

## Product 10--Booklet:

### Coping with Military Sexual Trauma for Veterans (44 pgs)

## ***Coping with Military Sexual Trauma:***

### ***A resource guide for veterans, their loved ones and professionals who work with victims***

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*This booklet was written specifically for women and men veterans who were victims of any type of sexual trauma while on active duty. This is also a good resource for family members, friends and helping professionals to learn more about military sexual trauma and how to support veterans through their healing and recovery. In addition, the booklet provides an overview of the new Department of Defense policies on sexual assault prevention and response (DoD SAPR) as well as other valuable information on victims' concerns, reporting barriers, medical issues, family impact, the recovery process and veterans' resources.*

*This booklet is meant to provide a solid foundation of information to fill some gaps for military victims at a time when information is needed, but hard to find or difficult to remember. This booklet can serve as a quick-reference guide to come back to weeks or months later in the process as a helpful resource.. It is not intended to be a substitute for medical, psychological or legal advice, but to offer general information about military sexual trauma and some of the resources available to veterans. Professional consultation should be sought for specific medical, psychological or legal advice.*

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## *Excerpts from the booklets*

*“My whole life I have wanted to be in the military.”*

*“I was proud to serve my country.”*

*“I wanted to carry on the family tradition, so I enlisted.”*

*“I loved the military...It was my life.”*

### ***Some important things you should know***

Chances are, you are reading this because you or someone you care about was the victim of a sexual assault or sexual harassment while serving in the military. This booklet was written specifically for women and men who were victims of any type of sexual trauma on active duty. This is also a good resource for family members, friends and helping professionals to learn more about military sexual trauma and how to support you through this difficult time. To begin, let's start with a few important facts you should know about sexual assault and harassment.

#### **Many different people are affected by sexual assault and harassment.**

Victims include women and men, young and old, enlisted and officers, heterosexuals and homosexuals as well as persons from all racial and ethnic backgrounds. Sexual assault or harassment can happen to anyone--no matter what their background or situation. Persons in new situations can be at a greater risk for sexual assault due to the power differences and the potential for abuse of power (and rank).

#### **Sexual assaults occur in different types of situations. No matter what—it is never the victim's fault that the assault happened--never.**

For example, you may decide to leave your window open on a summer night, go for a walk alone, get drunk at a party, go home with someone you just met, or say no to your date or your spouse about sex. None of these actions or decisions gives anyone the right to take advantage of you. However, many rape victims do blame themselves for what happened. It is important to remember, just like any other crime, the offender is responsible AND to blame. You did not cause this to happen by anything you did or said.

#### **Everyone deserves support. You do not have to deal with this alone.**

There are many resources and people who want to help. It is important to find the resource that is best for you. This booklet gives you some general information about the medical, emotional and policy issues. It can be useful if you were recently assaulted on active duty or if it occurred a long time ago. We hope this guide will answer some of your questions or address some of your concerns. However, since military and veteran services and state laws can be different, you might want to contact the local Veterans Affairs Office or VA Medical Center, or a civilian rape crisis program in your area if you need more specific information or support. Remember, there are many people available to try to assist you.

**Survivors of sexual assault and harassment should be treated with respect when trying to get help.** You have the right to be informed about your choices in medical care, the military and civilian justice systems, your legal rights, and counseling options. With this information, you will be able to make the decisions that are best for you. Remember, victims of crime are also entitled to specific rights under federal law (addressed in detail later in this booklet).

## *What is military sexual trauma (MST)?*

Military sexual trauma includes ANY type of sexual assault or sexual harassment which happens on active duty in a military setting. It can occur during peacetime, during war time and during training activities. In fact, some research has found that the occurrence of sexual assault and sexual harassment is higher during war time, possibly in part due to the increased stress associated with war.

## **Who can be affected?**

ANYONE serving in the military can be a victim of military sexual trauma. This includes women and men, officers and enlisted and persons from all races, backgrounds, religions and sexual orientations.

The offender could be someone of the opposite or the same gender as the victim. However, when someone sexually assaults another person of the same gender (e.g., a man rapes another man) it does NOT mean this was a homosexual act. In fact, both the victim and the offender might be heterosexual. Sexual assault is an act of power and control, it is NOT a method of expressing sexual desire or intimacy.

Similarly, sexual harassment is also about degrading, humiliating and controlling the victim—regardless of the victim's gender or sexual orientation. However, when someone is sexually assaulted or harassed because of their sexual orientation, race or religion, this is considered a hate crime and is also punishable by federal law.

In short, military sexual trauma are the terms now used by the Department of Veteran Affairs, the Department of Defense and other professionals to refer to any type of sexual assault or sexual harassment towards an active duty service member. Any type of military sexual trauma can have a negative effect on the victim, the unit and the mission.

*“We never talked about what was going on.  
It was an unspoken truth most of us tried to deny.”*  
--Victim of sexual abuse in the military

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