

Men, did you or someone you know have an unwanted sexual experience during military service?

If so, you're not alone.

Strength and Recovery

Men Overcoming Military Sexual Trauma



Read on to learn about other men's experiences and some helpful information for you.

What is Military Sexual Trauma?

Military sexual trauma, or MST, refers to sexual assault or sexual harassment that occurred during a Veteran's military service.

MST can happen to anyone, regardless of gender, strength, size, age, race, sexual orientation, or branch or era of service.

MST can include:

- Being pressured into sexual activities, either with threats or with promises of better treatment
- Being unable to consent, such as when asleep or intoxicated
- Being physically forced or overpowered
- Unwanted sexual touching or grabbing
- Repeated and offensive remarks about one's body or sexual activities
- Threatening and unwelcome sexual advances
- Any sexual activity against your will or when you were unable to say no



Other things to know – MST also can occur more than once or by more than one perpetrator. The reason doesn't matter; even if it was called "hazing," it is still MST. Also, the perpetrator(s) may or may not be known to you, may be male or female, and may be Servicemembers or civilians.

*Veterans from many different backgrounds have experienced MST, and men and women may recover in similar ways. **However, this brochure focuses on male Veterans' experiences.***

You Are Not Alone

Men often don't talk about sexual trauma, so survivors may think they're the only ones it's ever happened to. VA health care providers ask all Veterans about MST because of this.

*Many men have taken the brave step to speak up. **In fact, over one-third of all Veterans who tell a VA provider they experienced MST are men.***

What Makes MST So Difficult for Many Men?

There are many reasons. Other male Veterans have said things like:

- “I can't believe this happened to me.”
- “I felt like less of a man after, sometimes like not even a man at all.”
- “I tried so long to just move on. It's probably too late now.”
- “I should have been able to stop it. It was my fault.”



For many men, other issues are also critical:

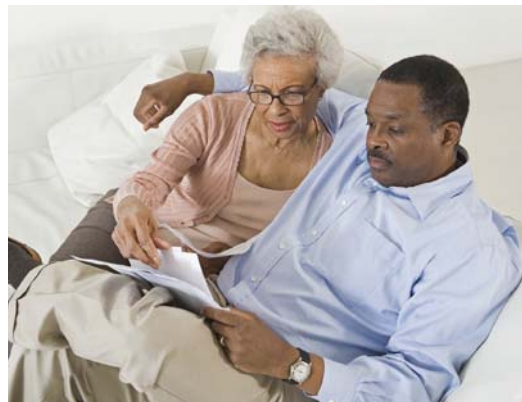
- Men may have had uncontrollable biological reactions like an erection or ejaculation during MST. This does **not** mean that they wanted or enjoyed it. It also does not mean anything about their sexual orientation.
- Men's background and identity, like their age, race, sexual orientation, religion, and prior abuse or trauma, can also affect their reactions.

Some Common Reactions in Men

Some men recover on their own. Others struggle with some common reactions, even many years later. Many men say they are:

- Angry, especially when feeling threatened or betrayed
- Ashamed or feeling damaged or like a failure
- Worried about their masculinity or sexual orientation
- Having sexual concerns such as low sex drive or erection problems
- On edge, on guard, or having panic attacks
- Numb, flat, or unable to feel love or happiness
- Down, depressed, or thinking life isn't worth living
- Having fights or difficulty trusting
- Feeling isolated or avoiding reminders
- Having trouble with sleep, focus, or memory
- Having chronic pain or digestive problems
- Having eating problems or negative body image

If you can relate to some of these, that doesn't mean you're "crazy" or "weak." In fact, they are very understandable. However, it is also possible to feel better over time.



You Deserve a Better Quality of Life

- Many men have difficulties for years after MST. You may still blame yourself, for example. However, as you move forward, we hope you come to realize that **MST is never your fault.**
- Men are taught to be silent and show no emotion, but other men who experienced MST want you to know that healing is possible.
- No matter how long it has been, you can still get your life back and begin a new chapter free of anger, guilt, or despair.

***Fight the good fight.** Even if you are doing well or choose to cope with MST on your own, find safe ways to take care of your physical and mental health. You'll be healthier and have a better quality of life.*



It's Never Too Late, and It's Never Too Soon

VA is committed to helping all Veterans who are struggling.

- VA offers free, confidential counseling and treatment to Veterans* for mental and physical health conditions related to MST.
- You **do not** need to have reported the MST when it happened or have documentation that it occurred.
- You **do not** need to have a VA disability rating and may be able to receive services even if you are not eligible for other VA care.
- You can ask to meet with a provider of a particular gender.
- All VA health care providers receive training on MST, including information about men's reactions and needs.
- Every VA health care system has an **MST Coordinator** who can help you access VA services and programs.



“It takes a lot of courage and strength to speak up. Talking to someone helped me to get better and stay independent.”

*Note: Although this brochure refers to Veterans, individuals with Other Than Honorable discharges and current Service members can also receive certain MST-related services. Ask for the MST Coordinator at your local VA medical center to learn more.

Moving Forward in Your Recovery

There are many steps you can take to move forward after MST. At first, many men try to ignore it or cope on their own. However, if doing that isn't helping or you feel stuck, consider talking to someone.

- Telling a VA provider that you experienced MST can be a big step. You can do this even if you don't want or need treatment.
- If you are struggling, there are proven, effective treatments for many problems associated with MST.
- MST-related treatments can include medical care, outpatient, residential, and inpatient counseling, and medications.
- In treatment, you will partner with your provider(s) to set goals at your pace and build on your strengths. It's your choice whether to talk about your experiences of MST. You may also focus on learning new tools or skills that will help you build a better life.
- Keep trying and you'll find something that fits for your recovery.



Resources to Help You Move Forward

- If you are struggling, call the Veterans Crisis Line at 1-800-273-TALK (8255) or visit www.veteranscrisisline.net. Operators are specially trained and experienced in helping Veterans, and many are Veterans themselves.
- Check out www.maketheconnection.net to see and hear stories from other men. Click “Videos” at the top, then from the gender menu on the left check “Male,” and then from “Advanced Filters” on the right check “Effects of Military Sexual Trauma.”
- Visit www.mentalhealth.va.gov/msthome.asp to learn about MST and VA programs and services.
- Speak with your VA health care provider or contact your local VA health care system at www.va.gov/directory and ask to speak to the MST Coordinator.
- Contact your local Vet Center at www.vetcenter.va.gov.
- Veterans can receive compensation for conditions that began or got worse in the line of duty, including injuries or disabilities related to MST. A Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA) MST Coordinator at your nearest Regional Office can explain more. Visit www.va.gov for a list of VBA Regional Offices or call VA’s general hotline at 1-800-827-1000.



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