

Vietnam-era women veterans continue to experience wartime stress

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Vietnam-era women veterans suffer with stress-related mental health conditions, including posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD), major depression and generalized anxiety disorder, more than four decades

after their service.

Women veterans represent the fastest growing group among the [veteran](#) population, and like their male counterparts, have poorer health than civilians. While women veterans were for many years a small percentage in both the U.S. and veteran populations, their rapid increase has warranted more focused attention and research on their health and corresponding healthcare needs.

The study used data (4,219 women veterans) collected in a large-scale epidemiologic investigation of Vietnam-era women veterans known as The Health of Vietnam Era Women's Study, or HealthViEWS. Several decades after their service, women veterans who were active duty at this time completed both a mail survey and a telephone interview.

"Our findings support continued emphasis upon PTSD as an important adverse health outcome for [military veterans](#) and highlight the potential long-term effects of military service on these aging women veterans of the Vietnam era. It was also noteworthy that exposure to [sexual discrimination](#) and harassment while deployed was a consistent risk-factor for poor long-term health functioning and increased disability," explained corresponding author Brian Smith, Ph.D., research psychologist in the Women's Health Sciences Division, National Center for PTSD at VA Boston Healthcare System and assistant professor of psychiatry at Boston University School of Medicine.

According to the researchers, while this study was focused on women veterans of the Vietnam era, given that these types of interpersonal exposures continue to plague women deployed in current conflicts, it is important to note that the present findings have implications for contemporary women serving in the military as well.

The researchers hope the results of this study will draw attention to the

importance of continuing to study and advance understanding of the long-term health and corresponding health care needs of older women veterans. "Our findings suggest that women veterans' experiences while deployed may have important implications for their health, functioning, and quality of life in the years and decades following their [military service](#), and as such we hope that these findings will help inform the development and refinement of services for [women veterans](#)," he added.

More information: Brian N. Smith et al, Impact of Wartime Stress Exposures and Mental Health on Later-Life Functioning and Disability in Vietnam-Era Women Veterans, *Psychosomatic Medicine* (2019). [DOI: 10.1097/PSY.0000000000000762](#)

Provided by Boston University School of Medicine

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