

SEXUAL ASSAULT AND DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AGAINST BOTH MEN AND WOMEN WHILE SERVING IN THE MILITARY

“I am changed; I am mean. People notice this about me and tell me I am different now.” This is how one woman veteran who was raped while serving in Iraq describes herself now. She avoids friends and family and won't leave her room for extended periods of time. She has been “running from challenges” which is unlike her usual approach to life. She is failing some courses at college due to her inability to concentrate on her studies.

Not only was she raped by an officer while in Iraq, she also saw combat injuries and deaths while there. She suffers from nightmares which relive both the rape and the death and destruction she witnessed. She cannot rid herself of thoughts and memories about what happened to her. She feels guilty; angry; but mostly emotionally numb. She realizes that she has lost compassion for others. She hates being around children

“When I was a little kid, all I wanted to do was go into the military, you know, like a little Rambo. But it's not like they show in the posters. It's not like that at all.” Stated by one male veteran who had been raped by another male soldier while in the military.

Survivors of military sexual assault and of service in war zones have some things in common...they both are at risk of losing the capacity to cope with normal daily life due to PTSD, severe depression, and medical conditions. Studies on trauma and health in both male and female patients suggest that the active mechanism linking trauma and physical health is the diagnosis of PTSD. In other words, having PTSD is a health risk in and of itself. Sexual assault has very specific health risks associated with it. Even those who return without physical wounds or scars may be carrying emotional landmines in their pockets.

- A **trauma** is an event which involves actual or threatened death or serious injury to oneself or others and that when experienced or witnessed creates intense fear, horror, and helplessness. Sexual assaults or attempted assaults are examples of trauma.
- A national cross-sectional, community-based telephone survey of **women** who had served in the military during the Vietnam era or later, found **30%** had been sexually assaulted.
- The Pentagon's own study of sexual assault in the military released in May, 2005, found that **9%** of the 2,012 reported victims of sexual assault in the armed forces in 2002 and 2003 were **men**. Most said they were assaulted by fellow servicemen.
- Rates of military sexual assault are **higher** than lifetime rates among **women** in the general population.
- **Women** are **20 times** more likely to be victimized during their military tour than are men
- The National Victim Center has estimated that only 16 percent of rape cases are ever reported, and it is generally agreed that the crime is **underreported** in military, as well as civilian life.

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- The Department of Defense recent estimates suggest that **domestic violence** in the military rose from 18.6 per 1000 in 1990 to 25.6 per 1000 in 1996. On average each fiscal year from 1990 to 1996, 23.2 per 1000 spouses of military personnel experienced a violent victimization.- *FY90-96, Spouse & Child Maltreatment, Department of Defense.*
- Research has demonstrated that **sexual trauma** often **results in health consequences** for the victim
- Compared with **women** veterans without military sexual assault, women veterans **with sexual assault** report having more of the following **health problems**:
 - **Chronic Pain** **GI**
 - Low Back Pain Diarrhea
 - Pelvic Pain Indigestion
 - Headaches Nausea
 - **Cardiac** Swallowing Difficulties
 - Palpitation Irritable Bowel Syndrome
 - Heart Attacks
- **Gynecologic** **Other**
 - Worse Menopause Hypertension
 - Endometriosis Diabetes
 - Painful sex Arthritis
 - Worse PMS Obesity; Eating Disorders
 - Miscarriage Chronic Fatigue
 - Infertility PTSD/Depression, long term and chronic
 - Sleep disturbances-nightmares
 - Loss of desire to have a baby and to be a mother; not satisfied with sex life
 - Alterations in Body Image: Feels older than age; feel they look less attractive
 - Personal isolation; feeling left out, lonely, lost, depressed, misunderstood, angry
 - Most are unmarried
 - Problems getting a job
 - Drinking problems, Drug problems of a very serious nature.

Recovering from the harmful effects of sexual assault is certainly possible but it often requires psychotherapy and sometimes medication. The need for such treatment may persist for years. Men are often more reluctant to reveal a past rape than are women, and women themselves are more likely **not** to report such an event even to those closest to them.

Rape or attempted rape is a deeply wounding, life-altering experience.

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