

Putting Research to Work for Military Families



Focus:
Multiple
Branches

A Closer Examination of Sexual Trauma During Deployment: Not all Sexual Traumas are Associated With Suicidal Ideation

Monteith, L. L., Menefee, D. S., Forster, J. E., & Bahraini, N. H. (2016). A closer examination of sexual trauma during deployment: Not all sexual traumas are associated with suicidal ideation. *Suicide and Life-Threatening Behavior*, 46(1), 46-54. doi:10.1111/sltb.12171

SUMMARY: Different types of sexual trauma during deployment were analyzed to explore possible links to suicidal ideation. Service members who experienced sexual trauma that included physical violence were more likely to report suicidal ideation than Service members who experienced verbal sexual trauma.

KEY FINDINGS:

- Verbal offensive sexual remarks were not associated with suicidal ideation except when the remarks were related to being threatened for lack of engaging in sexual activity.
- Exposure to sexually-related physical violence (e.g., being forced to have sex) was positively related to suicidal ideation.
- The highest amount of sexual trauma that was reported was experiences of offensive sexual remarks.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMS:

Programs could:

- Offer peer support groups to Service members who have experienced a history of sexual trauma
- Provide education to Service members and their families about the relationship between a history of certain types of sexual assault and suicidal ideation
- Develop partnerships with community organizations to provide supportive services for Service members who have experienced sexual trauma

IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICIES:

Policies could:

- Encourage routine screening for suicidal ideation of Service members, especially among those with histories of trauma (e.g., sexual trauma, combat exposure, etc.) to facilitate services for those in need
- Increase awareness campaigns to educate professionals who work with military families about the relationship between sexual trauma and suicidal ideation
- Urge the development of protocols about how to assist Service members who experience severe suicidal ideation

This product is the result of a partnership funded by the Department of Defense between the Office of Military Community and Family Policy and the USDA's National Institute of Food and Agriculture through a grant/cooperative agreement with The University of Minnesota.



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METHODS

- Participants were recruited upon admission to inpatient trauma-focused mental health treatment.
- Veterans completed self-report measures that assessed suicidal ideation, history of sexual assaults during deployment, and demographic information.
- Analyses were conducted to examine the relationships among suicidal thoughts, and history of sexual trauma.

PARTICIPANTS

- Participants were 199 OEF/OIF/OND Veterans who were admitted to an inpatient Veterans Affairs (VA) hospital. The average age of the sample was 32.5 years (SD=7.4).
- The sample consisted of 171 men and 28 women. Most of the participants were White (61%), as well as Black (23%), Latino (7%), Asian American (1%), multiracial (6%) or identified as other (3%).
- The following service branches were represented in the sample: Army (68%), Marine (24%), Air Force (4%) and Navy (4%).

LIMITATIONS

- Although demographic data were collected, none were used in the analyses which could have added more context by which to interpret the findings.
- There was no explanation of the type of inpatient treatment the participants attended, which could have had an impact on participants' suicidal ideation and the results presented in this study.
- There was no description of the nature of the suicidal ideation, so it is unclear if participants' suicidal ideation is related to past sexual trauma, other trauma, or current stressors.

AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research could:

- Replicate the study with surveys that have specific questions about suicidal ideation related to sexual trauma
- Collect more data from female Service members regarding their experiences with sexual trauma
- Conduct studies on the prevalence and incidence of sexual trauma among Service members

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