Sexual Assault Victimization and Mental Health Treatment, Suicide Attempts, and Career Outcomes Among Women in the US Army


SUMMARY: Service members that are victims of sexual assault may experience severe emotional trauma and a variety of negative outcomes following the assault. Administrative records of female, Active Duty, sexual assault victims in the US Army and a comparison group were used to determine associations with negative outcomes. The sexual assault victims had an increased likelihood of experiencing mental health treatment and negative outcomes.

KEY FINDINGS:
- Victims were more likely than the comparison group to have various types of mental health treatment and suicide attempts following the sexual assault.
- Victims had a higher rate of attrition from military service than both the comparison group and the total population of female Soldiers.
- Victimization was associated with subsequent demotion, and demotion rates were higher for victims that did not receive treatment after the sexual assault.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMS:
Programs could:
- Offer support groups for Service member victims of sexual assault
- Disseminate information about available resources and help for Service members potentially impacted by sexual assault
- Provide evidence-based sexual assault prevention information to Service members

IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICIES:
Policies could:
- Recommend education of professionals around the possible effects of sexual assault on Service members
- Continue to support programs that address the negative outcomes experienced by Service member victims of sexual assault
- Encourage collaboration among military-based programs and community-based organizations to support Service members following a sexual assault
METHODS
- Administrative records of female Soldiers on Active Duty with a reported sexual assault during the study period (2004 to 2009) were included.
- The comparison group of female Soldiers was identified based on having a similar predicted risk of sexual assault prior to the reported assault.
- Administrative records were assessed for several negative outcomes in the twelve months following the reported sexual assault.
- The likelihood of victims experiencing negative outcomes was compared to the full female US Army population and the comparison group.

PARTICIPANTS
- Participants were 4,238 female, US Army Service members with an administrative record indicating a sexual assault victimization.
- A total of 21,190 female US Army Service members were used in the comparison group.
- Age, race/ethnicity, and rank of the victims and members of the comparison group were not reported.

LIMITATIONS
- The study only used data from administratively reported sexual assaults. The results may not generalize to Service members with unreported sexual assaults.
- Male Service members with records of sexual assault victimization were excluded; therefore, any conclusions may not generalize to male victims.
- Only the twelve months following each assault were used; therefore, the long-term consequences of sexual assault victimization were not assessed.

AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH
Future research could:
- Examine the outcomes of sexual assault victimization of male Service members
- Determine the long-term outcomes of sexual assault victimization on Service members
- Explore interventions that may reduce the negative outcomes following a sexual assault

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