

# Putting Research to Work for Military Families



Focus:  
Army

## Sexual Assault Victimization and Mental Health Treatment, Suicide Attempts, and Career Outcomes Among Women in the US Army

Rosellini, A. J., Street, A. E., Ursano, R. J., Wai, T. C., Heeringa, S. G., Monahan, J., ... Kessler, R. C. (2017). Sexual assault victimization and mental health treatment, suicide attempts, and career outcomes among women in the US Army. *American Journal of Public Health, 107*(5), 732-739. doi:10.2105/ajph.2017.303693

**SUMMARY:** Service members that are victims of sexual assault may experience severe emotional trauma and a variety of negative outcomes following the assault. Administrative records of female, Active Duty, sexual assault victims in the US Army and a comparison group were used to determine associations with negative outcomes. The sexual assault victims had an increased likelihood of experiencing mental health treatment and negative outcomes.

### KEY FINDINGS:

- Victims were more likely than the comparison group to have various types of mental health treatment and suicide attempts following the sexual assault.
- Victims had a higher rate of attrition from military service than both the comparison group and the total population of female Soldiers.
- Victimization was associated with subsequent demotion, and demotion rates were higher for victims that did not receive treatment after the sexual assault.

### IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMS:

Programs could:

- Offer support groups for Service member victims of sexual assault
- Disseminate information about available resources and help for Service members potentially impacted by sexual assault
- Provide evidence-based sexual assault prevention information to Service members

### IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICIES:

Policies could:

- Recommend education of professionals around the possible effects of sexual assault on Service members
- Continue to support programs that address the negative outcomes experienced by Service member victims of sexual assault
- Encourage collaboration among military-based programs and community-based organizations to support Service members following a sexual assault

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## METHODS

- Administrative records of female Soldiers on Active Duty with a reported sexual assault during the study period (2004 to 2009) were included.
- The comparison group of female Soldiers was identified based on having a similar predicted risk of sexual assault prior to the reported assault.
- Administrative records were assessed for several negative outcomes in the twelve months following the reported sexual assault.
- The likelihood of victims experiencing negative outcomes was compared to the full female US Army population and the comparison group.

## PARTICIPANTS

- Participants were 4,238 female, US Army Service members with an administrative record indicating a sexual assault victimization.
- A total of 21,190 female US Army Service members were used in the comparison group.
- Age, race/ethnicity, and rank of the victims and members of the comparison group were not reported.

## LIMITATIONS

- The study only used data from administratively reported sexual assaults. The results may not generalize to Service members with unreported sexual assaults.
- Male Service members with records of sexual assault victimization were excluded; therefore, any conclusions may not generalize to male victims.
- Only the twelve months following each assault were used; therefore, the long-term consequences of sexual assault victimization were not assessed.

## AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research could:

- Examine the outcomes of sexual assault victimization of male Service members
- Determine the long-term outcomes of sexual assault victimization on Service members
- Explore interventions that may reduce the negative outcomes following a sexual assault

## ASSESSING RESEARCH THAT WORKS



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