

Women Veterans' stories of strength

Interviewee1: Society as a large, they have this opinion that Veterans should be men and not women, and if women are Vets and they've gone over there, then they've stayed on post and they're nurses and they push papers and that they're not Combat Vets. And I am a Combat Vet.

Interviewee2: The female to male ratio in Guantanamo Bay is about 15 or 20, so for every 20 males there's one female. So it's kind of hard to get acclimated to that, especially being young, being defined as being attractive. It becomes a problem because everyone's thinking either you're getting ahead because you're attractive or well this girl must be very promiscuous because clearly she's running through guys. Although, just perceptions were really strident.

Interviewee3: It's still tough for women here. We still have a hard time. We still have to watch our backs. We still have to pay attention to where we are and where we're going.

Interviewee4: It can be particularly challenging for women because women have been integrated in so many ways, into lots of different roles in the military. But when you come out, like I found it a little difficult, I think, to relate to non-military women.

Interviewee3: When I first got back, large groups just could not happen for me. I couldn't even be in a place. There was so much anxiety that if I walked into a space, coliseum, football field, auditorium. I could manage an auditorium if I stood at the back of the room by the door. That was about as much as I could handle.

Interviewee4: Well I was used to talking to people every day all the time. I wasn't used to being alone.

Interviewee2: I felt like I was tired all the time. If I wasn't out running, I was sleeping, which of course is very militaristic; you're work or you're sleeping.

Interviewee5: I was having issues with like proximity of people coming close to me or loud sounds and stuff.

Interviewee6: A friend of mine said, "You know, you're really, you're not getting out of bed, you're not doing anything, you're not taking a shower and you really need to get some help besides medication and besides just laying around."

Interviewee7: Believe it or not it was a long time before I actually went to the VA, simply because of my son. I was afraid they would take my son for admitting to some issue, so it was a long time before I went.

Interviewee8: At the VA that I belong to, they're very sensitive to women's issues. They have a women's program just for women.

Interviewee9: And so I get care from Women's Health Clinic to Mental Health to a Primary Care Provider, and now actually with the VA, they have that new system where you can actually email your doctor. It's amazing.



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Interviewee2: I've been doing much better at trying to manage my symptoms and cope with them as they happen or even prevent them.

Interviewee10: But the biggest thing was the groups and just getting to talk to the other women.

Interviewee11: So I encourage women, if you need to talk to somebody seek another woman because they understand. There are great men and women providers at the VA. I've had both. But you've just gotta keep pushing through.

Interviewee6: And help is the biggest thing. You can't do it on your own. It's not something you can read a book and figure it out. No, you actually need someone that's trained and can sit and listen to you and help you and tell you maybe you need this medication or maybe you just need somebody to talk to.

Interviewee7: Even though you're having this issue, even though things come up, you can get past it. You're not by yourself, you're not, like I say I always feel like that man out on the island, and that's just not so. There's so many different people who are going through the exact same thing.



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