

WOMEN VETERANS: RISK FACTORS FOR HOMELESSNESS FACT SHEET

Women veterans are the fastest growing cohort of the veteran population, and also the fastest growing cohort of the homeless population.

BY THE NUMBERS¹

- Women comprise 8 percent of our nation's veterans and their numbers are expected to double over the next 20 years.
- The median age of women veterans is 49. Many assume that women veterans are younger, but women have been serving our country in every war and conflict since the Revolutionary War.
- Women veterans are more racially and ethnically diverse than their male counterparts.

FAMILY IDENTITY and REINTEGRATION

Women often need to juggle both service member and family member roles. She is often a wife, mother, or daughter, with responsibilities to her family that often conflict with her role and responsibilities as a service member. Family functioning plays a greater role in women's individual adjustment than men's, and mothers have more problems with depression and family functioning than women without children.² Women in dual-military marriages must adjust to changes in their partner when they return while dealing with their own, and often carry the responsibility of caring for an injured veteran.

MENTAL HEALTH ISSUES

- Depression is one of the top three diagnostic categories for women veterans seen at the VA.³
- Although women and men are both prone to experience post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), women who have been physically injured are more likely to have PTSD.⁴
- There is also a high co-morbidity of mental health issues and substance abuse among Iraq and Afghanistan veterans. VA data show that almost 22 percent with PTSD also have a substance use disorder.⁵

MILITARY SEXUAL TRAUMA

- Sexual assaults occurred at an average of more than 70 per day in the United States military during 2012.⁶ The VA says one in five women seen at the Veterans Health Administration and one in 100 men have experienced MST.
- A disproportionately high number of homeless women veterans have a history of MST – significantly higher than stably housed women veterans.⁷

WOMEN VETERAN RESOURCES

Women Veterans Call Center
(855) 829-6636

Veterans Crisis Line
(800) 273-8255

Combat Call Center
(877) 927-8387

National Toll Domestic Violence Hotline
(800) 799-7233
www.ndvh.org

Vet Centers
vetcenter.va.gov

Veterans Stand Downs
va.gov/homeless/standdown.asp

State Veteran Affairs Office
va.gov/statedva.htm

County Veteran Service Offices
nacvso.org/find-a-service-officer

Veteran Service Organizations
va.gov/vso/VSO-Directory_2012-2013.pdf

State Women Veterans Affairs
va.gov/statedva.htm

VA Center for Women Veterans
va.gov/womenvet

Center for Women Veterans: Advisory Committee on Women Veterans
va.gov/womenvet/ACWV.asp

Women Veterans Health Care
womenshealth.va.gov
Women's Clinic
Women Veteran Program Manager
MST Coordinator

OIF/OEF/OND Coordinator
(877) 222-8387
oeoif.va.gov

Women Veterans OIF/OEF/OND
oeoif.va.gov/womenvets.asp

Veteran Treatment Court
justiceforvets.org

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

Domestic violence is the often unspoken and under-recognized fallout of issues stemming from military service. The statistics for women veteran victims are frightening: women veterans and female service members are three times more likely than non-veterans to be victims of intimate partner violence, and 39 percent of women veterans and 30-44 percent of active duty women report having experienced intimate partner violence.⁸

VETERAN SERVICES

- Despite tremendous efforts by the VA to provide services to women, 87 percent of female veterans do not use VA Healthcare Services.⁹ Many women veterans aren't aware of state and federal benefits and services available to them, and many are accessing services from community systems of care.¹⁰
- Both the VA and community veteran agencies remain a male-dominated system of care which presents a cultural obstacle for many female veterans, especially those who have experienced MST.
- Childcare is a major challenge for women seeking services at the VA and remains an obstacle to care.

HOMELESSNESS, POVERTY, AND UNEMPLOYMENT

Issues stemming from military service are often the primary causal factors for women veteran homelessness. There may also be significant economic factors at play. Unemployment among young veterans is high, military pay is low, and many veteran families are dealing with debt. Current service systems to provide women veterans housing are inadequate. There is a shortage of gender-specific and women veteran specific housing, and women with families are also challenged to find adequate housing for the entire family. Because of this, civilian community-based housing services are taking up the charge, often without knowing that the woman they are serving is a veteran.

- Although veterans are less likely to be poor, poor veterans are more likely to become homeless.¹¹
- Although women veterans are generally more educated than male veterans, women veterans generally earn less than male veterans and often less than they made in the military.¹²
- Eight percent of women veterans are unemployed.¹³
- Women veterans who were identified as homeless by the VA more than doubled, increasing by more than 140 percent from 2006 to 2010,¹⁴ compared to a 45 percent increase among male veterans.¹⁵

¹ Department of Veterans Affairs, National Center for Veterans Analysis and Statistics. Accessed May 23, 2013: va.gov/vetdata/index.asp.

² The Joint Economic Committee, 2007; Kelley, Hock, Jarvis, Smith, Gaffney, et al., 2002; Vogt, Pless, King, & King, 2005; Karney & Crown, 2007.

³ Department of Veterans Affairs, Women Veterans Health Care. Accessed May 23, 2013: oefoif.va.gov/womenvets.asp.

⁴ Maguen et al, "Gender differences in traumatic experiences and mental health in active duty soldiers redeployed from Iraq and Afghanistan." 2012; OIG, "Review of Combat Stress in Women Veterans Receiving VA Health Care and Disability Benefits." Dec 2010.

⁵ Seal, K. H., Cohen, G., Waldrop A., Cohen, B. E., Maguen, S., & Ren, L. (2011). Substance use disorders in Iraq and Afghanistan veterans in VA healthcare. 2001–2010: Implications for screening, diagnosis and treatment. *Drug and Alcohol Dependence*, 116(1-3), 93–101.

⁶ Department of Defense, Sexual Assault Prevention and Response Office. Department of Defense Annual Report on Sexual Assault in the Military, Fiscal Year 2012. April 15, 2013.

⁷ Government Accountability Office, "Homeless Women Veterans: Actions Needed to Ensure Safe and Appropriate Housing," GAO-12-182, Dec. 2011, p. 1 (hereinafter "2011 GAO Homeless Report").

⁸ Department of Veterans Affairs, "Overview of IPV." Information accessed on March 1, 2012. ptsd.va.gov/public/pages/domestic-violence.

⁹ Department of Veterans Affairs, Medical SAS Outpatient Dataset, 2005.

¹⁰ California Research Bureau. "California's Women Veterans Response to the 2011 Survey: Preliminary Report." 12-004. July 2012.

¹¹ Culhane, Dennis P et al. "Veteran Homelessness: A supplemental report to the 2009 Annual Homeless Assessment Report to Congress." U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, Office of Community Planning and Development, and the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, the National Center on Homelessness Among Veterans. 2011.

¹² U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, "Employment Situation of Veterans Summary." March 20, 2013; and U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey PUMS. 2011.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Refer to No. 7.

¹⁵ Refer to No. 7.



Swords to Plowshares
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