



*SUMMIT*2011 National Training Summit
on Women Veterans



Resources for Military Sexual Trauma (MST) Survivors

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Agenda

- What is military sexual trauma (MST)?
- How common is MST?
- How does MST affect Veterans?
 - Associated conditions
 - Ways in which the experience of MST can differ from the experience of other traumas
 - The recovery process
- VA's response to MST
 - MST-related services available
 - Examples of national education and outreach/access to care initiatives

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Military Sexual Trauma (MST)

- Term VA uses for **sexual assault** or **sexual harassment** occurring during military service
- Defined by U.S. Code:
“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?

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

- Someone may be...
 - Physically forced into participation
 - Pressured into sexual activities (e.g., with threats of consequences; with implied better treatment)
 - Unable to consent to sexual activities (e.g., intoxicated)



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



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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

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How Common is MST?

- About 1 in 5 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

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VHA's MST Screening Questions

“While you were in the military...

- a) Did you receive uninvited and unwanted sexual attention, such as touching, cornering, pressure for sexual favors, or verbal remarks?”
- b) Did someone ever use force or threat of force to have sexual contact with you against your will?”

An affirmative response to either item is considered to be a positive screen for MST

- A positive screen does not indicate the Veteran's current subjective distress, diagnosis, interest in, or need for treatment

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VA MST Screening Data FY 2010

	Women	Men
% of All Veteran VHA users with a positive screen for MST	22.4%	1.2%
% of OEF/OIF/OND Veteran VHA users with a positive screen for MST	18.5%	0.8%
% of Homeless Veteran VHA users with a positive screen for MST	38.7%	3.2%

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Data provided by the Office of Mental Health Services' Military Sexual Trauma Support Team

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Associated Conditions

- VHA's national monitoring data reveals that the diagnoses most commonly associated with MST among users of VA healthcare are:
 - PTSD
 - Depression and other mood disorders
 - Psychotic disorders
 - Substance use disorders

Data provided by the Office of Mental Health Services' Military Sexual Trauma Support Team

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Other Diagnoses Associated With Sexual Trauma

- Eating disorders
- Dissociative disorders
- Borderline Personality Disorder/Complex PTSD
- Somatization disorders
- Physical health problems (e.g., lower back pain; headaches; pelvic pain; GI pain/symptoms; sexual dysfunction; gynecological symptoms; chronic fatigue)



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Other Issues...

- Relationship problems
- Impact on parenting
- Employment problems
- Adjustment issues
- Spirituality issues/crisis of faith

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Not All Traumas Are Created Equal

- Any kind of trauma affects our physiology/biology, our emotional equilibrium, and our way of thinking about the world
- There are some reasons why recovery from MST can sometimes be even more complicated

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Not All Traumas Are Created Equal

- MST is an interpersonal trauma
 - Perpetrator is frequently a friend, intimate partner, or other trusted individual
 - May be particularly confusing in the military context, where rely on others to be “Servicemembers in arms”
- MST may be ongoing over time
 - Survivors may continue to have interactions with their perpetrator(s)
 - May be ongoing potential for revictimization
 - Can increase feelings of helplessness and of being trapped



Not All Traumas Are Created Equal

- Social support may be limited
 - Far from friends and family
 - Societal messages about sexual trauma – may be told by others that experiences aren't as “legitimate” as combat trauma
 - Problematic given research identifying social support as the most consistent and best predictor of recovery after trauma
- Socialization and values
 - Importance of strength and self-sufficiency: victimization may be extremely difficult to accept or understand



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Recovery

- Not everyone needs treatment, but it can help to have a guide/traveling companion and source of support
- Typically involves a mix of skills-building (stabilization) and trauma processing (exposure) work
- Talking to someone may help, even if you don't need ongoing therapy or aren't ready to confront your memories

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**VA Cares About
Military Sexual Trauma**

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National Policy

- All Veterans seeking VA care must be screened for MST
- All treatment for physical and mental conditions related to MST is free and unlimited in duration
- Every facility must have a designated MST Coordinator
 - Serves as a point person for MST issues at the facility
 - Responsible for ensuring that MST-related monitoring, treatment, and education & training occur

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National Policy (cont.)

- Staff must receive training on issues related to MST
- Staff must engage in outreach, to ensure Veterans are aware of services available
- OMHS has funded a national MST Support Team to improve VA's response to MST and ensure it is meeting mandates

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MST Support Team

- In FY07, VHA's Office of Mental Health Services established the MST Support Team to:
 1. Conduct monitoring of MST screening and treatment within VHA
 2. Expand MST-related education, training, and outreach resources within VHA
 3. Promote best practices for MST screening and treatment within VHA
 4. Offer policy recommendations related to MST for consideration by OMHS



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VA Services

- Free care is provided for all physical and mental health conditions related to MST
 - VA disability rating (“service connection”) is not required
 - Treatment is independent of disability claims process
 - Many Veterans can receive free MST-related care even if they’re not eligible for other VA care
 - Incidents do not have to have been reported at the time
 - Veterans can ask to meet with a provider of a particular sex if it would make them feel more comfortable

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VA Services (cont.)

- Every VA Medical Center offers evidence-based therapy for conditions related to MST
- Every VA Medical Center has providers knowledgeable about treatment for the aftereffects of MST
 - Many have specialized outpatient mental health services focusing on sexual trauma
 - Vet Centers have specially trained counselors

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VA Services (cont.)

- Nationwide there are almost two dozen programs that offer specialized MST treatment in residential or inpatient settings
 - A dozen of these programs are for women only
- Some facilities have separate programs for men and women; all residential and inpatient MST programs have separate sleeping areas for men and women



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MST-Related Care FY 2010

Every facility provided MST-related outpatient care to both women and men in FY 2010. Veterans who had experienced MST had a total of 696,250 free MST-related encounters.

- 452,176 encounters were to female Veterans
 - 81.4% of these visits were for mental health care
- 244,074 encounters were to male Veterans
 - 79.9% of these visits were for mental health care

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Data provided by the Office of Mental Health Services' Military Sexual Trauma Support Team



MST-Related Mental Health Care FY 2010

	% of Veterans with at least one MST-related MH Encounter	
	Women	Men
All Veterans	54.4%	37.6%
OEF/OIF/OND Veterans	58.4%	48.3%
Homeless Veterans	87.2%	77.5%



MST and Overall Satisfaction with VHA Care

- The OMHS MST Support Team recently investigated satisfaction with VA healthcare among Veterans who had and had not experienced MST
- Overall satisfaction ratings were high. Both men (78.5%) and women (72.3%) rated satisfaction with VHA care as very good or excellent
- Overall satisfaction ratings did not significantly differ among Veterans who did and did not report MST, after adjusting for patient characteristics



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Provider Gender and MST-Related Mental Health Care, FY 2009

- Uniform Mental Health Services in VA Medical Centers & Clinics (UMHS, VHA Handbook 1160.01) recommends that Veterans being treated for conditions related to MST should have the option of being assigned a same-sex mental health provider
- 84.7% of female MST positive Veterans received care from a female provider for at least one MST-related mental health encounter in FY 2009

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Examples of National Education & Outreach/Access to Care Initiatives

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Major Educational Initiatives

- Comprehensive web-based training courses on MST for VHA mental health and primary care providers
- Collaboration with VBA to develop training for staff processing MST-related claims or interacting with MST survivors
- Monthly training calls for VA staff on a variety of MST-related topics
- Annual training conference for VA staff on clinical care and development of treatment programming
- VA Intranet website with MST-related resources and discussion forums



VA's National Rollouts of Evidence-Based Therapies

- Emphasis on increasing Veterans' access to evidence-based practices (EBP) through national rollout training programs
 - Cognitive Processing Therapy and/or Prolonged Exposure Therapy for PTSD
 - Acceptance and Commitment Therapy, Cognitive Behavioral Therapy, and/or Interpersonal Therapy for depression
 - Social Skills Training for Serious Mental Illness
 - Upcoming: Motivational Interviewing and Motivational Enhancement



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VA's National Rollouts of Evidence-Based Therapies

- Several of these therapies were initially developed for and have been rigorously tested among sexual trauma survivors and female Veterans
 - Rollouts help ensure MST survivors have access to cutting-edge treatments

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VA's National Rollouts of Evidence-Based Therapies

- Rollouts involve national training conferences for VA clinicians; conference participants then see cases and attend ongoing case consultation calls
- Initial program evaluation data show:
 - Significant gains in therapist competency following training
 - Significant improvements among Veterans receiving these treatments



VA's National Rollouts of Evidence-Based Therapies

The MST Support Team has partnered with the rollouts to:

- Ensure training materials have MST-relevant examples and include discussion of issues unique to working with MST survivors
- Ensure that MST Coordinators receive advance notice of training conferences
- Host national MST training calls for clinicians with overviews of these therapies
- Provide books/treatment manuals on CPT, ACT, PE, and other relevant evidence-based treatment approaches to MST Coordinators and regional points of contact



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Outreach & Access to Care Initiatives

- VA's MST Support Team has developed educational handouts, posters, and brochures to educate Veterans about the symptoms associated with sexual trauma and the availability of VA services, including effective treatments
- Available for MST Coordinators and other VA staff to order and distribute



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Outreach & Access to Care Initiatives

- New MST homepage on the OMHS internet website:



www.mentalhealth.va.gov/msthme.asp

- The MST Support Team is also conducting a systematic review of VA national websites more generally to ensure that accurate and appropriate MST-related information is included

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Outreach & Access to Care Initiatives

- The MST Support Team has developed a number of campaigns to encourage MST Coordinators to increase their visibility within their facility in order to improve Veterans' ability to access MST-related services
 - A variety of resources have been developed and distributed to MST Coordinators to assist in these efforts: tip sheets, posters, handouts, and contact cards

~Making Connections~

To Help Survivors of Military Sexual Trauma

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Helping VA “Answer the Call”

- Campaign to support efforts by MST Coordinators to educate key frontline staff in their facility, like telephone operators and clinic clerks
- The goal is to streamline the experiences of Veterans calling with MST-related questions
- Campaign will help ensure frontline staff are familiar with the terms “military sexual trauma” and “MST,” readily able to identify and direct callers to the MST Coordinator, and sensitive to Veterans’ privacy concerns

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Sexual Assault Awareness Month

- Every year MST Coordinators nationwide host events to educate Veterans and staff about issues related to MST and raise awareness about available services
 - Clothesline Projects: Veterans decorate t-shirts in ways that reflect their experiences of sexual trauma and recovery, and these are hung side-by-side
 - Ribbons of Support: Messages of support to survivors sent by staff, Veterans, and community members are gathered together for a moving display



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All Hands On Deck

To Help Survivors of Military Sexual Trauma



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For More Information...

- Please consult:
 - The MST Coordinator at your local VA Medical Center
 - The OEF/OIF Coordinator at your local VA Medical Center
 - The Women Veteran's Program Manager at your local VA Medical Center
 - Your local Vet Center
 - VA's general information hotline (1-800-827-1000)
 - www.mentalhealth.va.gov/msthme.asp

- Veterans can also ask their existing VA healthcare provider for a referral for MST services

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THANK YOU
for your service!

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