have sex
- Being sexually touched or grabbed in a way that made you uncomfortable, including during hazing experiences
- Repeated comments about your body or sexual activities
- Threatening and unwelcome sexual advances
- Any other sexual activity where you were involved against your will or unable to say "no"

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MST can occur at any time or place during your military service, such as while you're on or off duty, or on or off base. The perpetrator(s) may or may not be someone you know and may be fellow Servicemembers or civilians.

People don't often talk about sexual assault or sexual harassment, so survivors may think they're the only ones to experience it or to have difficulties afterwards.

However, Veterans from all types of backgrounds have experienced MST:

- All genders and ages
- All ranks, branches and eras of service
- All racial and ethnic backgrounds
- All sexual orientations
- All religious backgrounds
- All physical sizes and strengths

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