

VETERANS AND GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

A growing number of women are serving in the US military. Currently, women comprise nearly 15 percent of active duty military forces. And more than 2.2 million women veterans live across the United Statesⁱ. These numbers are expected to keep rising. In fact, women are the fastest growing group of Veteransⁱⁱ.

When women make the brave choice to serve their country through military service, they benefit from unique opportunities and training, but also face increased risks of violence and trauma compared to their male counterpartsⁱⁱⁱ. Women veterans must juggle the expectations of active duty with caregiving duties, interpersonal violence, sexual and racial harassment in the workplace. These gender related barriers may force women to pursue “premature separation” from the military^{iv}, which may cause them to lose out on veteran’s benefits when they return home. In addition, service members may be barred from seeking civil or constitutional remedies in federal (civilian) courts against the military for its failure to adequately prevent and address the sexual violence they experienced^v.

FACTS

- Every day, 55 service members endure a sexual assault.^{vi}
- While only constituting 14.6 percent of the military, women account for 95 percent of reported sex crime victims^{vii}.
- Black women now constitute nearly one third of all women in the U.S. military. At around 30 percent, this number is twice their representation in the civilian population and higher than that of men or women of any other racial or ethnic group^{viii}, this offers unique implications about Black women’s experiences of both homelessness and sexual violence.
- A 2004 study of women veterans from Vietnam and all wars since, who were seeking help for posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD), found that 71 percent said they were sexually assaulted or raped while serving^{ix}.
- 26 percent of active-duty women report experiencing military equal-opportunity violations on the basis of sex.
- Women who experience sexual violence in the context of active duty military service are nine times more at risk for PTSD than their civilian counterparts.
- Both men and women who have been sexually assaulted while in the military represent the fastest growing segment of the homeless population -- and the rate of women veterans that are homeless is particularly on the rise, with African American women being especially affected^x.
- Women veterans are four times more likely to become homeless than their civilian counterparts^{xi}.
- Because those who experience personal violence, including rape, are 6.5 times more likely to experience homelessness, women veterans who have experienced violence are at a greater risk for experiencing homelessness, especially when compounded by PTSD.

YWCA has supported members of the military and military families for nearly a century, beginning in World War I when the YWCA and other women's groups lobbied for a female military corp. The effort paid off during World War II when the first Women's Auxiliary Corps (WACS) was founded in 1942. Soon after, the YWCA was one of six national organizations that launched the USO.

Every year, at YWCAs across the country, over 4,000 military veterans and their families receive emergency housing, health care, career training and counseling. And that number will continue to grow. In the last decade, the number of homeless female veterans has more than doubled. Women veterans are up to four times as likely as their male counterparts to be: younger; self-identify as a racial minority; have lower incomes; and, be unemployed. As a result, they are also more likely to become homeless. YWCA housing provides a lifeline as veteran service women transition into civilian life, heal from PTSD and care for themselves, and their families.

ⁱ Office of the Actuary, Department of Veterans Affairs. VA veteran population projection model, 2011. Available at: http://www.va.gov/vetdata/Veteran_Population.asp Accessed June 6, 2013.

ⁱⁱ Frayne SM, Phibbs CS, Berg E, et al. Sourcebook: Women veterans in the Veterans Health Administration. Volume 2. Sociodemographics and use of VHA and NonVA Care (fee). 2012. http://www.womenshealth.va.gov/WOMENSHEALTH/docs/WH_facts_FINAL.pdf. Accessed October 1, 2013.

ⁱⁱⁱ Secretary of Defense Ash Carter, Department of Defense Press Briefing on Sexual Assault in the Military in the Pentagon Press Briefing Room, 2015 <http://www.defense.gov/News/Transcripts/Transcript-View/Article/607047/departments-of-defense-press-briefing-on-sexual-assault-in-the-military-in-the-p>

^{iv} Center for Health Equity Research and Promotion, Philadelphia VA Medical Center, 2014

^v Service Women's Action Network, 2014

^{vi} RAND Corporation

^{vii} (National Coalition for Homeless Veterans, 2014).

^{viii} Melin, Julia (2016) "Desperate Choices: Why Black Women Join the U.S. Military at Higher Rates than Men and All Other Racial and Ethnic Groups," *New England Journal of Public Policy*: Vol. 28: Iss. 2, Article 8. Available at: <http://scholarworks.umb.edu/nejpp/vol28/iss2/8>

^{ix} http://www.arlingtonwestsantamonica.org/docs/Sadler_Military_Environment.pdf

^x Rape and the U.S. Military: The betrayal from within. (2013). The Women's Freedom Center http://www.reformer.com/ci_23161831/rape-and-u-s-military-betrayal-from-within

^{xi} "Homelessness and Trauma Go Hand-in-Hand": Pathways to Homelessness among Women Veterans
Hamilton, Alison B. et al. *Women's Health Issues*, Volume 21, Issue 4, S203 - S209