

VETERANS HEALTH ADMINISTRATION UNDERSTANDING MILITARY SEXUAL TRAUMA (MST)

Amy Smith, PsyD, LP, VISN 6 MST POC, MST Coordinator Salisbury VAMC

Marie Stewart, MSW, LCSW, MST Coordinator Durham VAMC

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OVERVIEW

- Introduction
- What is MST/Personal Trauma
- Services available for MST/Personal Trauma
- How to obtain services
- Contact information
- Questions

What is Military Sexual Trauma (MST)?

- Term VA uses for sexual assault or sexual harassment occurring during military service.
- Defined by Federal Law:
- “Physical assault of a sexual nature, battery of a sexual nature, or sexual harassment [“repeated, unsolicited verbal or physical contact of a sexual nature which is threatening in character”] that occurred while a Veteran was serving on active duty or active duty for training.”
- Title 38 US Code 1720D

What is MST? (cont.)

- Any sort of sexual activity in which someone is involved against his or her will.

Someone may be...

- Pressured into sexual activities: (e.g., with threats of consequences; with implied better treatment; “command rape”).
- Unable to consent to sexual activities (e.g., Intoxicated).
- Physically forced into participation.

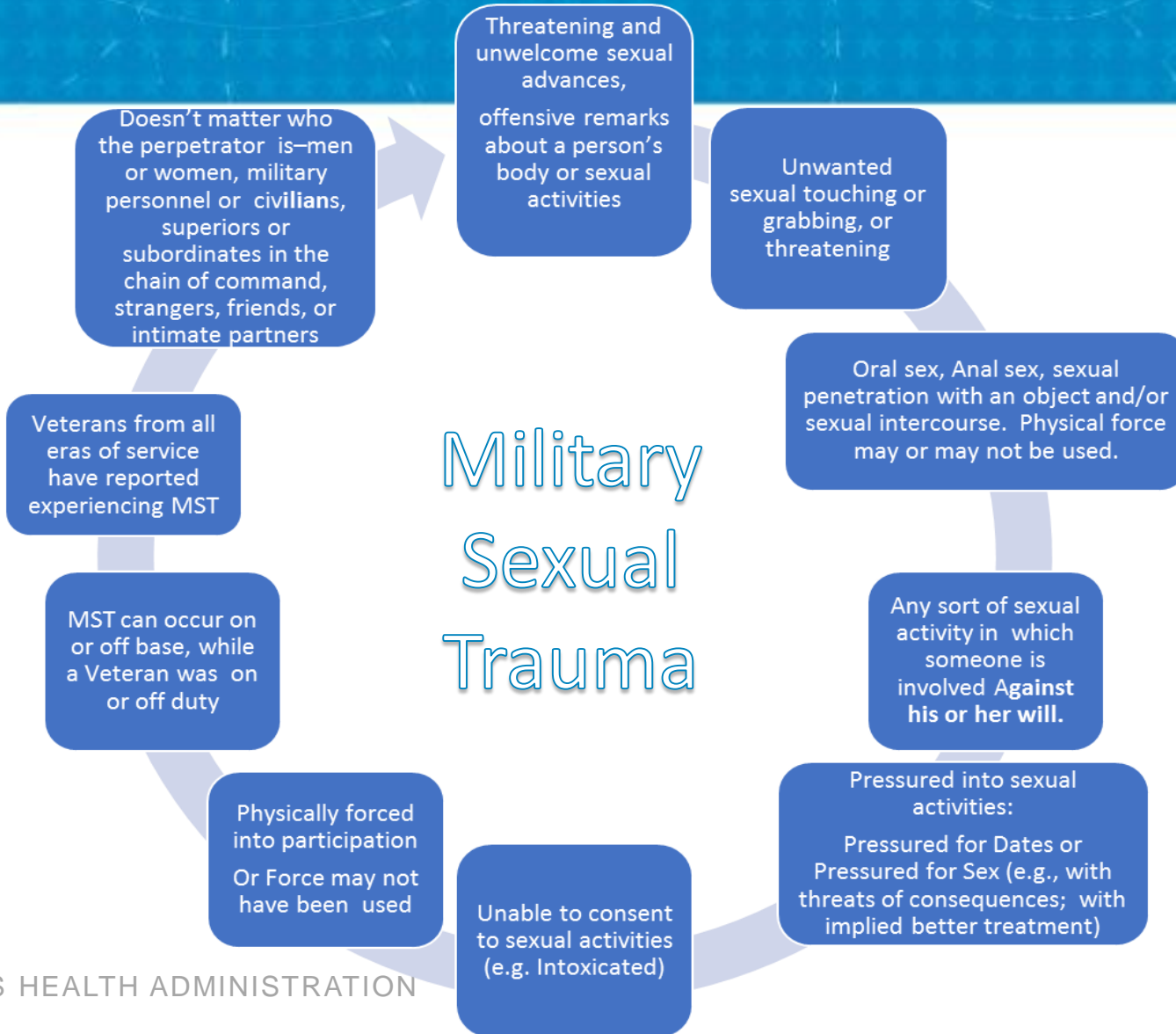
What is MST? (cont.)

- Can involve unwanted touching, grabbing, oral sex, anal sex, sexual penetration with an object, and/or sexual intercourse. Physical force may or may not be used.
- Other examples include threatening and unwelcome sexual advances, unwanted sexual touching ,or grabbing, or threatening, offensive remarks about a person's body or sexual activities.

What is MST? (cont.)

- MST can occur on or off base, while a Veteran was on or off duty.
- Doesn't matter who the perpetrator is – can be men or women, military personnel or civilians, superiors or subordinates in the chain of command, strangers, friends, or intimate partners.
- Veterans from all eras of service have reported experiencing MST.
- MST is an experience, not a diagnosis.

Military Sexual Trauma



How Common is MST?

- This can be difficult to know, as sexual trauma is frequently underreported.
- About **1 in 4 women** and **1 in 100 men** have told their VHA healthcare provider that they experienced sexual trauma in the military.
- Although women experience MST in higher proportions than do men, because of the large number of men in the military, there are significant numbers of men and women who have experienced MST.

Data provided by the VA Mental Health Services Military Sexual Trauma Support Team

Impact of Trauma

- Most people have symptoms in the immediate aftermath of a traumatic event.
- With support and treatment, some of those symptoms improve over time, with some survivors experiencing posttraumatic growth and describing they go on after the event to lead a full life.
- However in some cases, where survivors do not have an opportunity to talk about and process their traumatic event, they may experience longer-term problems.

Impact of Trauma (cont.)

- Many survivors describe that after their traumatic experience, they felt 'nothing,' (tried to block the memory of the event out of their mind).
- Symptoms usually start soon after the traumatic event, but may not happen until months or years later. Some of these symptoms may come and go over many years. However, if these symptoms last longer than 4 weeks and create distress or interfere with work/home life, one may have PTSD.
- There are four types of symptoms: intrusion, avoidance, negative alterations in cognitions and mood, and alterations in arousal and reactivity.

Impact of Trauma (cont.)

- **Intrusion Symptoms:** Bad memories of the traumatic event may come back at any time, and one may feel the same fear and horror he/she did when the event took place, or one may notice increased body reactions. Some report experiencing nightmares/flashbacks. These experiences can occur when there is a trigger (sound, sight, etc. reminds one of the event).
- **Avoidance symptoms:** Veterans may have engaged in behaviors to assist them with trying to 'forget' or manage the intense feelings they may have experienced following their traumatic event (i.e., use of alcohol/drugs/overeating/overworking). This can include trying to avoid situations, objects, people that trigger memories.

Impact of Trauma (cont.)

- Negative alterations in cognitions and mood: Veterans may not be able to recall certain parts of the traumatic event.
- When a woman or man experiences a traumatic event, it can negatively impact their beliefs about themselves, other people, and the world around them.
- Some of the beliefs that may be impacted include the following: Beliefs about Safety, Trust, Intimacy, Power and Control, and Esteem.
- Veterans may also report they have a difficult time experiencing emotions or they may feel negative emotions most of the time.

Impact of Trauma (cont.)

- Hyper arousal: Some Veterans report feeling jittery, on edge, always on guard and like they are looking out for danger. This can impact sleep patterns, increase feelings of anger and irritability, decrease concentration, and increase high risk behaviors.

Diagnoses Associated with Sexual Trauma

- Depression
- Anxiety Disorders
- Post Traumatic Stress Disorder
- Substance abuse/dependence
- Eating disorders
- Dissociative disorders
- Physical health problems (e.g., lower back pain; headaches; pelvic pain; GI pain/symptoms; sexual dysfunction; gynecological symptoms; chronic fatigue)

Other Issues

- Relationship problems
- Employment problems
- Parenting difficulties

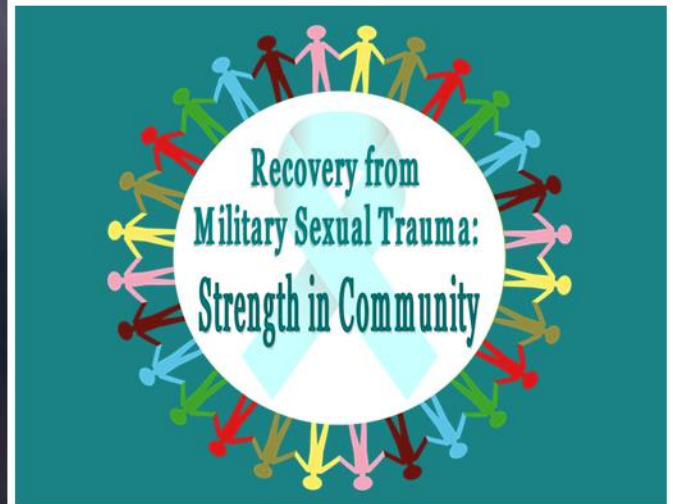
Recovery is Possible



VA Services for Military Sexual Trauma:



Help
Hope
Healing



Trauma Recovery and the Types of Treatment Available:

- Although not everyone may need treatment, it can help to have a guide or source of support to assist with empowering Veterans to work toward their goals and improve their symptoms.
- Many of the programs across the VISN offer a wide range of treatment to assist in the recovery process, which involve a Phases of Treatment Recovery Model:
 - 1) Education
 - 2) Skills Building
 - 3) Trauma Processing (Reconnection and Meaning Making)

Outpatient Treatment for MST is Available at Each VA Medical Center

- **Asheville VAMC-** Provides group and individual therapy for treatment of MST and other related problems.
- **Durham VAMC-** Provides phases of treatment recovery model, EBPs (CPT, PE, STAIR, ACT, DBT), Additional groups (Learning to Cope with Trauma, Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction, Women's Clinic Spirituality, Music Therapy).
- **Fayetteville VAMC-** Provides gender-specific peer group, skills building, EBPs, Peer Support Specialist group, Intimacy group, Empowerment group, Mindful movement (Yoga), Guided Imagery.
- **Hampton VAMC-** Provides individual and group therapy based programs.
- **Richmond VAMC-** Provides EBPs (DBT skills, CPT, PE, ACT, and STAIR), Mindfulness/chair yoga with peer support specialist, spiritual women's group, rec therapy Women in Action group, some MST/pain telehealth for CBOC.
- **Salem VAMC-** Provides individual and group therapy for treatment of MST and other related problems; telehealth options to CBOCs.
- **Salisbury VAMC-** Provides phases of treatment recovery model for MST treatment, Gender-specific trauma education group, EBPs (DBT skills, Seeking Safety, ACT, CPT, PE), Women's Resilience Group, Mindful Movement (Yoga), Mindfulness Group, telehealth options to HCCs.

Who's Eligible?

- VA provides free care (including medications) for mental and physical health conditions related to MST.
- Free care is available to both men and women.
- Neither individuals nor health insurance plans are billed for this care, although there may be co-pays for services not related to MST.
- VA disability rating (“Service Connection”) is not required.
- No specific diagnosis (e.g., PTSD) is required.

Who's Eligible (cont.)

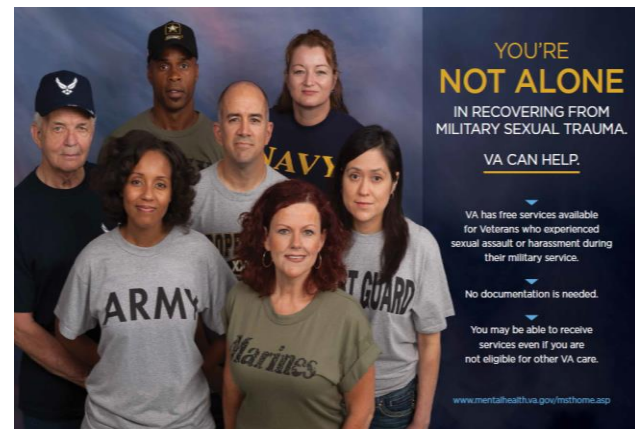
- Incidents do not have to have been reported at the time of the traumatic event in order to be eligible for VHA MST-related care.
- Provider of services makes determination about whether care is MST-related.
- Veterans may ask to meet with a provider of the same or opposite sex if it would make them feel more comfortable, and this option is available within their clinics.

How Do Veterans ACCESS CARE?

- Ask your existing VA provider for a referral for MST services.
- Contact the MST Coordinator at your local VA Medical Center.
- If you were deployed as part of OEF/OIF or ONC, you can also contact the OEF/OIF Coordinator at your local VAMC.

Outreach and Access to Care Initiatives

- VHA has engaged in a range of efforts to ensure information about MST-related services is readily available to Veterans.
 - Internet website (www.mentalhealth.va.gov/msthome.asp)
- MST is included in “Make the Connection” and “About Face” websites featuring Veterans’ stories of recovery.
 - www.maketheconnection.net
 - www.ptsd.va.gov/aboutface



Please Contact your Local VISN 6 MST Coordinator if you have Site-Specific Questions

Asheville VAMC- Lynn Marlow, Ph.D.

1100 Tunnel Rd
Asheville, NC 28805 (828) 298-7911 x5707

Durham VAMC - Marie Stewart, MSW, LCSW

508 Fulton St
Durham, NC 27705
(919) 286-0411 x5243

Fayetteville VAMC- Yvonne “Kim” McKeithen, Psy.D.

Bldg 45
2300 Ramsey St
Fayetteville, NC 28301 (910) 488-2120 x7593

Hampton VAMC- Debra W. Brown, Ph.D.

100 Emancipation Drive (116A) Hampton, VA
23667
(757) 722-9961 x2724

Richmond VAMC- Sarah Raymond, Ph.D.

Psychology Services
1201 Broad Rock Blvd (116B)
Richmond, VA 23249 (804) 675-5000 x3864

Salem VAMC- Sarah VossHorrell, Ph.D.

1970 Roanoke Blvd (116C)
Salem, VA 24153 (540) 982-2463 x1467

Salisbury VAMC- Amy P. Smith, Psy.D.

1601 Brenner Ave
Salisbury, NC 28144 (704) 638-9000 x14230



**Thank you
for your time and support!**