

# Relationship impairments hinder men seeking mental health treatment

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Relationship impairment (difficulty managing expectations and requirements within an intimate relationship) plays a role in explaining the association between symptom severity and those seeking treatment among post-9/11 military veterans. However, the role it plays is different for men and women.

In men, [relationship](#) impairment appears to interfere with seeking treatment for post-[traumatic stress disorder](#) (PTSD) and depression, whereas for women, it may facilitate treatment seeking. These findings may partially explain widely demonstrated [sex differences](#) in those seeking treatment.

Although symptom severity is a known predictor of treatment seeking, the role of work and relationship impairment in this association is unclear. In an effort to examine the contribution of relationship and work impairment to service use among women and men with stress disorder PTSD and depression symptoms, researchers from the VA Boston Healthcare System and Boston University School of Medicine (BUSM) surveyed 363 post 9/11 [military veterans](#).

They found that in men, treatment seeking was reduced when accompanied by high relationship impairment. For women, relationship impairment acted as a mediator of the positive association between PTSD symptom severity and service use.

According to the researchers the finding that relationship impairment

interfered with treatment seeking for men but facilitated treatment seeking for women may help explain widely demonstrated sex differences in treatment seeking. "These results underscore the importance of attending to the role of relationship impairment in veterans' treatment seeking and highlight the value of implementing gender-informed approaches to [treatment](#) promotion efforts," explained corresponding author Dawne S. Vogt, Ph.D., research psychologist in the Women's Health Sciences Division, National Center for PTSD at the VA Boston Healthcare System and associate professor of psychiatry at BUSM.

While the researchers cannot be sure why this sex difference emerged, they believe it is possible that this finding is due to the different role that relationships often play in women's and men's lives, including [women's](#) greater attunement to and emphasis on relationships.

**More information:** Dawne Vogt et al, Do Functional Impairments Promote or Hinder Mental Health Treatment Seeking: Differential Results for Women and Men, *Psychiatry Research* (2018). [DOI: 10.1016/j.psychres.2018.12.031](#)

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