Both women and men can experience military sexual trauma (MST) during their service. All veterans seen at Veterans Health Administration facilities are asked about experiences of sexual trauma because we know that any type of trauma can affect a person's physical and mental health, even many years later.
We also know that people can recover from trauma. VA has services to help veterans do this.

For more information, male and female veterans can speak with their existing VA healthcare provider, contact the MST Coordinator at their nearest VA Medical Center, or contact their local Vet Center.

A list of VA and Vet Center facilities can be found online at
www.va.gov and
www.vetcenter.va.gov.

You can also call VA's general information hotline at 1-800-827-1000.

Veterans should feel free to ask to meet with a clinician of the same or opposite sex if it would make them feel more comfortable.

mst support team

Employee Education System

Department of Veterans Affairs

September 2008

Military Sexual Trauma

VETERANS:

Did you experience any unwanted sexual attention, uninvited sexual advances, or forced sex while in the military?

Does this experience continue to affect your life today?

WHAT IS MILITARY SEXUAL TRAUMA?

Military sexual trauma (MST) is the term that the Department of Veterans Affairs uses to refer to sexual assault or sexual harassment that occurred while the veteran was in the military. It includes any sexual activity where someone is involved against his or her will – he or she may have been pressured into sexual activities (for example, with threats of negative consequences for refusing to be sexually cooperative or with implied faster promotions or better treatment in exchange for sex), may have been unable to consent to sexual activities (for example, when intoxicated), or may have been physically forced into sexual activities. Other experiences that fall into the category of MST include unwanted sexual touching or grabbing; threatening, offensive remarks about a person's body or sexual activities; and/or threatening and unwelcome sexual advances.

MST can affect a person's mental and physical health, even many years later. Some of the difficulties both female and male survivors of MST may have include:

- ***Strong emotions:*** feeling depressed; having intense, sudden emotional reactions to things; feeling angry or irritable all the time
- ***Feelings of numbness:*** feeling emotionally 'flat'; difficulty experiencing emotions like love or happiness
- ***Trouble sleeping:*** trouble falling or staying asleep; disturbing nightmares
- ***Difficulties with attention, concentration, and memory***
- ***Problems with alcohol or other drugs***
- ***Difficulty with things that remind them of their experiences of sexual trauma:*** feeling on edge or 'jumpy' all the time; difficulty feeling safe; going out of their way to avoid reminders of their experiences; difficulty trusting others
- ***Difficulties in relationships:*** feeling isolated or disconnected from others; abusive relationships; trouble with employers or authority figures
- ***Physical health problems:*** sexual difficulties; chronic pain; weight or eating problems; gastrointestinal problems

WHAT SERVICES ARE AVAILABLE?

The VA provides free, confidential counseling and treatment to male and female veterans for mental and physical health conditions related to experiences of MST. You do not need to be service connected and may be able to receive this benefit 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.

CAN I APPLY FOR DISABILITY COMPENSATION FOR CONDITIONS RELATED TO MY EXPERIENCES OF MST?

Veterans can receive compensation for disabilities that began or got worse in the line of duty, including disabilities or injuries resulting from MST. When a veteran applies for disability compensation, VA must first determine whether there are current disabilities related to his or her military service. If there are,compensation is based on the current level of impairment.

A Veterans Service Representative at the Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA) can explain the compensation program in greater detail and assist you in filing a claim. For more information, call the VA's general information hotline at **1-800-827-1000**.