

The Athena Project

# Exploring sex-specific health care and the health and well-being of women Veterans in Canada

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## Introduction

- Kate Hill MacEachern, PhD, Senior Research Associate, Applied Research
- Atlas Institute for Veterans and Families
  - Mental health and well-being of Veterans and their Family members
  - Connect with Veteran communities
  - Create resources
  - Provide training and coaching for service providers
  - Conduct applied and clinical research, fund external research
- Downward trend in indicators of mental health and well-being among Veterans in Canada
- Women Veterans are disproportionately represented in indicators of mental and physical illness or injury including posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and chronic pain

## The Athena Project

- Response to identified need of women's health and female-focused research
  - Better understand the experiences
  - Ask the right questions
  - Generate evidence that can inform policies and programs to support the specific needs of women Veterans
- Community engaged approach
  - Working group of women Veterans
  - Provide input and advice on research priorities
  - Active engagement in each stage of the research process
  - Project ambassadors

## Women Veterans health and well-being survey

- How do experiences from time in service relate to mental health as a Veteran?
- Single time-point, self-report survey, accessed online
- Retrospective component and some repeated questions (time in service and time as a Veteran)
- Health care needs and access, diagnosed mental health, current symptomology, physical health, experiential and behavioural factors
- Sharing noteworthy or interesting trends in experiences from service and mental health in this preliminary data
  - Spark conversations and share ideas

# Sample characteristics

## Sample characteristics

- 157 women Veterans from the CAF (n = 105) and RCMP
- 54.61 years old, range from 28 - 84
- 65% married, common-law, co-habiting
- 95.5 identified as cisgender\*
- 86.0% identified as straight\*
- 81.5% identified as white, 6.4% Indigenous, 5.1% Black\*
- 22.52 years in service
- 21.7% posted outside of Canada
- 51.6% had a medical release
- 50.9% retired or caring for themselves
- 94.1% owned or rented their home

*\*multiple identities could be selected*

## Diagnosed mental illness

Has a doctor, psychiatrist, or psychologist ever diagnosed you with a(n):

Variable	%	
Eating disorder	12.7	
Sleep disorder	24.2	
Anxiety disorder	45.2	←
Mood disorder	25.5	
Trauma or stress-related disorder	69.4	←
Operational stress injury	28.0	

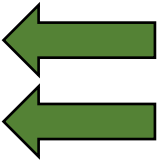
## Chronic pain

Variable	%
Are you usually free of pain or discomfort? (N = 157)	
Yes	34.4
No	65.6
How would you describe this pain or discomfort? (n = 103)	
Mild	20.4
Moderate	55.3
Severe	24.3
How many activities does your pain limit? (n = 103)	
None	4.9
A few	30.1
Some	30.1
Most	35.0



## Suicidal ideation and attempts

Variable	n	% Yes
Have you ever seriously contemplated suicide	147	46.9
Has this happened in the past 12 months	65	38.5
Have you ever seriously attempted suicide	149	18.1



- National estimates of suicidal ideation in past 12 months is 2.7% for females

**Does mental health symptomology differ based on perceived access to care?**

## Sex-specific health care access

“In general, what was it like accessing care for any of these health concerns?”:

Variable	N	% Easy	
Screening (e.g., mammograms, pap tests)	137	51.1	
Birth control	132	65.9	←
Fertility treatment	48	45.8	
Menstrual health	109	37.6	←
Prenatal, childbirth, maternity, or postnatal care	101	57.4	←
Menopausal care	83	34.9	←
Surgical procedures	89	39.3	←

Health care access	Anxiety	Depression	PTSD	Moral injury
Screening			F(1, 135) = 12.78	
Difficult			37.12	
Easy			27.01	
Menstrual		F(1, 103) = 16.36	F(1, 107) = 18.23	
Difficult		17.51	39.06	
Easy		8.91	26.46	
Prenatal	F(1, 97) = 26.66	F(1, 95) = 27.88	F(1, 99) = 18.58	F(1, 65) = 12.55
Difficult	9.96	17.79	39.91	30.20
Easy	3.76	10.49	25.12	21.25
Menopause	F(1, 79) = 18.42	F(1, 77) = 19.41	F(1,81) = 24.80	
Difficult	10.15	16.71	36.93	
Easy	4.79	9.93	21.00	
Fertility	F(1,44) = 22.00	F(1, 45) = 16.92		
Difficult	9.96	15.76		
Easy	3.76	8.91		
Surgery			F(1, 87) = 16.58	
Difficult			38.94	
Easy			25.97	

**Do workplace experiences from service relate to mental health symptomology?**

## Variables

Dependent variables	Mean	Standard deviation
Posttraumatic stress disorder (PCL-M)	31.34**	16.78
Moral injury (MIOS)	26.04*	11.04
Generalized Anxiety (GAD-7)	8.63*	6.25
Depressive symptoms (CESD-10)	14.19**	7.92

\*mild symptomology

\*\*moderate symptomology

Independent variables		
Everyday discrimination (EDS)	26.80	10.92
Workplace discrimination (CWDH)	32.33	11.65
Institutional betrayal (IBQ-2)	7.64	6.13
Organizational stress (PSQ-Org)	4.55	1.28
Operational stress (PSQ-Op)	4.55	1.13
Sexual harassment (DRRI-2-K)	7.64	6.13

## Regression models

Regression step	Generalized Anxiety		Depressive Symptoms		PTSD		Moral Injury	
	Variable	Adj. R <sup>2</sup>	Variable	Adj. R <sup>2</sup>	Variable	Adj. R <sup>2</sup>	Variable	Adj. R <sup>2</sup>
Step one	Everyday discrimination	.34	Everyday discrimination	.40	Work discrimination	.39	Work discrimination	.31
Step two	Institutional betrayal	.41	Institutional betrayal	.47	Organizational stress	.47	Organizational stress	.39
Step three	Organizational stress	.44	Organizational stress	.50	Sexual harassment	.49	Institutional betrayal	.41
Step four	-	-	-	-	Institutional betrayal	.51	-	-

What does it all mean?



## Caveats

- Results based on preliminary findings with small sample size
  - More in-depth analyses planned
- Retrospective and self-report data
  - Experiences from service may be perceived differently based on current mental/physical state
- Additional factors not captured in data or not yet examined
  - E.g., Exposure to trauma not associated with sexual assault, harassment, or discrimination
  - E.g., Intersectionality and/or interaction among identity factors
- A first step in exploring women Veterans' mental health

## What does this all mean?

- Preliminary results support what we are seeing and hearing anecdotally
- Experiences from time in service appear to relate to mental health
  - Different experiences relate to different mental health outcomes
  - Need to understand the mechanisms at play in these associations
- Some cause for concern
  - Suicidal ideation, chronic pain
- Collaborative approach needed to understand the interconnectedness and complexities of women's health

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