



**COOPERATIVE EXTENSION**  
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**VA**



**U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs**

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## 5.2 Understanding Female Veteran Suicide and Resources Available

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## Facts about Women Veteran Suicide

Women Veterans comprise approximately 9 percent of the U.S. Veteran population, and the VA estimates that by 2035, 15% of the population will be Veteran women (U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, 2018).

Recent research and initiatives on suicide prevention have often taken a neutral approach regarding gender differences. However, there is an increasing problem regarding suicide among female Veterans, with an increase in these suicide rates compared to other U.S. adult populations (Monteith et al., 2021). This situation has encouraged scholars to work to understand gender differences in the prevalence of suicidal thoughts and behaviors, risk and protective factors, suicide methods, suicide prevention preferences and needs, and design effective interventions to prevent suicide among female Veterans (Monteith et al., 2021).

The VA is focused on improving the health and well-being of women Veterans by addressing suicide and suicidal behaviors women (U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, 2018). ***The suicide and crisis Lifeline number is: 988***

[Facts about Women Veteran Suicide and Resources  
https://www.mentalhealth.va.gov/suicide\\_prevention/docs/Final\\_Facts\\_About\\_Suicide\\_Among\\_Women\\_Veterans\\_508.pdf](https://www.mentalhealth.va.gov/suicide_prevention/docs/Final_Facts_About_Suicide_Among_Women_Veterans_508.pdf)

## Suicide Risk Factors for Female Veterans

Recent research showed that women Veterans have high rates of mental health and substance use disorders, intimate partner violence (IPV), and emotion dysregulation. These, combined with additional risk factors such as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), loneliness and hopelessness, can increase risk factors in the female Veteran population (Figure 5.2a). (U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, n.d.).

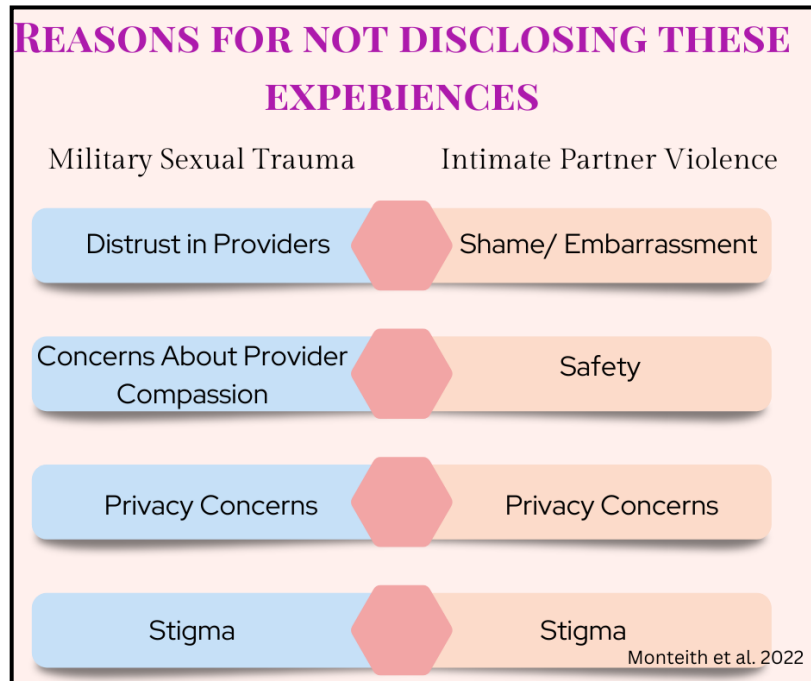


**Figure 5.2a**  
*Female Suicide Risk Factors*  
**Source**  
*Monteith et al., 2022*

For instance, abusing alcohol in order to mitigate emotional pain can increase the chances of a suicide attempt because alcohol abuse impairs decision-making and is associated with more impulsive decisions, such as attempting suicide. Past abuse and trauma, such as sexual assault as an adult or as a child, can also increase the chance of suicide (Association for Behavioral and Cognitive Therapies, n.d.).

Recent research also showed that female Veterans who screened positive for military sexual trauma (MST) are at higher risk of dying by suicide than those who screened negative (Monteith

et al., 2021). The number of women screening positive may be higher than we know because women Veterans often do not disclose sexual trauma for many reasons. Some of those reasons may include stigma, privacy concerns, distrust in providers, and shame or embarrassment (Figure 5.2b)



**Figure 5.2b**

*Reasons Provided by Female Veteran for Not Disclosing Military Sexual Trauma and Intimate Partner Violence Experiences*

**Source**

Monteith et al, 2022

Methods of suicide are different between female and male Veterans. Results from a study revealed that even though firearms are the most common method of suicide among Veterans overall, women Veterans are more likely to use firearms as a suicide method than non-veteran adult women (31.3%). Women Veterans who have experienced trauma, like military sexual trauma or intimate partner violence, may have more access to firearms as they may secure firearms to maintain a sense of safety and protection. Female Veterans (26.3%) are more likely than Veteran men (7.5%) to die by suicide from poisoning, suffocation (20.5% of Veteran women vs. 16.8% of Veteran men), or other methods of suicide (3.4% of Veteran women vs. 5.5% of Veteran men) (Monteith et al., 2021).

## Resources for Women Veterans

There are resources available for women Veterans at risk of suicide. These include:

- ◆ **Comprehensive Primary Care:** VA provides full services to women Veterans, including comprehensive primary care, gynecology care, maternity care, specialty care, and mental health services.
- ◆ **Women Veterans Program Manager:** The VA has a Women Veterans Program Manager at every VA medical center who acts as an administrative leader for the Women Veterans Health Program and an advocate for women Veterans.
- ◆ **Women's Health Providers:** Women Veterans can be assigned to trained and experienced Women's Health Providers, who provide primary care and gender-specific care as part of the patient-provider relationship.
- ◆ **Women Veterans Call Center:** This service provides women Veterans with information about relevant VA benefits and services and answers questions women Veterans may have about their benefits. Call or text 1-855-VA-WOMEN (1-855-829-6636) to contact responders who can help with enrollment and appointments and make referrals to Women Veterans Program Managers, the Health Eligibility Center, the Veterans Benefits Administration, and crisis lines as needed.

### [Women Veterans Call Center](https://www.womenshealth.va.gov/wvcc.asp)

<https://www.womenshealth.va.gov/wvcc.asp>

- ◆ **Military Sexual Trauma:** The VA uses the term "military sexual trauma" (MST) to refer to sexual assault or sexual harassment experienced during military service. MST includes any sexual activity during military service in which a person is involved against their will or when someone is unable to say no.

### [Military Sexual Trauma](https://www.mentalhealth.va.gov/msthome/index.asp)

<https://www.mentalhealth.va.gov/msthome/index.asp>

- ◆ **Women's Mental Health Champions:** A national network of Women's Mental Health Champions is in place to disseminate information, facilitate consultations, and develop local resources in support of gender-sensitive mental health care.

- ◆ **Women Veteran Coordinators:** Women Veteran Coordinators (WVCs) are located in every regional office and are the primary contact for women Veterans. WVCs provide information and comprehensive assistance to female Veterans, their dependents, and beneficiaries concerning VA benefits and related non-VA benefits. WVCs may assist female Veterans in the claims intake, development, and processing of military sexual and personal trauma claims.

[Regional VA Office Locator](#)

<https://www.va.gov/find-locations/>

### **Women Veterans Resources**

[Center for Women Veterans](#)

<https://www.va.gov/womenvet/resources/materials.asp>

## References

Monteith, L. L., Holliday, R., Brown, T. L., Brenner, L. A., & Mohatt, N. V. (2021). Preventing Suicide in Rural Communities During the COVID-19 Pandemic. *The Journal of Rural Health*, 37(1), 179-184. 10.1111/jrh.12448

U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs. (2018). *Facts About Suicide Among Women Veterans: June 2018*. Office of Mental Health and Suicide Prevention.