

Sexual trauma common in postmenopausal women veterans

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Thanks to increased media attention, sexual assaults occurring in the military are finally getting the attention they deserve. However, most reports involve reproductive-aged women Veterans from recent service eras. A new study confirms the problem has a long history with assaults linked to numerous mental and physical problems. Study results will be presented during The North American Menopause Society (NAMS) Annual Meeting in Chicago, September 25 to 28, 2019.

Only recently has the problem of military sexual trauma (MST), defined as sexual assault and/or sexual harassment during military service, made its way out of the closet and into the headlines. The Veterans Health Administration (VA) instituted mandatory universal annual MST screening in 2003; an estimated one in four women Veterans report MST when screened by [healthcare providers](#).

Not surprisingly, MST is associated with an increased risk for multiple physical and mental health concerns. However, research and clinical attention in this area has largely focused on younger women Veterans who served more recently. Little was known, until now, about MST among postmenopausal women Veterans.

In this new study, researchers examined the prevalence of MST and its physical and mental health-related comorbidities. In the sampling of postmenopausal women, 13% had a positive MST screen which was strongly associated with such mental health diagnoses as posttraumatic stress disorder, depression, and suicidal ideation. MST was also

associated with multiple aging-related medical conditions, including insomnia, [sleep apnea](#), and chronic pain.

"Although prior trauma is not often considered in the [clinical care](#) in this population, both VA and community providers caring for older women Veterans should recognize the prevalence and importance of MST when assessing patients' health concerns," says Dr. Carolyn Gibson, lead author of the study from the San Francisco VA Health Care System.

"These findings call attention to the need for additional research in this understudied population and underscore the importance of trauma screening regardless of a woman's age," says Dr. Stephanie Faubion, NAMS medical director.

Provided by The North American Menopause Society

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