

## VETERANS AND GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

A growing number of women are serving in the U.S. military. Currently, women comprise nearly 15% of active duty military forces and 9.4% of the total veteran population.<sup>i</sup> Approximately 2 million women veterans live across the United States.<sup>ii</sup> These numbers are expected to keep rising. In fact, women are the fastest growing group of veterans.<sup>iii</sup>

When women make the choice to serve their country through military service, they benefit from unique opportunities and training, but also face increased risks of violence and trauma compared to their male counterparts.<sup>iv</sup> Women who are veterans must juggle the expectations of active duty with caregiving duties, interpersonal violence, and sexual and racial harassment in the workplace. These gender related barriers may force women to pursue “premature separation” from the military,<sup>v</sup> which may cause them to lose out on veteran’s benefits when they return home. In addition, service members may be barred from seeking civil or constitutional remedies in federal (civilian) courts against the military for its failure to adequately prevent and address the sexual violence they experienced.<sup>vi</sup>

### FACTS

- Reports of sexual assault in the U.S. military increased by nearly 10% in 2017 across all branches of service.<sup>vii</sup> This could be a result of more assaults occurring and/or more confidence in the reporting process and therefore more reports of sexual assault.
- The Department of Defense estimated that 20,500 service members experienced a sexual assault in 2018, which is more than 55 service members every day.<sup>viii</sup> However, service members face many barriers to reporting incidents of sexual violence and abuse, thus available estimates are much lower than the actual prevalence of gender-based violence in the military.<sup>ix</sup>
- Although women make up less than 20% of the military, a recent study showed that they are the targets of 63% of assaults, with the youngest and lowest-ranking women most at risk.<sup>x</sup>
- Black women now constitute nearly one third of all women in the U.S. military. At around 30%, this number is twice their representation in the civilian population and higher than that of men or women of any other racial or ethnic group,<sup>xi</sup> offering unique implications about Black women’s experiences of both homelessness and sexual violence.
- A 2002 study of women veterans from Vietnam and all wars since, who were seeking help for post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), found that more than 71% said they were sexually assaulted or raped while serving.<sup>xii</sup>
- 26% of active-duty women report experiencing military equal-opportunity violations on the basis of sex.<sup>xiii</sup>

- Women who experience sexual violence in the context of active duty military service are nine times more at risk for PTSD than their civilian counterparts.<sup>xiv</sup>
- Both men and women who have been sexually assaulted while in the military represent the fastest growing segment of the homeless population — and the rate of women veterans that are homeless is particularly on the rise, with Black women being especially affected.<sup>xv</sup>
- Women veterans are four times more likely to become homeless than their civilian counterparts.<sup>xvi</sup>
- Because those who experience personal violence, including rape, are 6.5 times more likely to experience homelessness, women veterans who have experienced violence are at a greater risk for experiencing homelessness, especially when compounded by PTSD.<sup>xvii</sup>

YWCA has supported members of the military and military families for nearly a century, beginning in World War I when the YWCA and other women's groups lobbied for a female military corp. The effort paid off during World War II when the first Women's Auxiliary Corps (WACS) was founded in 1942. Soon after, the YWCA was one of six national organizations that launched the USO.

Every year, at YWCAs across the country, over 4,000 military veterans and their families receive emergency housing, health care, career training, and counseling. And that number will continue to grow. In the last decade, the number of homeless female veterans has more than doubled.<sup>xviii</sup> Veteran women are more likely to be younger, unmarried, unemployed, disabled, and a person of color than non-veteran women.<sup>xix</sup> As a result, they are also more likely to become homeless. YWCA housing provides a lifeline as veteran women transition into civilian life, heal from PTSD, and care for themselves and their families.

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<sup>i</sup> Department of Veterans Affairs, National Center for Veterans Analysis and Statistics. (2017). "Women Veterans Report.", 2017. Retrieved from [https://www.va.gov/vetdata/docs/SpecialReports/Women\\_Veterans\\_2015\\_Final.pdf](https://www.va.gov/vetdata/docs/SpecialReports/Women_Veterans_2015_Final.pdf).

<sup>ii</sup> Id.

<sup>iii</sup> Id.

<sup>iv</sup> Secretary of Defense Ash Carter. (2015). "Briefing on Sexual Assault in the Military in the Pentagon Press Briefing Room." Department of Defense Press. Retrieved from <http://www.defense.gov/News/Transcripts/Transcript-View/Article/607047/departement-of-defense-press-briefing-on-sexual-assault-in-the-military-in-the-p/>.

<sup>v</sup> The RAND Corporation. (2018). "Addressing Barriers to Female Officer Retention in the Air Force." Retrieved from <https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/0fbd/833a6a3bc923f6ea0474911e9e472c46dc5b.pdf>.

<sup>vi</sup> National Sexual Violence Resource Center. (2013). "Sexual Violence in the Military." Retrieved from [https://www.nsvrc.org/sites/default/files/publications\\_nsvrc\\_guides\\_sexual-violence-in-the-military-a-guide-for-civilian-advocates.pdf](https://www.nsvrc.org/sites/default/files/publications_nsvrc_guides_sexual-violence-in-the-military-a-guide-for-civilian-advocates.pdf).

<sup>vii</sup> Cohen, Z., Browne, R. (April 30, 2018). "US military sees spike in sexual assault reports." CNN. Retrieved from <https://www.cnn.com/2018/04/30/politics/dod-sexual-assault-report-2017/index.html>.

<sup>viii</sup> Phillips, Dave. (May 2, 2019). "'This is Unacceptable.' Military Reports a Surge of Sexual Assaults in the Ranks." The New York Times. Retrieved from <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/05/02/us/military-sexual-assault.html>.

<sup>ix</sup> National Sexual Violence Resource Center. (2013). "Sexual Violence in the Military." Retrieved from [https://www.nsvrc.org/sites/default/files/publications\\_nsvrc\\_guides\\_sexual-violence-in-the-military-a-guide-for-civilian-advocates.pdf](https://www.nsvrc.org/sites/default/files/publications_nsvrc_guides_sexual-violence-in-the-military-a-guide-for-civilian-advocates.pdf).

<sup>x</sup> Phillips, Dave. (May 2, 2019). "'This is Unacceptable.' Military Reports a Surge of Sexual Assaults in the Ranks." The New York Times. Retrieved from <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/05/02/us/military-sexual-assault.html>.

<sup>xi</sup> Melin, Julia. (2016) "Desperate Choices: Why Black Women Join the U.S. Military at Higher Rates than Men and All Other Racial and Ethnic Groups." New England Journal of Public Policy: Vol. 28: Iss. 2, Article 8. Retrieved from <http://scholarworks.umb.edu/nejpp/vol28/iss2/8>.

<sup>xii</sup> Sadler et al. (2003). Factors Associated With Women's Risk of Rape in the Military Environment. American Journal of Industrial Medicine. Retrieved from [http://www.arlingtonwestsantamonica.org/docs/Sadler\\_Military\\_Environment.pdf](http://www.arlingtonwestsantamonica.org/docs/Sadler_Military_Environment.pdf).

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- <sup>xiii</sup> The RAND Corporation. (2014). "Sexual Assault and Sexual Harassment in the U.S. Military." Retrieved from [https://www.rand.org/pubs/research\\_reports/RR870z1.html](https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR870z1.html).
- <sup>xiv</sup> Suris et al. (2004). "Sexual Assault in Women Veterans: An Examination of PTSD Risk, Health Care Utilization, and Cost of Care." Retrieved from <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/15385701>.
- <sup>xv</sup> Hamilton, Alison. et al. (2011). "Homelessness and Trauma Go Hand-in-Hand: Pathways to Homelessness among Women Veterans Hamilton." Women's Health Issues , Volume 21 , Issue 4 , S203 - S209.
- <sup>xvi</sup> Id.
- <sup>xvii</sup> National Coalition for Homeless Veterans. (2012). "Homeless Female Veterans." Retrieved from <http://www.nchv.org/images/uploads/HFV%20paper.pdf>.
- <sup>xviii</sup> Id.
- <sup>xix</sup> VA National Center on Homelessness Among Veterans. (2016). "Women Veterans and Homelessness." Retrieved from <https://www.va.gov/HOMELESS/nchav/docs/HERS-Womens-Proceedings.pdf>.