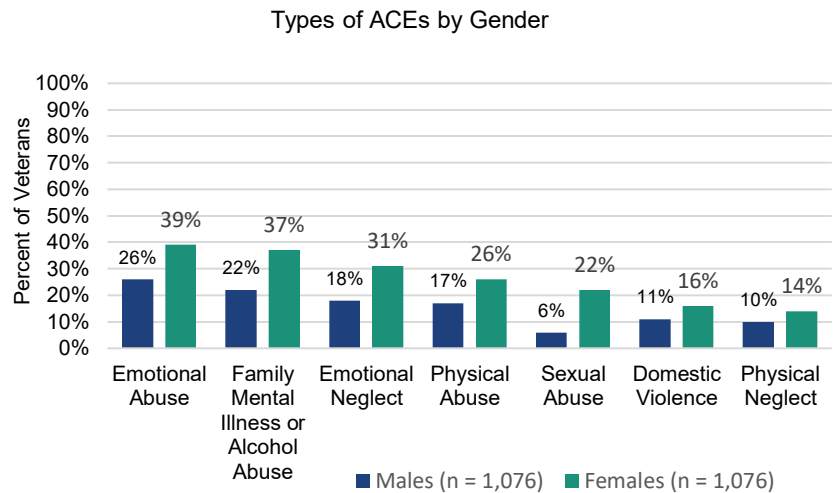


Veteran Outcomes When Exposed To Traumatic Experiences

Takeaway: Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs), Military Sexual Trauma (MST), and Military Combat Exposure (CE) often have deleterious impacts on the mental and physical well-being of Service members and veterans' transition success to civilian life. Traumatic exposure screening during and after military service is imperative for prevention and treatment.

Adverse Childhood Experiences

Seven childhood experiences are known traumatic events that have been linked to adults experiencing increased risks for health problems, mental illness, substance abuse, suicide, criminal activity, unsafe sex practices, and reduced life expectancy. A dose-response exists, which means greater exposure to each trauma increases the likelihood of negative outcomes. A higher prevalence of ACEs exists in veteran than in civilian populations. Female veterans in The Veterans Metrics Initiative (TVMI) and the Veterans Engaging in Transition Studies (VETS) datasets reported experiencing greater ACEs than their male veteran peers and female civilian counterparts. Emotional abuse was most frequently reported by both genders, which includes control and isolation, humiliation and criticism, manipulation and gaslighting, intense jealousy and possessiveness, and threats and intimidation. This abuse erodes an individual's self-worth, creates his or her dependency on an abuser, and reduces his or her sense of safety.



MST

Of the surveyed veterans, **3% of the males and 41% of the females reported unwanted sexual attention**, and **1% of the males and 17% of the females reported unwanted sexual contact**. MST is underreported within the Department of Defense by Service members due to fear of negative career impacts, possible retaliation, and further traumatization. When MST occurs in combination with other risk factors, like ACEs and CE, veterans generally experience poor civilian transition and negative outcomes in the well-being domains of vocation, finances, and mental and physical health.

MST's Impact on Males

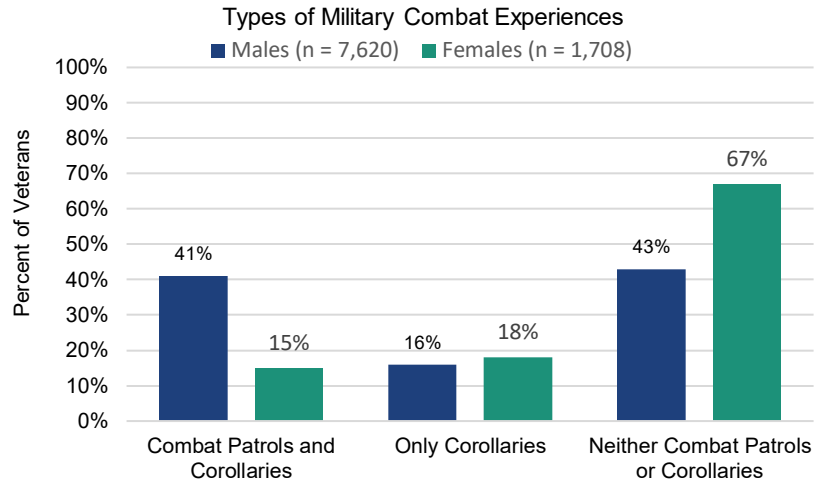
- 4x more likely at Wave 1 and 11.7x at Wave 5 to have a problematic financial status
- 8x more likely at Wave 1 and 3.4x more likely at Wave 5 to report probable depressive symptoms; 6.9x more likely at Wave 1 and 5x more likely at Wave 5 to report probable anxiety symptoms; 14x more likely at Waves 1 and 5 to report probable post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) symptoms
- 10.5x more likely at Wave 1 and 11x more likely at Wave 5 to report social isolation
- 8.6x more likely at Wave 1 to report suicidal thinking

MST's Impact on Females

- 47% less likely at Wave 1 to work full time
- 94% more likely at Wave 5 to have a problematic financial status
- 2x more likely at Wave 1 to report probable depressive symptoms; 73% more likely at Wave 1 to report probable anxiety symptoms (2 x more likely at Wave 5); 3.5x more likely at Wave 1 to report probable PTSD symptoms
- 2.8x more likely at Wave 1 to report social isolation

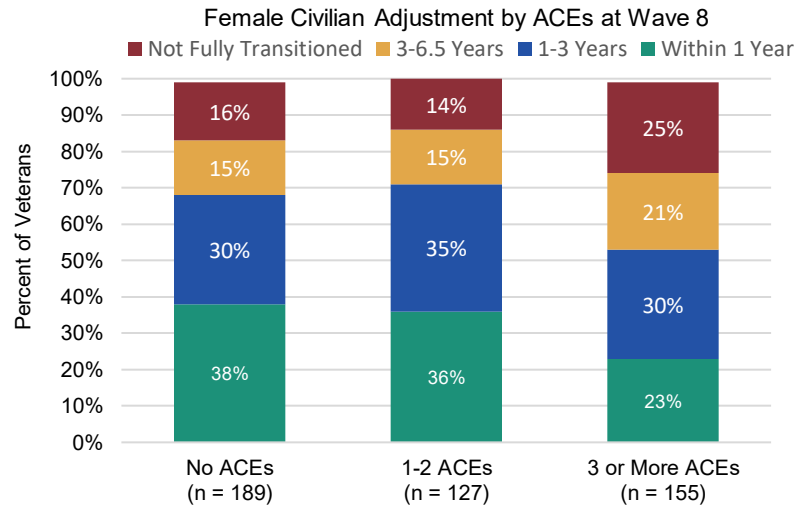
Note. The comparison groups are same-sex veterans who did not report experiencing MST.

Combat patrols include firing at enemy combatants and encountering dangerous impediments (e.g., land mines, roadside bombs). Corollaries of combat refer to consequences that result from warfare, such as witnessing a fellow unit member, an ally, or civilians being wounded or disfigured. Both types of exposures can result in psychological trauma and moral injuries. Among the surveyed veterans, males were almost 3x more likely to be exposed to combat and corollaries than females. Veterans in the TVMI and VETS datasets who experienced combat patrols were more likely to have suicidal thoughts: **9% of the surveyed female veterans and 8% of the male veterans had suicidal ideation at Wave 1. Of these veterans, males, who experienced combat patrols, were 77% more likely to experience suicidal thoughts (n = 7,763), and females, who experienced combat patrols, were 2.3x more likely to experience suicidal thoughts (n = 1,739).**



Impact of Traumatic Experiences on Veteran’s Mental Well-Being and Civilian Adjustment

Veterans’ transitions from military-to-civilian life can be complicated by prior traumatic exposures. For example, at 6.5-years post-separation, female veterans in the VETS dataset who reported experiencing three or more ACEs (n = 155) were more likely to not be fully transitioned than those females who reported experiencing less ACEs (see chart on the right). As another example, 66% of male veterans who reported experiencing three or more ACEs and MST (n = 32) at Wave 6 had problematic mental health. Male veterans who reported experiencing three or more ACEs (n = 3,628) were 4.1x more likely to encounter suicidal thinking in Wave 6. Female veterans who reported experiencing three or more ACEs and MST were 2.5x more likely to encounter suicidal thinking in Wave 6, while female veterans who reported experiencing MST and CE (n = 986) were 2.4x more likely to report suicidal thinking in Wave 6.



Study Summary

The Veterans Metrics Initiative: Linking Program Components to Post-Military Well-Being (TVMI) collected six waves (i.e., 3, 9, 15, 21, 27, and 33 months) of well-being and program utilization data from almost 10,000 post-9/11 veterans who had separated from military service in 2016. Additional waves (i.e., 51 and 78 months) of data were collected independently by the Clearinghouse for Military Family Readiness at Penn State through the Veterans Engaging in Transition Studies (VETS), which is part of the VETERANetwork. Veterans from TVMI voluntarily chose to participate in VETS (n = 3,514).

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