

Introduction

The Office on Women's Health (OWH), Region V has a vision to make the lives of all women and girls healthier. Over the past century and decade, the amount of women in the military has increased in region V and throughout the nation. OWH is committed to adding women veterans' health needs to their priorities through securing programs and policies that will better serve them.

The University of Illinois at Chicago's (UIC), Master of Public Administration (MPA) Capstone group worked with OWH to investigate and examine the current health needs of women veterans. The research team sought ways to best collect the necessary information. Through past research examination, conversations with women veterans, the Women Veterans' Conference, and formal interviews with healthcare service providers; the team was able to collect a large portion of information to correlate. The information collected from these sources focused the study into three components; health issues and treatment, gender and service utilization, and organization processes and policies.

As of 2000, there were 1.6 million women veterans in the United States. Over the past century, the role of women in the U.S. military has changed drastically. Their ranks continue to expand as women have an increasing presence in the military.¹ Women in the wars in Iraq and

Afghanistan have been breaking down many barriers for what women are permitted and able to achieve. As the differences between men and women in the military grow slimmer, and the needs of veterans increase, the health services they are provided must be examined to see if they are adequate and specialized enough to meet their unique needs.

This study outlines past research with a focus on Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, Traumatic Brain Injury, Military Sexual Assault and other existing problems that factor into healthcare services to include reintegration, unemployment and homelessness. Laws that changed the face of women serving in the military, benefits available to them as a result of service, and the development and change in policy of sexual harassment and sexual assault and how those influence healthcare for women veterans is also examined to lend to the analysis of services.

Data collection was conducted within the scope of the researchers to examine the views and practices of front-line health workers who serve this unique population and others in comparison. Analysis was conducted to identify patterns and frequencies within the programs as well as to note any variation in services, identify service delivery, variation in treatment, accessibility of healthcare; barriers that may prevent healthcare providers from delivering services prevent women veterans from utilizing services and to highlight best practice examples.

¹ Suris, A., Lind, L., Kashner, M. T., Borman, P. D. (2007). Mental Health, Quality of Life, and Health Functioning in Women Veterans: Differential Outcomes Associated with Military and Civilian Sexual Assault. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*. 22, 179-197.