

Healing and wholeness after MST

Interviewee1: Just the human male/female dynamics. When you are in a long way from home in a captive environment, in a high-stress environment, some people in positions are gonna take advantage of others that are, you know, lower so to speak than them. Every day, there was issues with sexual harassment. Sometimes there was touching, there was groping.

Interviewee2: You know, you hear story after story of experiences of Military sexual trauma or PTSD. Sometimes they go hand-in-hand. The PTSD is from the sexual trauma. Even if it's not a rape, which quite often it is, but even when it's not it's just the constant barrage of inappropriate jokes or inappropriate comments or touching or bumping against.

Interviewee3: I was attacked by another Platoon Sergeant, assaulted both physically and sexually. At that time, from where that happened in the restroom, I had to walk into where everybody was staying. And I just told them that I'd been physically assaulted. At that point in time, I had already started believing that that's all that had happened was a physical assault. And so they encouraged me to report it to First Sergeant and I was scared man.

Interviewee4: There isn't supposed to be sexual harassment. It's not supposed to be part of the environment. I think women are, by some men, looked at as a weakness in the Military, so it's like you don't want to be the woman that's making drama, you don't want to be the weak link in this, you know, well-ironed machine, even if it's justified, so I think a lot of it just women let it go.

Interviewee5: I had a supervisor who was just, he was hateful. He was always mean, he was very hard on me and I took it even though I was successful at my job and I kind of ignored him and one day I finally snapped, and I told him "Would you treat your wife, your child, your grandmother, your aunt, you know any of these women in your life, would you treat this way?" I was like, "Because I am somebody's daughter, you know, I am somebody" and it's the way that men either try to come across very hard, I think, or they come across as condescending and they're gonna you know try to lure you into their bedroom. So, it's a lot of times one spectrum to the other. And it's a learning process.

Interviewee1: You just feel so disempowered, you know, and I remember on... in the initial occasions when it happened, I would go and report the incidences to my Higher Command, and it seemed to fall on deaf ears to the point where I just stopped reporting the things that happened.

Interviewee6: I held on to a lot of what happened. But I did eventually, through stress, I reported the hazing incident to the Battalion. When I did that, there was a court-martial, there the ringleader was court-martialed. After I reported it, and the court-martial went through and the gentleman was disciplined, I was also disciplined. I was taken from my job site, and I worked in the galley cleaning pots and pans. From there I went to the central tool room, where I worked with tools. And it was hard, because this happened early in my career. So I knew I had another four and a half years left to serve, and I just dreaded waking up and having to do these menial tasks.



U.S. Department
of Veterans Affairs

**MAKE THE
CONNECTION**

Interviewee2: It's something that you become even more isolated, and it becomes your secret. It's really scary and you feel really isolated, and you don't talk about it.

Interviewee1: Find a good, good therapist that has training in Military sexual trauma if that's what you need, and really get gut-level honest and tell that therapist what happened to you, and work on strategies to work through that.

Interviewee6: For a long time I thought of myself as three things. A military Veteran, someone that has suffered a military sexual trauma, and someone that was diagnosed with PTSD. That was the only things that defined me. But once I started working with this and I accepted this, I started thinking of myself outside the box. And a lot larger than I ever had before. You know I'm also a kind person. I have a lot of strengths. Now I'm in school studying to be a social worker. I'm married. I own a home. I'm very satisfied with my life, and I'm happy. I am so happy that I went to the VA and got some help.

Interviewee2: I continue to work with other women Vets, and we meet on a regular basis and talk and can share our experiences, and that has helped immensely. So, for me, my mental health is restored and, you know, it's a multi-phase thing. It comes with my faith, it comes with my, you know, seeing a therapist and really addressing the issues head on, and it comes in my action and how I'm doing and living my life out and that it can... I can use my story. I can use my experience to not only make me a better person but to serve my community.



U.S. Department
of Veterans Affairs

**MAKE THE
CONNECTION**