



Dear Potential Recruit,

Serving in America's Armed Forces can be one of the most rewarding ways to serve America. It is also the only one where you agree to give your life in defense of our Nation. Before you make this decision, you have the right to know what you are signing up for.

As a woman in the Armed Forces, you will have the distinction of being among the less than two percent of the female population in the United States to serve in the military, where they currently make up about 20% of the armed forces and since 2015, women now also serve in combat roles.

Despite the many advertised hardships, the United States has a proud tradition as an all-volunteer force. Things like being separated from loved ones for long periods, the potential to develop physical and mental health issues and the knowledge that you may die in service to our Nation.

However, Military Sexual Trauma (MST), a little-known but pervasive and significant problem with long-lasting impacts on victims, remains a growing problem within the US Military.

As a woman in the military, you are highly likely to be affected by MST.

MST is the term the VA uses to refer to experiences of sexual assault or repeated, threatening sexual harassment that a Veteran experienced during military service. MST encompasses any sexual harassment or sexual activity a service member endures without providing consent. Some examples of MST include:

Rape or sexual assault: This can involve unwanted sexual contact, penetration, or other forms of sexual violence.

Sexual harassment is unwanted sexual advances, comments, or gestures that create a hostile or uncomfortable work environment.

Stalking: This can include persistent or unwanted pursuit or surveillance, which can be physically and emotionally traumatic.

Inappropriate touching: Unwanted physical contact, such as groping, fondling, or other forms of nonconsensual touch.

Coercion: Using threats or manipulation to force someone into sexual activity.

Grooming: Refers to a process in which an individual builds a relationship with another person to gain their trust and establish power and control over them. It is often a precursor to sexual assault, harassment, or other forms of misconduct.



There are no reliable statistics for the actual number of women in the military who have experienced MST because only **one in four women report MST**. Victims report many reasons, including fear of retaliation, stigma, and lack of trust in the military justice system. The information provided is based only on reported instances of MST.

- Although less than one percent of reported sexual assaults result in a conviction, more than 60 percent of victims who make a report receive a bad conduct discharge from the military, typically within seven months of making notifying officials.
- Of the women who reported MST, 58 percent also faced reprisal and retaliation, with 77 percent of the actions perpetrated by the victim's chain of command (CoC).
- After discharge, a disproportionate and growing number of MST victims end up homeless or in prison without access to earned benefits such as the GI Bill, medical care, and disability stipends.
- Women who experience MST are highly likely to develop chronic physical ailments, including chronic pain, gastrointestinal issues and sexual dysfunction.
- Nine out of 10 MST survivors develop PTSD and other severe mental health issues, depression, anxiety and behavioral disorders.
- Women Veterans are two times more likely to attempt suicide than non-Veterans.
- MST survivors often struggle with a range of challenging emotions and symptoms, including anxiety, depression, flashbacks, and difficulty with trust and relationships. As a result, they may turn to a variety of poor coping mechanisms to manage these feelings, including:
 - **Substance abuse:** Women veterans may turn to drugs or alcohol to self-medicate their emotional pain or to escape difficult emotions or memories related to their trauma.
 - **Isolation:** Some women veterans may withdraw from social situations and relationships to avoid triggers or emotional pain related to their trauma.
 - **Risky behavior:** Engaging in high-risk behaviors, such as reckless driving or unprotected sex, can be a way of seeking thrills or adrenaline rushes to manage feelings of numbness or disconnection.
 - **Overworking:** Some women veterans may throw themselves into work or other activities to distract themselves from their trauma, but this can lead to burnout and exacerbate feelings of anxiety and stress.



- **Self-harm:** Cutting or other forms of self-harm to release emotional pain or feelings of guilt or shame related to the trauma can also lead to physical harm or further psychological distress.

It's important to remember that MST can have significant mental and physical health impacts. Understandably, some women may not be willing to risk MST and its consequences because the cost is too high.

By deciding not to enlist currently, you help to send the message to the military that leadership needs to take more action to address the issue and create a culture that values and protects the rights of all service members.

If you decide to enlist after reading this information, it's important to remember that you have the opportunity to create change from within. Some ways you can do this are:

- **Speak up:** If you witness any form of harassment or assault, speak up and report it immediately. This will help to create a safer and more supportive environment for all service members.
- **Listen and support:** If someone comes to you with a story of MST, listen to them and believe them. Provide emotional support and help them seek resources and professional help if needed.
- **Educate yourself and others:** Learn more about MST, its impacts, and the resources available to survivors. Share this information with others to help raise awareness and reduce stigma.
- **Mentor and empower other women:** Mentor and empower other women in the military. Help them to build confidence and assertiveness and encourage them to speak up and support one another.

Signing the disclosure does not mean you are giving up any of your rights. Your signature is used only to prove that you were provided the facts and likely outcomes if you report MST within the current military culture.



Works Cited

1. "Women in the Military." Defense.gov, U.S. Department of Defense, 2021, www.defense.gov/Explore/Features/story/Article/1773108/women-in-the-military/.
2. "Military OneSource: All-Volunteer Force." Military OneSource, U.S. Department of Defense, 2022, www.militaryonesource.mil/military-life-cycle/new-to-the-military/all-volunteer-force/.
3. "Military Sexual Trauma (MST)." Veterans Affairs, U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, 2022, www.mentalhealth.va.gov/msthome.asp.
4. "Military Sexual Trauma (MST): Facts and Figures." Service Women's Action Network, 2021, www.servicewomen.org/military-sexual-trauma-mst-facts-and-figures/.
5. "Military Sexual Trauma (MST): An Overview." Veterans Affairs, U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, 2022, www.mentalhealth.va.gov/msthome/mst_overview.asp.
6. "Military Sexual Trauma." National Center for PTSD, U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, 2022, www.ptsd.va.gov/understand/types/military_sexual_trauma.asp.
7. "Grooming." Rape, Abuse & Incest National Network (RAINN), 2022, www.rainn.org/articles/grooming.
8. "Military Sexual Trauma (MST): Facts and Figures." Service Women's Action Network, 2021, www.servicewomen.org/military-sexual-trauma-mst-facts-and-figures/.
9. Grady-Benson, John, and Christopher P. Krebs. "Military Service Academy Sexual Assault and Sexual Harassment Victimization." U.S. Department of Defense, 2019, www.sapr.mil/sites/default/files/reports/DoD_Service_Academy_Survey_on_Sexual_Assault_and_Sexual_Harassment-Report_of_Findings_February_2020.pdf.
10. "Frequently Asked Questions About Military Sexual Assault and Sexual Harassment." Human Rights Watch, 2022, www.hrw.org/news/2018/03/07/frequently-asked-questions-about-military-sexual-assault-and-sexual-harassment.
11. "Military Sexual Trauma (MST): An Overview." Veterans Affairs, U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, 2022, www.mentalhealth.va.gov/msthome/mst_overview.asp.
12. "Women's Health - MST and Physical Health." Veterans Affairs, U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, 2022, www.womenshealth.va.gov/WOMENSHEALTH/Services/MilitarySexualTrauma/PhysicalHealth.asp.
13. "Military Sexual Trauma (MST): An Overview." Veterans Affairs, U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, 2022, www.mentalhealth.va.gov/msthome/mst_overview.asp.
14. "Women Veterans' Mental Health." Veterans Affairs, U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, 2022, www.mentalhealth.va.gov/mental-health/women-veterans.asp.