



SEX & the Military: *What's a Woman Veteran to Do?*

We've all seen the headlines and we've heard all the reports. Sexual harassment and abuse of women in the military are hot topics today. Although the media have devoted much time and space to these issues, little media attention has been given to the psychological services available to women veterans.

Our staff of dedicated health professionals in the Women's Stress Disorder Treatment (WSDT) program is here for all women veterans who may have endured harassment or abuse, either physical or mental.

According to Psychologist **Joseph Constans, Ph.D.**, "Women who have been exposed to this kind of trauma often experience multiple emotional complications." According to Dr. Constans, a member of the WSDTT, common symptoms of trauma include: -- *intrusive thoughts of the event* -- *nightmares* -- *insomnia* -- *irritability* -- *self-blame* -- *low self-esteem* -- *feelings of depression* -

What's a woman to do? Well, our staff of professionals suggests

that if you are a woman veteran who is experiencing even just one of the symptoms listed above, take the first step and call **Ms. Dee Martin** at **(504) 568-0811, Ext. 5654** or **1-800-935-VETS, Ext. 5654**.

We're here for you! Give yourself and us a chance. ★

See page four for a coupon entitling you to a FREE introductory session!

VA Regional Office Announces On-Site Assistance for Women

In an effort to bring benefits and claims information closer to women veterans, the VA Regional Office, New Orleans, LA has named **Gayle Cooper** as the Women Veterans Coordinator for benefits and claims. Cooper is on-site at the Women's Health Clinic in the Medical Center every second and fourth Monday of each month.

She is available to consult with women veterans regarding benefits and claims (original or reopened). She also can provide assistance in filing personal trauma claims. All counseling sessions are confidential and protected by the Privacy Act.

Using your VA benefits may lead to career advancement, medical care, monetary benefits for disabilities and much more. For more information call Gayle Cooper at **(504) 619-4477** or at **1-800-827-1000**. ★

Women Veterans Health Programs

A number of women veterans experienced sexual trauma while serving in the military. While some have sought counseling and treatment, many have never discussed it with anyone. Sometimes women are very uncomfortable talking about it now, and even wonder if they can, or if it would matter. Yet, these women, know that they have "not felt the same" since it occurred.

Unfortunately, this is a very common reaction to sexual trauma. Many events are never reported. There are reasons for this silence, many of them are based on misconceptions about women who have experienced trauma. Nearly one-third of all rape victims develop Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) sometime during their lifetime. PTSD symptoms are often accompanied by physical problems and generally "not feeling well."

Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) health care professionals are sensitive to the experience of sexual trauma and the impact it can have on a person's physical and emotional health. They understand and are experienced VA health professionals who can help women regain their confidence, self-esteem and quality of life! ★

Special Features...

- ★ FAQs about Women Veterans Stress Disorder Treatment...2-3
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- ★ Meet the Women Veterans Stress Disorder Treatment

Quick Facts & Numbers to Know...

/// Enrollment:

▶ If you are currently seeking health care services for a service-connected condition at the VA Medical Center in New Orleans or its Outpatient Clinic in Baton Rouge, **you do not need to enroll**. If you are 50 percent or more VA service-connected **you do not need to enroll**. If you are seeking care during your first year after separation from active duty for compensable disabilities incurred or aggravated in the line of duty and VA has not yet rated the claim, **you do not need to enroll**.

▶ If you choose to enroll, the VA's Patient Business Office will mail you a new form, called the 1010-EZ for completion. VA encourages all veterans to enroll in order to plan for the future of its resources.

▶ After October 1, 1998, all veterans will be encouraged to enroll. **Enrollment will be on an annual basis**.

▶ For more information about enrollment, call (504) 589-5991 or 1-800-935-8387, Ext. 5991.

/// Insurance and Billing:

▶ The VA Medical Center will bill veterans' insurance carriers for non-service connected care.

▶ Before visiting the Medical Center, call to pre-register so that your records will be current before you arrive for care.

▶ Be prepared to answer questions about insurance and to show your insurance card so that your records can be up to date.

▶ Insurance companies will be billed only for non-service connected conditions. Having insurance will not adversely affect eligibility.

▶ For specific billing/insurance questions, call (504) 589-5223 or 1-800-935-8387, Ext. 5223.

Know the FAQs:

Frequently Asked Questions???

Q. Who is eligible for counseling and treatment for sexual trauma under the Women Veterans' Health Programs Act of 1992, as amended by the Veterans' Health Programs Extension Act of 1994?

A. VA may provide counseling and treatment to veterans who VA determines require such counseling, care, and services to overcome sexual trauma. The trauma may result from a physical assault of a sexual nature, battery of a sexual nature, or sexual harassment, which occurred while serving on active military duty. Public Law 102-585, defines sexual harassment as repeated, unsolicited verbal or physical contact of a sexual nature which is threatening in character.

Q. What is the Women Veterans' Health Programs Act of 1992, as amended by the Veterans Health Programs Extension Act of 1994?

A. Public Law 102-585, Veterans' Health Care Act of 1992, Title I – Women Veterans' Health Programs, as amended by Public Law 103-452, Veterans' Health Programs Extension Act of 1994, established programs to improve health care services for veterans, including priority counseling and treatment for sexual trauma for eligible veterans.

Q. Is a woman veteran eligible to receive care for sexual trauma, although it was never reported when it occurred?

A. Yes. To be eligible to receive counseling and treatment for sexual trauma from VA, there is no requirement that a woman veteran must have reported the sexual trauma when it occurred or at any time during her active military service.

Especially for You Newsletter is produced by the Community and Public Relations Office of the VA Medical Center, New Orleans, LA. For more information or to be added to the mailing list, please call (504) 589-5218 or 1-800-935-8387, Ext. 5218. VA

Frequently Asked Questions

Q. Where can women veterans receive care or more information regarding VA sexual trauma services?

A. A woman veteran seeking counseling and treatment for sexual trauma may contact the Women Veterans Stress Disorder Treatment Team of the VA Medical Center, New Orleans, LA at (504) 568-0811, Ext. 5654 or 1-800-935-8387, Ext. 5654. Or, you may call the VA national toll free information and assistance number, 1-800-827-1000, for up-to-date information about VA sexual trauma programs and services and other benefits that may be available both from the VA and local communities.

Q. Can a woman veteran who experienced sexual trauma while in service on active duty qualify for disability compensation?

A. VA may pay compensation to a woman veteran for disabilities incurred in or aggravated by military service, including disabilities or injuries resulting from sexual trauma. Veterans who experienced sexual trauma while serving in the military can obtain assistance from their local VA Regional Office for filing a disability claim. Information may be obtained by calling 1-800-827-1000. A Women Veterans Coordinator is available at each regional office to assist women veterans in obtaining information about accessing VA benefits and services.

Q. Does a woman veteran who experienced sexual trauma while serving on active duty automatically qualify for disability compensation?

A. No. As indicated above, payment of compensation is based on the severity of the service-connected disability or disabilities. VA must first determine if there are current disabilities related to military service. If disabilities are deemed service related, VA then evaluates the degree of disability, that determines the amount of compensation payable. Compensation is not available for a less than 10 percent evaluation. A woman who has experienced sexual trauma may or may not have a residual disability, which can be considered as service-connected. Each case is reviewed and a decision made based on the specific circumstances of the claimed disability. More information may be obtained by calling 1-800-827-1000.

FAQs continued

Q. I have never talked about my trauma with anyone. I am frightened, and even wonder if I can. What can I do about this fear?

A. Unfortunately, this is a very common fear of women who have experienced sexual trauma, physical or emotional. In fact, it is estimated that only sixteen (16) percent of the rapes that occur in this country are ever officially reported. Many of the reasons for this silence are based on society's stereotypes of women who have experienced sexual trauma. It is important to remember that health care professionals have become increasingly sensitized to the experience of sexual trauma and the impact it can have on the victim. As a result, they are more able to respond to the fears and anxieties that the victim may be experiencing. They will also understand the difficulty in discussing these reactions with another person and will be able to help the victims express themselves in a way that is most comfortable.

Impact of Sexual Trauma on Mental & Physical Health

According to the 1988 report, "Rape in America," nearly one-third (31 %) of all rape victims develop Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) some time during their lifetime.

Additionally, researchers are beginning to notice a relationship between PTSD symptoms and an increase in physical health problems and reports of "not feeling well."

**General VA Hotline
1-800-827-1000**

Coupon for a FREE Consultation

As a woman veteran, you deserve complete health care.

Women Veterans – New Attitudes: Healthy Mind, Healthy Me!

was designed with your needs in mind. You don't have to live with anxiety, depression and/or sleep disturbances. To find your balance of mind and body, the Women Veterans Stress Disorder Treatment Team invites you to a complimentary consultation with a staff member.

To schedule an appointment, call **568-0811, Ext. 5654** or **1-800-935-8387, Ext. 5654** OR talk to your primary health care provider who can refer you.

Don't wait to take care of yourself!

You deserve something just for you – prevention is power!



"Stress Team": Dee Martin, counselor; Joseph Constans, Ph.D., psychologist & Elizabeth Schwarz, MD, psychiatrist.

Women Veterans Stress Disorder Treatment Team *Meet the Staff*

These dedicated health care professionals are here to serve you, the woman veteran. They understand the uncertain feelings, the anxiety, the feeling of "not feeling so well." And they're here for you. Take advantage of the above coupon and meet the staff. Share your insights, thoughts and fears. For more information or for a free brochure about the program, call **(504) 568-0811, Ext. 5654** or **1-800-935-8387, Ext. 5654**.



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