

# You're Not Alone

in Recovering from  
Military Sexual Trauma

VA CAN HELP





## Military Sexual Trauma

Military sexual trauma (MST) is sexual assault or sexual harassment that occurred during military service, including:

- Being pressured into sexual activities, such as with threats
- Sexual activities without your consent, such as when asleep or intoxicated
- Being overpowered or physically forced to have sex
- Being sexually touched or grabbed in a way that made you uncomfortable, including during hazing experiences
- Repeated comments about your body or sexual activities
- Threatening and unwelcome sexual advances
- Any other sexual activity where you were involved against your will or unable to say “no”

MST can occur at any time or place during your military service, such as while you’re on or off duty, or on or off base. The perpetrator(s) may or may not be someone you know and may be fellow Servicemembers or civilians.

People don’t often talk about sexual assault or sexual harassment, so survivors may think they’re the only ones to experience it or to have difficulties afterwards.

However, Veterans from all types of backgrounds have experienced MST:

- All genders and ages
- All ranks, branches and eras of service
- All racial and ethnic backgrounds
- All sexual orientations
- All religious backgrounds
- All physical sizes and strengths

## Some Common Reactions



MST can affect a person's mental and physical health, even many years later. Veterans can differ in their

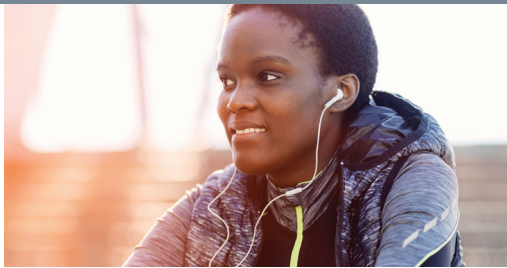
reactions to MST, especially based on their gender, race, ethnic background, religion, sexual orientation, previous stressful life experiences, and other background factors. Some common difficulties include:

- **Strong emotions:** intense, sudden emotional reactions to things; feeling depressed, angry or irritable; feeling ashamed or “damaged”
- **Feelings of numbness:** feeling emotionally “flat”; difficulty feeling emotions like love or happiness
- **Trouble sleeping:** trouble falling or staying asleep; disturbing dreams
- **Difficulties with attention, concentration, and memory:** trouble staying focused; having a hard time remembering things
- **Self-doubt or questioning:** blaming yourself; questioning parts of who you are, like your masculinity/ femininity or sexual orientation

- **Problems with alcohol or other substances:** drinking or using substances or getting “high” to cope or escape
- **Self-harm or unsafe behaviors:** suicidal thoughts or behaviors; cutting; risk-taking; aggression
- **Difficulty with things that remind them of their experiences of sexual trauma:** feeling on edge or “jumpy”; difficulty feeling safe; avoiding reminders of MST
- **Difficulties in relationships:** feeling isolated or disconnected; difficulty trusting; unsafe relationships; trouble with authority figures; frequent arguments
- **Sexual difficulties:** concerns about sex drive; problems with arousal, enjoyment, performance, or pain during sex; avoidance of physical intimacy
- **Physical health problems:** chronic pain; weight or eating problems; digestive problems

Recovery from MST is possible, and it's never too late to move forward.





## VA is Here to Help

There are many steps you can take to move forward after MST, and starting treatment may be one of them.

- VA offers **free, confidential** counseling and treatment to Veterans for mental and physical health



conditions related to experiences of MST. You do **not** need to have a VA disability rating (be “service

connected”) and may be able to receive services even if you are **not** eligible for other VA care. You do **not** need to have reported the incident when it happened or have other documentation that it occurred.

- Every VA health care system has an **MST Coordinator** who can help you access VA services and programs.

- MST-related services are available at every VA health care system. MST-related counseling is also available through community-based Vet Centers. Services are designed to meet Veterans wherever they are in their recovery, whether that is focusing on strategies for coping with challenging emotions and memories or, for Veterans who are ready, talking about their MST experiences in depth.
- VA knows that Veterans have unique needs, preferences, and backgrounds and supports many paths to recovery.
- You can ask to meet with a female or male clinician if it would make you feel more comfortable.

Note: 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](http://www.va.gov) for a list of VBA Regional Offices or call VA’s general hotline at 1-800-827-1000.

# Resources and Ways to Learn More

For more information, you can:

- Speak with your VA health care provider
- Contact your local VA health care system and ask to speak to the MST Coordinator:  
[www.va.gov/directory](http://www.va.gov/directory)
- Contact your local Vet Center:  
[www.vetcenter.va.gov](http://www.vetcenter.va.gov)
- Call VA's general information line:  
1-800-827-1000
- Visit VA's website about MST:  
[www.mentalhealth.va.gov/msthme.asp](http://www.mentalhealth.va.gov/msthme.asp)
- Contact the Veteran's Crisis Line if you are having a mental health crisis:  
1-800-273-TALK (8255) or  
[www.veteranscrisisline.net](http://www.veteranscrisisline.net).  
Operators are specially trained and experienced in helping Veterans, and many are Veterans themselves.



**VA**



U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs  
Veterans Health Administration