Servicewomen’s Deployment Health

Anne G. Sadler, Ph.D., R.N.
VA Iowa City Health Care System
Department of Psychiatry
University of Iowa

2017 National Women Veterans Summit
Deployment health is defined as health issues that arise prior to, during, and following armed forces deployments.

• Women have carried arms & been at risk in every US war since the American revolution.

• Women’s recent unrestricted service:
  – Repeal of the military ban on women in combat (2013)
  – All US military combat positions open to women (2015)
Concerns about the adverse impact of expanded roles for women have **NOT** been realized regarding:

- military readiness
- unit cohesion
- military effectiveness in war

Military Women and Deployment

- Women 11% of Iraq/Afghanistan (I/A) service members.
- ~300,000 women have served in I/A in last decade.
- ↑ racial mix- relative to men (45% nonwhite vs 28%).
- Female and Reserve/National Guard (RNG) among fastest growing Veteran populations.
- RNG have unique stressors and ↑ rates of mental health concerns.

Notes: A total of 262 of 336 Iraq and Afghanistan veterans volunteered 304 words. Veterans who served in both countries could give a word to describe each experience.

PEW RESEARCH CENTER V/16|
Invincible Combatants
Invincible Combatants
Health Disparities

Among Military Members and Veterans

↑ Risk factors that influence health
↑ Morbidity and mortality
↑ Barriers to care

The health domains of vulnerable populations: physical, psychological, social
Military Women in Combat Locations

• Women are seeing more combat. Since 1990, ~25% of women report combat experiences relative to 7% of those serving previously.

• Women also at risk of sexual violence.


Sadler AG, Booth BM, Torner JC, Mengeling MA. Sexual Assault in the US Military: A Comparison of Risk in Deployed and Non-Deployed Locations Among OEF/OIF Active Component and Reserve/National Guard Servicewomen, American Journal of Industrial Medicine, in press.
Percentage of servicemembers surviving combat injuries continues to increase:

- 90% in Iraq/Afghanistan survive
- 72% in Vietnam survived
- 63% in WWII survived

Source: Pew Research Center analysis of Military Casualty Information, Department of Defense Personnel & Procurement Statistics
## Female Casualties Recent Operations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Army</th>
<th>Navy</th>
<th>Marine Corps</th>
<th>Air Force</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Wounded in Action</td>
<td>873</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>1,033</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deaths</td>
<td>125</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>166</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Defense Manpower Data Center (DMDC) Defense Casualty Analysis System.
Women experience complex mental health consequences of deployment(s).

- PTSD the leading mental health condition
- Substance abuse / Binge drinking
- Depression


Health VIEWS Study:

10,000 Women Who Served in the Vietnam War (VN)

- Women VN era relative to other American women had ↓ risk of death from:
  - All causes combined
  - Diabetes, Heart disease, Central nervous system

- Nurses who served in VN compared with nurses served only in US
  - 2x risk of death from pancreatic cancer
  - 5x the risk of brain cancer

- Women serving in VN or near VN had ↑ odds of PTSD relative to peers in US service associated with wartime exposures
  - including sexual discrimination or harassment
  - job performance pressures
Returning Servicemembers (OEF/OIF/OND) Have Enhanced Eligibility for VA Health Care:

Veterans who served in a theater of combat operations after November 11, 1998 are eligible for an extended period of eligibility for health care for 5 years post discharge.

https://www.va.gov/healthbenefits/apply/returning_servicemembers.asp

Additional information is available at the nearest VA medical facility. Veterans can also call VA toll-free at 877-222-VETS (8387).
Mental Health Care Engagement

Approximately half of OEF/OIF/OND service men and women DO NOT seek needed post-deployment mental health care either in VA or their community.


• Deployment research has been a high priority of VA research.
• 54 recent/current studies in process.

https://www.hsr.d.research.va.gov/research/search.cfm
Women Veterans Cohort Studies


Reproductive health:

- Impact of sexual assault and combat-related trauma on Fertility (PI: Ginny Ryan)
- Urogenital Symptoms, Depression & PTSD in OEF/OIF Women Veterans (PI: Cate Bradley)


Pregnancy/Next Generation

- Patterns and Experiences of VA Maternity Care Coordinator for Women Veterans (PI: Mattocks)
- Pregnancy Outcomes of Veterans (PI: Phibbs)
- A Quality Improvement Program to Improve Perinatal Mental Health Care for Women Veterans (Lead: Jodie Katon)

VA delivers high quality maternity care
New Research For Women Warriors

Technology for Expanded Access Responding to Veteran Preferences

- **Telemedicine Outreach** for PTSD in Small Rural CBOCs (PI: Fortney)
- PE Coach - Prolonged Exposure Therapy Mobile APP (PI: Reger)
- Evaluation of **Web-based CBT** for Women Veterans with PTSD (CDA PI: Lehavot)
- **Interventions Online** to Facilitate Post-War Access of Reserve and National Guard Servicewomen (PI: Sadler)
Focus on Access: Rural/CHOICE

- Developing Measures to Evaluate Network Adequacy for VA Community Care (Co-PI: Mengeling & Mattocks)
- Rural Veterans’ Access to VA and non-VA Health Care Providers: Current Conditions and Future Scenarios (ORH PI: Mengeling)
- Identification of Reoccurring and Systematic Issues of Choice Implementation among Community Healthcare Providers (PI: Mengeling)
Veteran-centered care engagement

- Online and Shared Decision-Making Interventions to Engage Service Men and Women in Post-Deployment Mental Health Care (PI: Sadler).
- Partnered research, e.g. Veteran consumers, VA providers, VA Central Office
- Women’s PBRN
she wore these.

It's our job to give her the best care anywhere.
Acknowledgments

• **VHA Office of Research & Development**
  – VHA Health Services Research & Development
    • Women’s Health Research Network (SDR 10-012)
    • Women Veterans Healthcare CREATE
  – VHA Quality Enhancement Research Initiative
    • EMPOWER QUERI Program (QUE 15-272)

• **VHA Women’s Health Services**
  – Women’s Health Evaluation Initiative (WHEI)

• **VHA Office of Mental Health & Suicide Prevention**

• **VHA Women’s Health Providers and Women Veteran Program Managers (WVPMs)**

• And the women who serve or have served


References & Resources (Frayne)


• Goldzweig C, Talene L, Balekian M, Rolon C, Yano EM, Shekelle PG. The state of women Veterans' health research: Results of a systematic literature review. J Gen Intern Med. 2006;21(S3).


WEBSITES

• https://www.hsr.d.research.va.gov/for_researchers/womens_health/default.cfm
• https://www.hsr.d/research.va.gov/research_topics/womens_health.cfm
• https://www.research.va.gov/programs/womens_health/default.cfm