



## **Study Suggests War-Time Location Affects Prevalence of PTSD among Vietnam Era Women Veterans**

**CITATION:** Magruder K, Serpi T, Kimerling R, Kilbourne A, et al. [Prevalence of Post-traumatic Stress Disorder in Vietnam-Era Women Veterans](#). *JAMA Psychiatry*. October 7, 2015; ePub ahead of print.

### **BACKGROUND:**

PTSD was the signature illness for men who served in Vietnam; however, far less is known regarding the effects of PTSD on women Veterans' health. This study examined the prevalence of lifetime and current PTSD for women Veterans who served in the Vietnam era by wartime location, and the extent to which location was associated with PTSD. Using data from VA's Health of Vietnam-Era Women's Study (HealthVIEWS), investigators identified three cohorts: women Veterans who served in Vietnam, women Veterans who served near Vietnam (i.e., Japan, Guam, and the Philippines), and those who served in the U.S. Data for the current study were collected by mail and telephone from 5/11 through 8/12 and included: 1,956 women Veterans who served in Vietnam, 657 women who served near Vietnam, and 1,606 women who served in the U.S. In addition to assessing PTSD, measures for this study included wartime exposures (i.e., sexual discrimination or harassment, casualty- or environment-related stress, job performance pressure, triage or death, danger or threat); demographics; and military service variables.

### **FINDINGS:**

- Women Veterans who served in Vietnam had significantly higher levels of lifetime and current PTSD than women who served near Vietnam or in the U.S.
- The lifetime prevalence of PTSD was 20%, 12%, and 14% for the Vietnam, near Vietnam, and U.S. women Veterans, respectively. The prevalence of current PTSD was 16%, 8%, and 9% for these three cohorts, respectively.
- The higher prevalence for women who served in Vietnam was accounted for by their wartime exposures. In particular, self-reported sexual discrimination or harassment and performance pressure were related to both lifetime and current PTSD in these women.

### **IMPLICATIONS:**

- The effects of serving in a war zone can be long-lasting in women. Future research should examine the presence of other psychiatric disorders on long-term health outcomes in women Veterans. Research should also investigate resilience and other positive effects of military service for these women.
- Clinicians should be vigilant to symptoms of PTSD – even in aging women Veterans – and encourage them to seek appropriate treatment if warranted.

### **LIMITATIONS:**

- Study non-respondents may have had a different PTSD prevalence than women Veterans who responded.
- Deployment to a war zone is not random and might be influenced by unmeasured individual characteristics that are risk factors for PTSD.
- Veterans may have had difficulty accurately recalling events over six decades that may have contributed to their current symptoms.

### **AUTHOR/FUNDING INFORMATION:**

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