

Overcoming military sexual trauma

Interviewee1: The day I got to my battalion I was excited about starting a new career and I guess that's what you can say is when my incident happened. They were planning a hazing and it just turned into more than that.

Interviewee2: I just told them that I had been physically assaulted. At that point in time I had already started believing that that's all that had happened was a physical assault. I was scared.

Interviewee3: These are things you don't just go around bragging about, saying, "Hey, this happened," so you just tend to keep it to yourself.

Interviewee4: I thought that it was something maybe I did, because I was really new at the unit.

Interviewee5: When you're backed into the file cabinet every day and when you're groped at every day you can laugh it off to a certain extent but it weighs on you.

Interviewee1: I lost all trust in people because, I, um, some of the things I experienced, so even with family members and, uh, loved ones, so it was very hard for me to connect with people.

Brigette: It was everything from depression to anger to grief, but not having anything to really understand what I was grieving about.

Interviewee6: And I found myself standing in my bedroom, all dark, the TV screen on, curtains closed. I wouldn't interact with my daughter but I knew something was wrong. As much as I loved her, I wasn't really the same.

Interviewee2: The substance abuse is what I used during the majority of my life to mask what was really bugging me.

Interviewee3: As the years went by everything started creeping up on me. I was fighting with myself. "That didn't happen let it go."

Interviewee7: I just stayed at work, nose to the grindstone, earning overtime. I was just stuffing emotions that I didn't even know I had.

Interviewee8: It really changed my life. It started to affect my relationship and came to a point where it's like, "Okay, I really need to talk to somebody about this."

Interviewee1: I thought about what I really wanted in my life, and I decided that I was going to get the VA, try to push through these issues.

Interviewee6: I didn't know that some of the sexual harassment I encountered, how much it impacted me until I went and talked to someone.

Interviewee1: It was a feeling of relief. It was also a feeling of "This happened to me, but it doesn't define me."



U.S. Department
of Veterans Affairs

**MAKE THE
CONNECTION**

Interviewee4: You have so many resources that you'll be able to stand up for yourself. It's a difficult and long process, but you're worth giving yourself a chance.

Interviewee6: Getting mental health helped me embrace my life. I started being happy again.

Interviewee5: Life gets so good when you take the time for yourself to do the healing for yourself. If you had the courage to go through military training and devote your life to your country and be willing to die for your country, you have the courage to do this.



U.S. Department
of Veterans Affairs

**MAKE THE
CONNECTION**