

FEMALE VETERANS FORUM DECEMBER 2, 2023

Presented by: Susan Kohler, RN

Service Officer & 2nd Vice Commander

American Legion Post 273, Madeira Beach, FL

Veteran - US Navy & US Army Nurse Corps Reserve

- ▶ Introduction
- ▶ Challenges for Female Veterans
- ▶ Women's Health & Wellness
- ▶ VA Health Services for Women
- ▶ Other Resources
- ▶ Discussion & QA

AGENDA



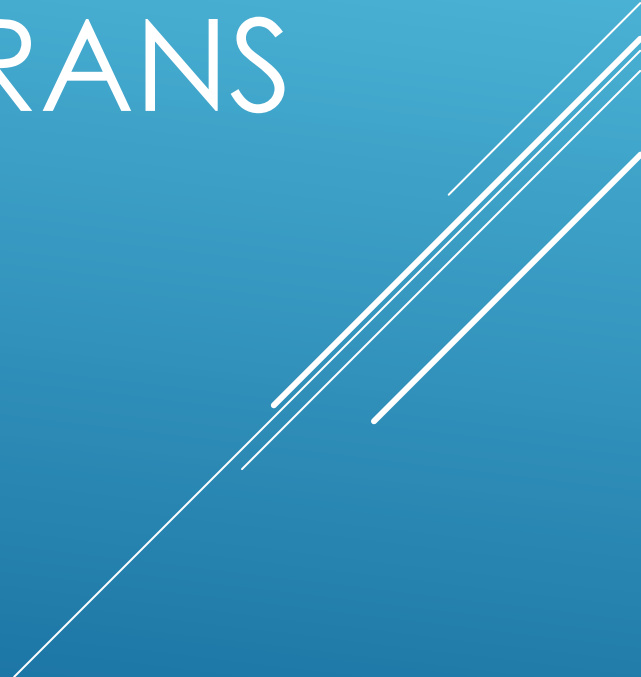
INTRODUCTION

The Female Veteran Forum is intended to create a safe and inviting environment for female veterans to share experiences and resources while building a collaborative network to assist in healing and succeeding in life.

<https://youtu.be/ay38TnudyDk>



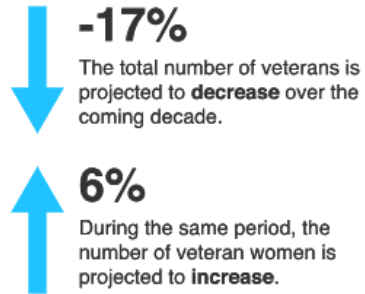
CHALLENGES FOR FEMALE VETERANS



- ▶ Women are the fastest-growing population of service members and veterans and, according to the Veterans Health Administration, they account for 30 percent of new patients.
- ▶ Veteran women differ from veteran men and their nonveteran counterparts, in their needs, and in the issues they face.
- ▶ Veteran women continue to face barriers to gender-specific mental and physical health care, including combat trauma, military sexual trauma, and family planning needs.
- ▶ Women veterans are more likely to face challenges transitioning to civilian life, such as dismissive assumptions about their service, the effects of military sexual trauma, and the need to balance work and caregiving responsibilities.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VuZAW4dX_PA

Figure 1. Projected Changes in the Number of Veterans and the Number of Veteran Women by 2032



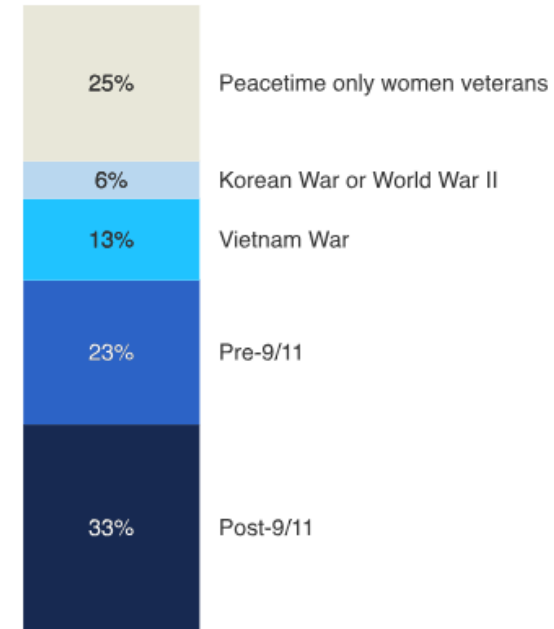
By 2032, women are projected to account for **14% of veterans**.

SOURCE: VA National Center for Veterans Analysis and Statistics, 2021.

NOTES: Between 2022 and 2032, the overall number of veterans was expected to decline from 18.8 million to 15.6 million, while the number of veteran women was expected to increase from 2.06 million to almost 2.17 million.



Figure 2. Veteran Women, by Service Era



SOURCE: U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, 2017, p. 12.

Table 1. Comparing Veteran Women, Veteran Men, and Nonveteran Women on Key Characteristics

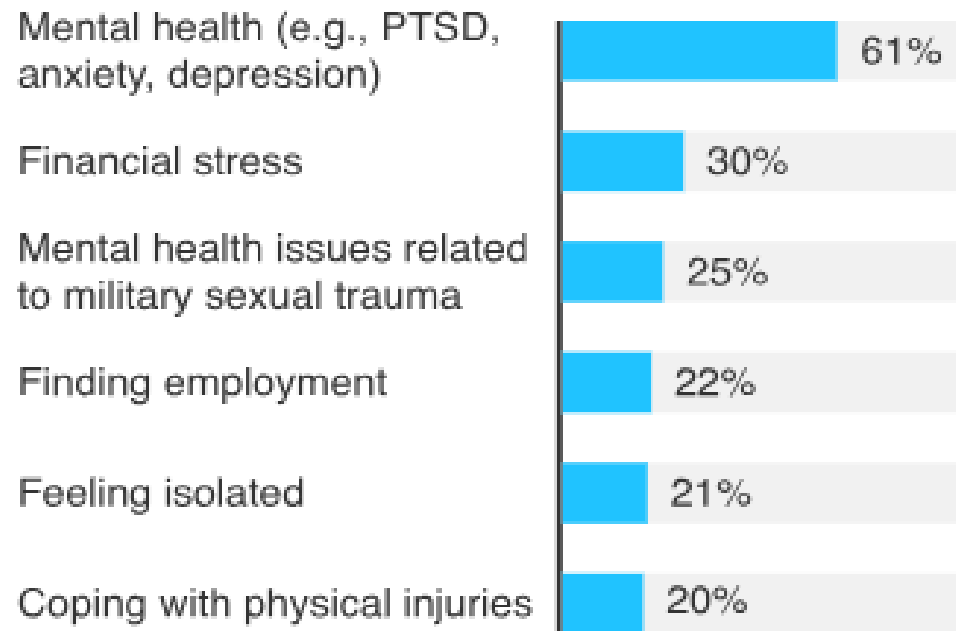
Characteristic	Veteran Women	Veteran Men	Nonveteran Women
Age (average)	51	65	47
Race/ethnicity			
Nonwhite, non-Hispanic	25.3%	14.8%	21.0%
Hispanic	9.5%	7.1%	16.6%
Household composition			
Divorced or separated	22.8%	15.2%	12.5%
Children living in the household	30.4%	15.3%	33.0%
Employment and financial status			
Unemployed	4.2%	4.4%	5.1%
Living in poverty	9.4%	6.4%	13.7%
Median earnings among those working full-time year-round (\$)	\$40,939	\$50,986	\$29,999

SOURCES: Unless otherwise indicated, data are from the 2017 American Community Survey Public Use Microdata Sample and reported in VA National Center for Veterans Analysis and Statistics, 2019. Data on unemployment are from 2021 and reported in U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2022a and 2022b.



U.S. Navy Master Chief Information Systems Technician Angela Koogler poses for a portrait aboard the Ohio-class ballistic missile submarine USS Louisiana (SSBN-743) on Aug. 26. US Navy Photo

Figure 3. Top Transition-Related Challenges Cited in a 2020 Survey of Veteran Women



SOURCE: Wounded Warrior Project, 2021, pp. 4, 21.

NOTES: Respondents were asked to indicate their top three challenges. The survey data reflect responses from 4,871 veteran women who were affiliated with the Wounded Warrior Project, 2 percent of whom were serving in the reserve component and 1 percent of whom were on active duty in the military.

- ▶ Prior to 2013, women could not serve in combat roles.
- ▶ 75% of veterans serving in Post 9/11 experienced some form of trauma
 - ▶ Combat trauma
 - ▶ Sexual trauma
- ▶ Veteran women experience PTSD at a rate of 11.7% compared with men at 6.7%
- ▶ Military Sexual Trauma
 - ▶ 5% of women reported assault in 2013
 - ▶ 6.2% of women reported assault in 2018
 - ▶ 1 in 3 women and 1 in 50 men experienced MST per survey in 2021
- ▶ Nearly 20% of female veterans have a disability

- ▶ The VA was not originally set up to support women who experienced military trauma.
- ▶ Women experience higher rates of depression, eating disorders, and other mental and behavioral health conditions (Rivera and Johnson, 2014)
- ▶ In 2018, the suicide rate among veteran women was 14.8 per 100,000—almost twice the rate for nonveteran women (Ramchand, 2021).
 - ▶ Homeless female Vets under 40 at >12 times the odds of having a suicide attempt
- ▶ The dilemma for female veterans:
 - ▶ The VA is familiar with military and veteran culture, but lacks programs sensitive to female physical and mental health services
 - ▶ Community Service Providers can support physical and mental health services for females, but lacks knowledge on military and veteran culture.
- ▶ Female Veterans often feel unwelcome or harassed when seeking services at a VA Facility

What is being done to address these challenges:

- ▶ **Deborah Sampson Act of 2020** - dedicated to monitoring access, quality, and disparities in the care and services provided to veteran women
- ▶ **Commander John Scott Hannon Veterans Mental Health Care Improvement Act**- requires VA to improve access to information about available mental health care resources
- ▶ **Making Advances in Mammography and Medical Options (MAMMO) for Veterans Act** - requires VA to improve access to mammograms and related care and to create a strategic plan to monitor its progress
- ▶ **The Protecting Moms Who Served Act of 2021** - requires the U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO) to report on the mortality and morbidity of pregnant and postpartum veteran women

Actions from our Local District Representative Luna:

- ▶ **SOS Act bill**- aimed at stopping sexual assault in the military
- ▶ **Send Them Treat Them Act**- to implement several reforms to pension and disability benefits through the VA and make the VA more transparent
- ▶ **Veteran Advisory Committee**- working with local community to create legislation to help veterans

Despite these acts, Women still report the following:

- Fewer than 49% of female veterans feel the VA meets their health needs
- gender-specific care they need is not available through VA and that there are barriers to accessing care when it is available.
- Studies indicate that a lack of VA providers trained in women's health and insufficient coordination with community providers are two significant factors that limit veteran women's access to VA care (Marshall et al., 2021).
- VA systems lacking a gynecologist on staff, primary care providers familiar with women's health and deficiencies in supplies and equipment needed to provide women adequate medical care
- Lack of family planning services, including Abortion, that is not covered by the VA, including transportation to a location where it would be covered.
 - Abortion rates were higher among veteran women who were low-income and had experienced homelessness or housing instability
 - On September 1, 2022, VA announced that it had submitted an interim final rule to allow abortion counseling and access to abortion services when the life or health of a pregnant veteran was in danger or when the pregnancy was a result of rape or incest

HEALTH & WELLNESS

How are you taking care of yourself?

- ▶ Mental Health
- ▶ Physical Health
 - ▶ Annual Wellness Exam
 - ▶ Pap Smears
 - ▶ Mammograms
 - ▶ Vaccines
- ▶ Fitness/exercise program

<https://www.cbsnews.com/news/female-veterans-mental-health/>



WELLNESS WEDNESDAY
Join us for every Wednesday for conversations on understanding wellness and how it impacts us all
Registration with WVOP is required <https://womenvetsonpoint.org/>

September 27:
Regaining your identity

October 4:
Vigilance: Being aware of your surroundings

October 11:
Benefits of Self Discipline

October 18:
How to connect with your friends again

October 25:
Hydration! Benefits and how to up your water intake

November 1:
Treating yourself to the things you love

WEDNESDAYS • 10:00 A.M.

WOMEN VETS on POINT **BOB DOLORES HOPE FOUNDATION** **US VETS PATRIOTIC M.A.F.F.**

<https://youtu.be/7qkr2fgmee0>

<https://youtu.be/devu7TMGsT4>

- Mental Health Counseling
- PTSD Coach Mobile App
- PTSD Family Coach Mobile App
- Support Groups
- Service Animal

PTSD AND MST SUPPORT

VA HEALTH SERVICES – BAY PINES

QUESTIONS – OPEN DISCUSSION

- ▶ RAND Study: <https://www.rand.org/pubs/perspectives/PEA1363-3.html>
- ▶ Issues Facing Today's Female Veterans — 'Feeling Invisible and Disconnected', Valerie L. Dripchak, PhD, LCSW, Social Work Today, Vol. 18 No. 6 P. 24
- ▶ CBS News Report: <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/female-veterans-mental-health/>
- ▶ US Department of Labor: <https://www.dol.gov/agencies/vets/womenveterans/womenveterans-relevant-research>
- ▶ PTSD Coach Mobile App - https://www.ptsd.va.gov/appvid/mobile/ptsdcoach_app.asp
- ▶ PTSD Family Coach Mobile App - https://www.ptsd.va.gov/appvid/mobile/familycoach_app.asp
- ▶ PTSD Treatment Decision Aid - <https://www.ptsd.va.gov/apps/decisionaid/>
- ▶ Mental Health Toolkit - <https://womenvetsonpoint.org/mental-health-toolkit/>

REFERENCES

The background is a solid blue color with several white geometric lines of varying lengths and orientations. Some lines form large, irregular polygons, while others are straight lines or short segments. The lines are scattered across the page, with a notable cluster of parallel lines on the right side.

PREPARED AND PRESENTED BY:

Susan R. Kohler, RN

srkohler@gmail.com