

Putting Research to Work for Military Families



Focus:
Multiple
Branches

Sexual Dysfunction is Associated with Suicidal Ideation in Female Service Members and Veterans

Blais, R. K., Monteith, L. L., & Kugler, J. (2018). Sexual dysfunction is associated with suicidal ideation in female service members and veterans. *Journal of Affective Disorders*, 226, 52-57. doi:10.1016/j.jad.2017.08.079

SUMMARY: It is important to examine the factors that are associated with Service members and Veterans' suicide; sexual dysfunction may be one of those factors. To examine these factors, 710 female Service members and Veterans completed an anonymous online survey regarding their suicidal ideation, sexual functioning, and posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and depression symptoms. Results indicated that sexual dysfunction was associated with suicidal ideation among female Service members and Veterans.

KEY FINDINGS:

- About one fifth (22%) of participants reported suicidal ideation during the past two weeks.
- Suicidal ideation was associated with sexual dysfunction and PTSD and depression symptoms.
- Among the components of sexual dysfunction, difficulties with arousal and low sexual satisfaction were most related with suicidal ideation.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMS:

Programs could:

- Offer support groups for female Service members who experienced sexual trauma
- Develop workshops for military couples to promote their relationship satisfaction
- Educate female Service members regarding the link between sexual dysfunction and suicidal ideation

IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICIES:

Policies could:

- Encourage the education of professionals working with female Service members regarding the association between sexual dysfunction and suicidal ideation
- Recommend regular screening of suicidal ideation among female Service members who were victims of sexual trauma
- Promote the development of programs that can promote sexual functioning in female Service members

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METHODS

- Participants were recruited by social media advertisements; they had to be in a romantic relationship to qualify for the study.
- Each participant completed an anonymous online survey regarding their suicidal ideation, sexual functioning, PTSD symptoms, and depression symptoms.
- Data were analyzed to examine the association between participants' sexual dysfunction and suicidal ideation.

PARTICIPANTS

- Participants were 710 female Service members or Veterans.
- The average age of the participants was 32.28 years (SD = 7.35); most of them were White (78%), followed by Multiracial (10%), Latina (6%), Black (5%), and Native Americans (1%).
- Most participants were in the Army (54%); the military branches of the rest of the participants were not reported.

LIMITATIONS

- Only one question was used to examine participants' suicidal ideation, which may limit the reliability of the results.
- The cross-sectional design of the study made it impossible to examine the causal relationship between sexual dysfunction and suicidal ideation.
- The study was based on self-report data; therefore, the findings may be subject to memory bias and social desirability bias.

AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research could:

- Recruit both male and female Service members to examine the potential gender differences in the association between sexual dysfunction and suicidal ideation
- Collect both subjective and objective data to increase the reliability of the study
- Conduct longitudinal studies to examine the causal relationship between sexual dysfunction and suicidal ideation

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