

## Preparing for the Emotional Concerns of Returning Veterans



Photo by CLC and BSU Student Jason Sather



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Minnesota  
STATE COLLEGES  
& UNIVERSITIES

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## Why Serve Veterans?



*Photo: MN National Guard*

## Who are our Veterans?

- The four military branches (Army, Navy, Marines and Air Force) have Active Duty and Reserve components.
- The Coast Guard, part of homeland security, also has an Active and a Reserve component.
- The Army and the Air Force have National Guard components.
- The National Guard units were formed from state militias and are under the control of State Governors with an Adjutant General acting as Commander.
- The National Guard can be activated by the President or Congress to serve as Active Duty Forces.

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## Military Demographics

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- Ethnic minorities make up 24% of the Air Force and 40% of the Army
- About 16% of the Active Duty Armed Forces members are women
- About 50% of military members are married – 11% married to another military member

(7)



## Types of Conflict Faced by Military Members

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- High intensity combat
- Low intensity combat
- Terrorist activities and guerilla warfare
- Friendly fire

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## Framework for providing services

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- Student development theory
- Culture shock
- Re-adjustment following combat duty
- Trauma adjustment



## Post deployment reactions

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- Initial adjustment
- Time 3-6 months out
- Longer than 6 months
- Returning from first, second, third or fourth deployment

## By the Numbers

- **Total Deployed (Federal Title 10) between 9-11-01 and 6-30-09 (Potentially eligible for Chapter 33—Post 9-11 GI Bill): 1.96 million**
- **Currently Deployed Worldwide: 260,208**
- **Each person impacts at least 60 other people**
- **79.8% of MN National Guard members (1/34 BCT) planned to enroll in college**

## Reliance of Guard/Reserve Forces for Deployments



Percent currently deployed by type of service (June '09)

	Active	Guard/Reserve
Mississippi	28%	72%
Minnesota	46%	54%
Texas	85%	15%
National Average	72%	28%

Source: [http://dva.state.wi.us/WebForms/Data\\_Factsheets/ResDistribution\\_Jun09.pdf](http://dva.state.wi.us/WebForms/Data_Factsheets/ResDistribution_Jun09.pdf)

**FORT LEWIS**  
Est. 1917

**I CORPS - AMERICA'S CORPS**  
Official Website

**Coming home  
to an active  
duty base**

**Soldier  
and Family  
Support  
Offices**

- Ft. Wood Housing
- Child & youth Services
- Civilian Personnel Advisory Center
- ARMY COMMUNITY SERVICE **ACS**  
Helping Soldiers to Succeed After War
- Education & Training
- Installation Chaplain's Office
- Religious Activities
- MWR (Morale, Welfare & Recreation) - ALL OF YOUR LIFE
- COMPASSION AND COURAGE
- American Red Cross
- USO



**Fort Minnesota**



Grand Portage National Monument

*Beyond the Yellow Ribbon*  
**Reintegration Partners**

**NATIONAL GUARD**  
ALWAYS READY ALWAYS THERE  
Transition Team

Minnesota Department of Human Services

**Faith**

**Minnesota**  
STATE COLLEGES  
& UNIVERSITIES

Minnesota Department of Education

positively Minnesota  
Department of Employment and Economic Development

Minnesota Association of County Veterans Service Offices

**Higher Education**

MINNESOTA DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS

### Stages Faced by Military Members, their Families and the Community

#### **Pre-Deployment**

- Getting Orders to Leave
- Separating from Significant Others (grief)
- Getting Your "Affairs in Order"

#### **Deployment**

- From "Citizen to Warrior"
- Training to Survive
- Using Training to Survive

#### **Returning Home**

- From "Warrior to Citizen"
- Rebuilding Relationships
- Reentering the World of Work/Education



## Returning Home

### *“Warrior to Soldier to Citizen”*

300 Hrs From Combat

**INSECURITY TO SECURITY**  
**DANGER TO SAFETY**  
**CHAOS TO ORDER**  
**LAWLESSNESS TO LAW**  
**DISCOMFORT TO COMFORT**  
**MISTRUST TO TRUST**  
**SURVIVAL TO COOPERATION**  
**‘ME’ TO ‘US’**



Photo: Sgt. Lynette Hoke, MN National Guard Public Affairs

## Returning Home: Family Members



- Control Issues
  - Household Management
  - Parenting
  - Budgeting
- Relationship Issues
  - Living with a “Stranger”
  - Inability to Work/Attend College
  - How does everyone “Fit In”
- “Self Worth” Issues
- Emotional/Physical Health Issues
  - Anger issues
  - Guilt
- Financial Issues

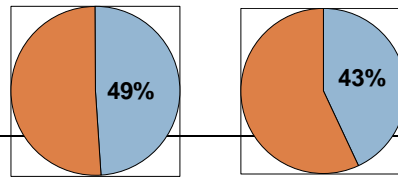
## Returning Home

- Difficulty adjusting to different roles and responsibilities
- May be an increase in conflict
  - self reports of veterans and military members indicate an increase in domestic violence incidents

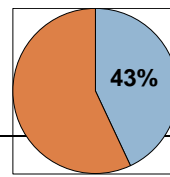


Photo: Sgt. Lynette Hoke, MN National Guard Public Affairs

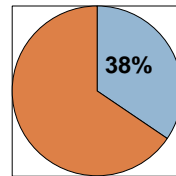
## Returning Home



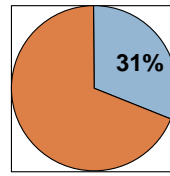
Army National Guard



Marine Reserves




Army



Marines


Percentage of combat veterans reporting symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder, depression or anxiety 90 to 120 days after returning from war.

Source: Dept of Defense Task Force on Mental Health report, June 2007



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# Questions

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- ## Veterans as College Students
- Estimated 30% of veterans drop out of college their first term.
  - 3% of freshman Veterans receive a 4 year college degree while 30 % of all college freshman receive a college degree. (3)
  - In 2000, Veteran white males graduated at a 20% rate while non-veteran white males graduated at about a 30% rate. (1)
  - In 2000, Veteran black males graduated at a 12% rate while non-veteran black males graduated at about a 13% rate. (1)

## Integrating Experience: Redefining Myself

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Overcome Alienation from Family and Society  
Move from Simplicity to Complexity  
Replace War with Another High  
Move Beyond War and Find Meaning in Life  
Come to Peace with Self, Spirituality and Others



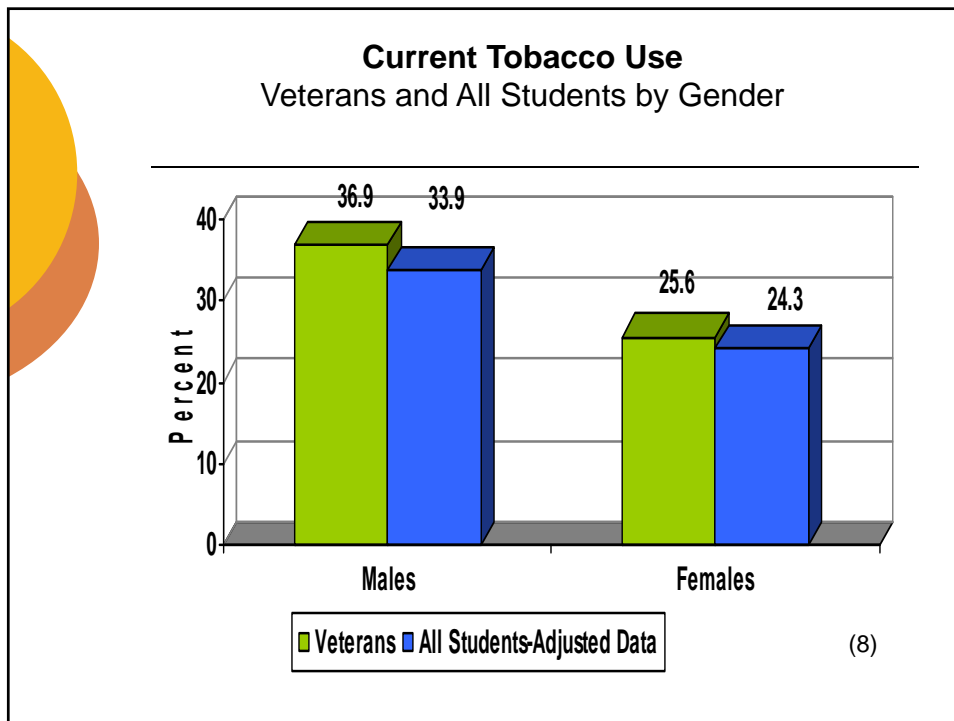
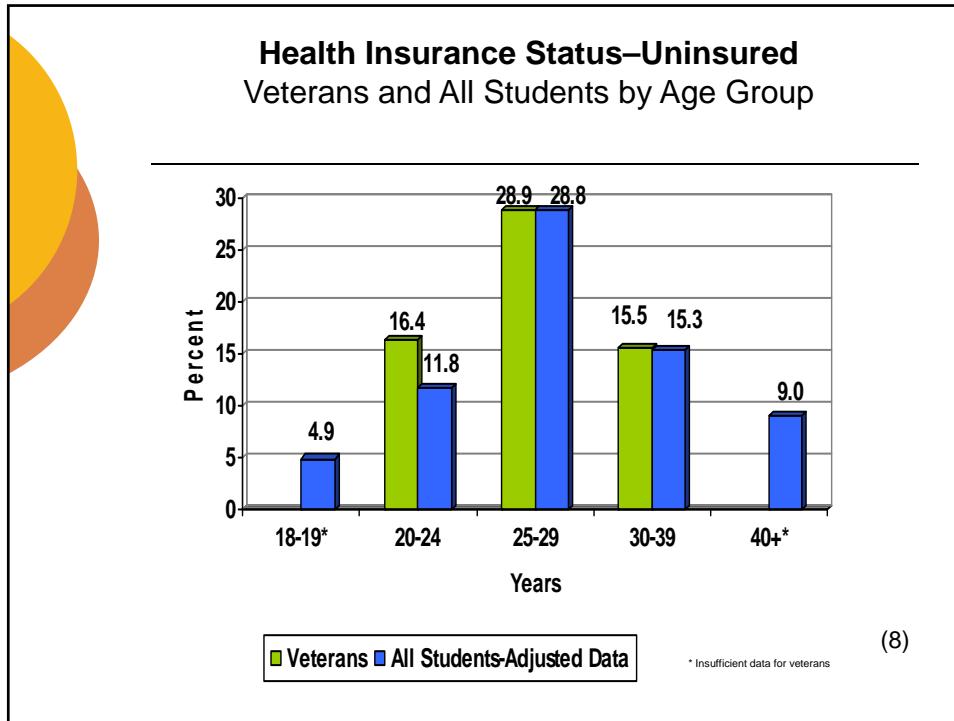
## Health and Health Related Behaviors: A Collaborative Study

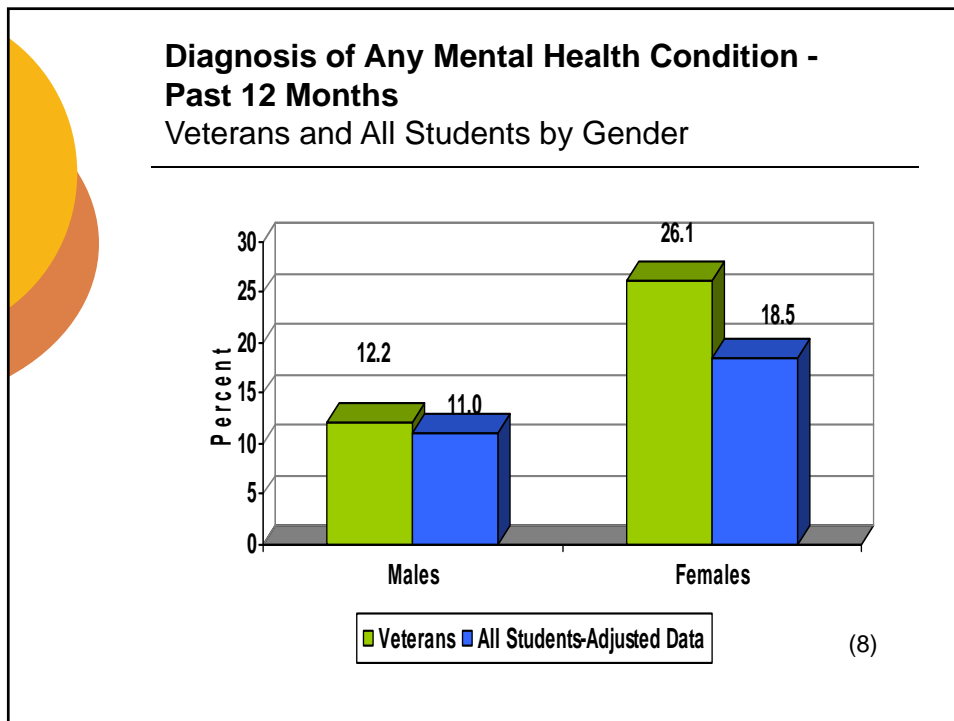
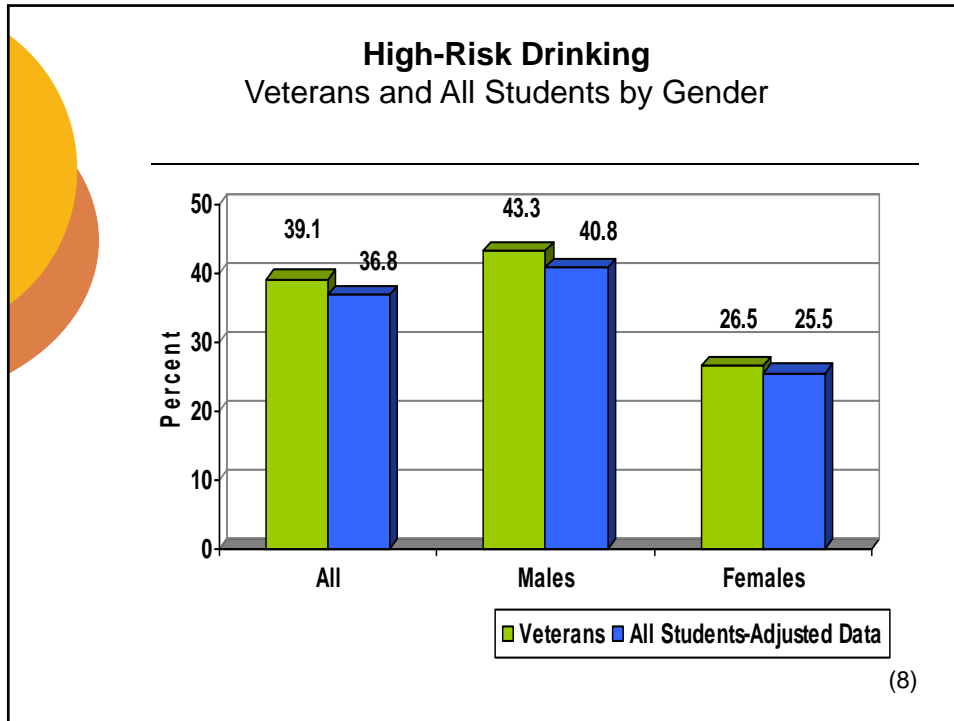
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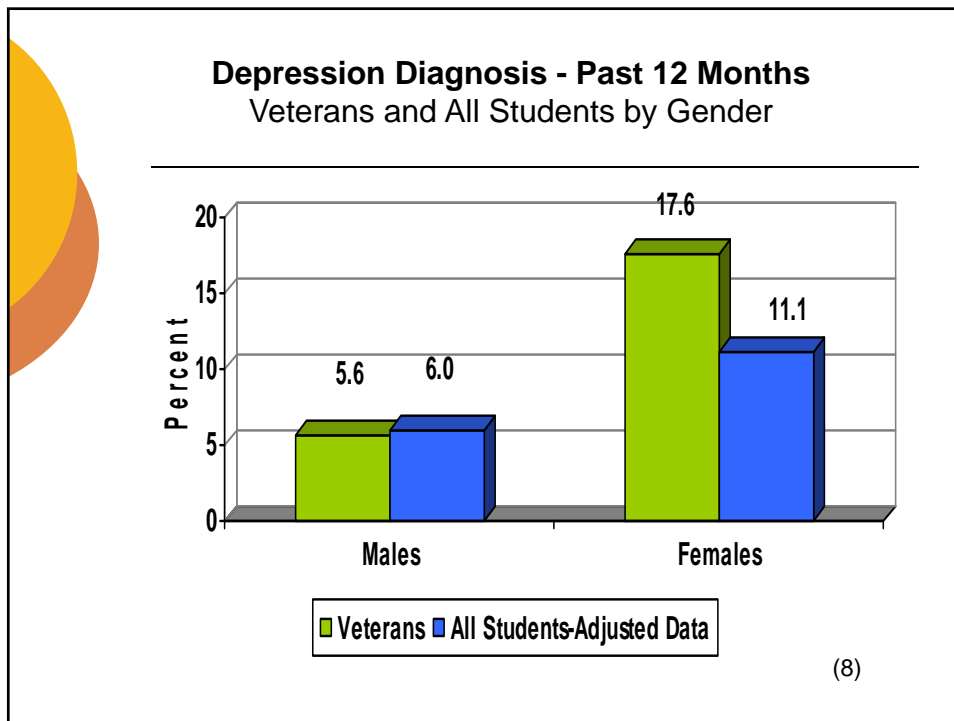
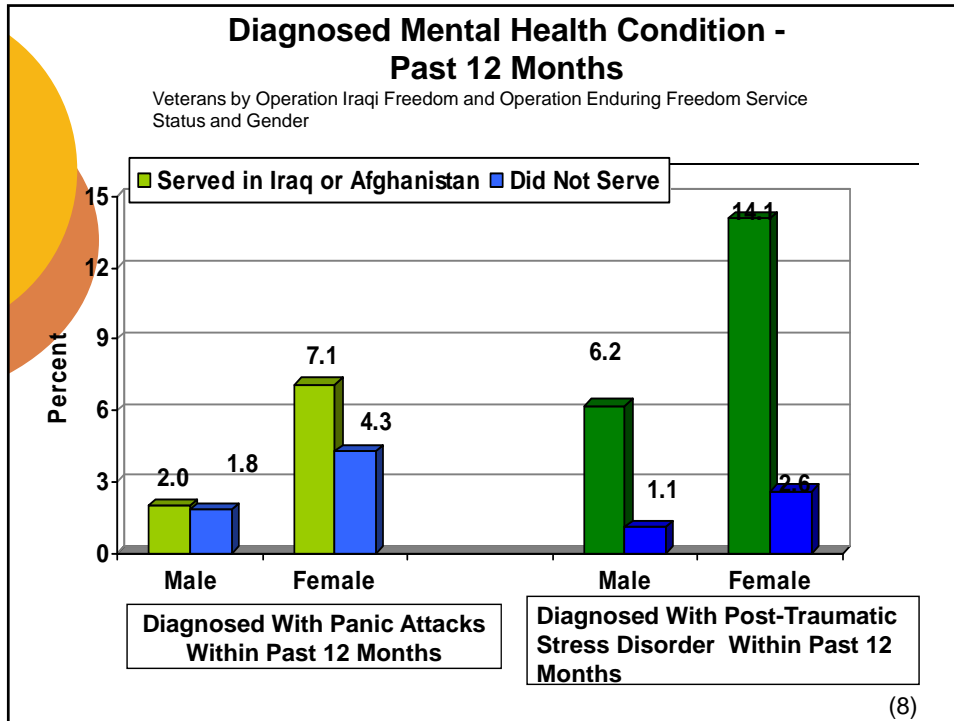
- 2008 College Student Health Survey
- 15 Minnesota colleges and universities
  - 11 State college campuses
  - 5 State universities
  - 2 Private colleges
  - 1 University of Minnesota campus
- 1901 veterans invited; 813 responded
  - 42.8% veteran response
  - 32.4% general population response
- <http://www.bhs.umn.edu/healthdata/results/index.htm>

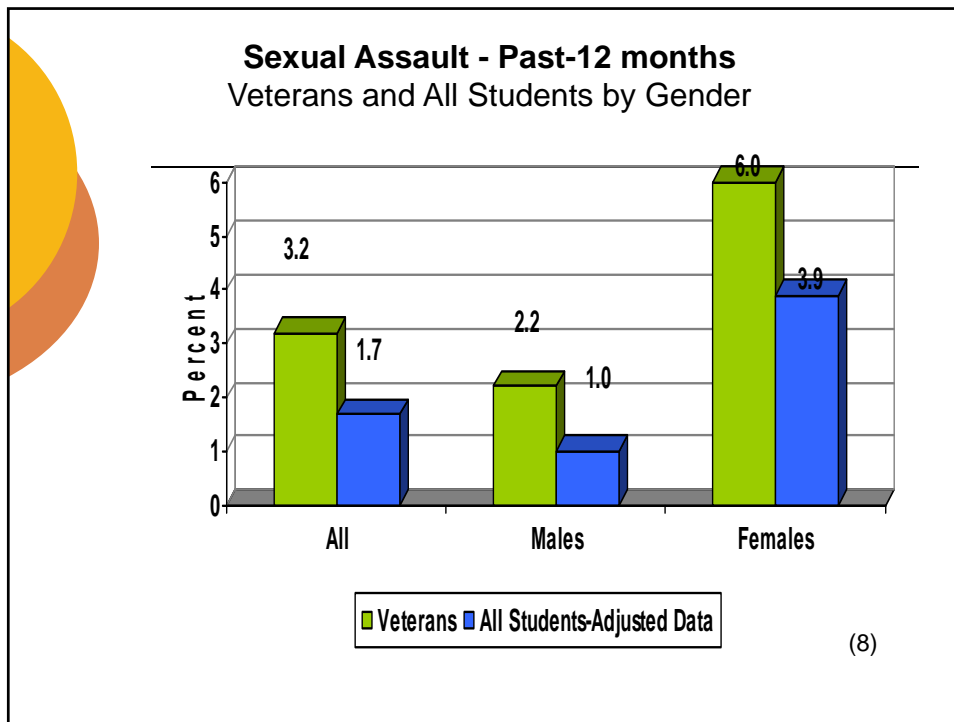
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Partial funding provided by a 2008 congressionally-directed grant award, P116Z080299





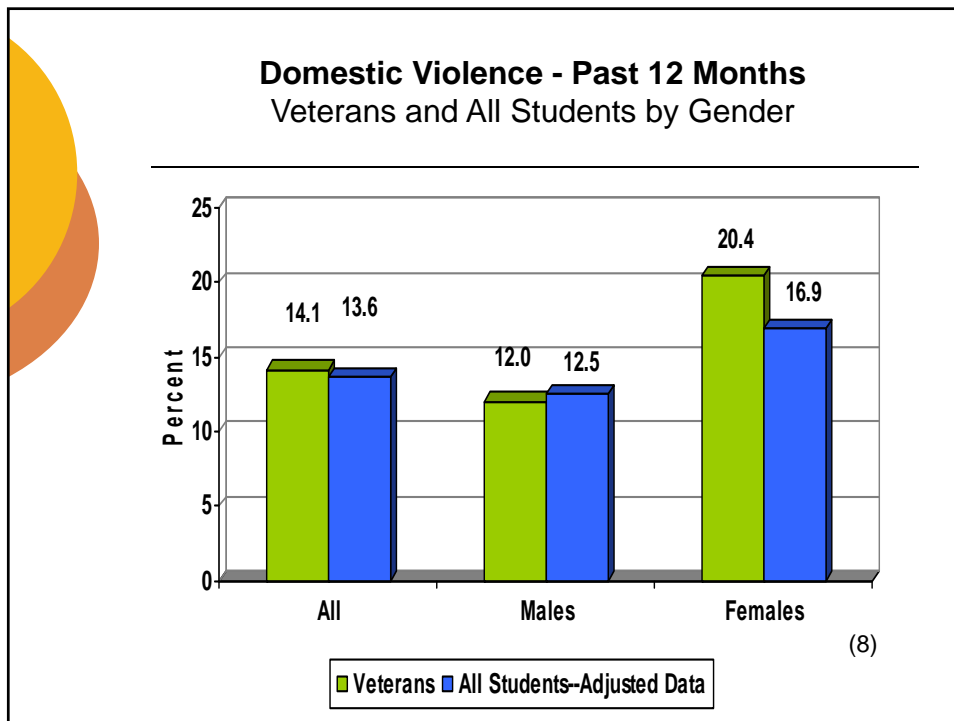
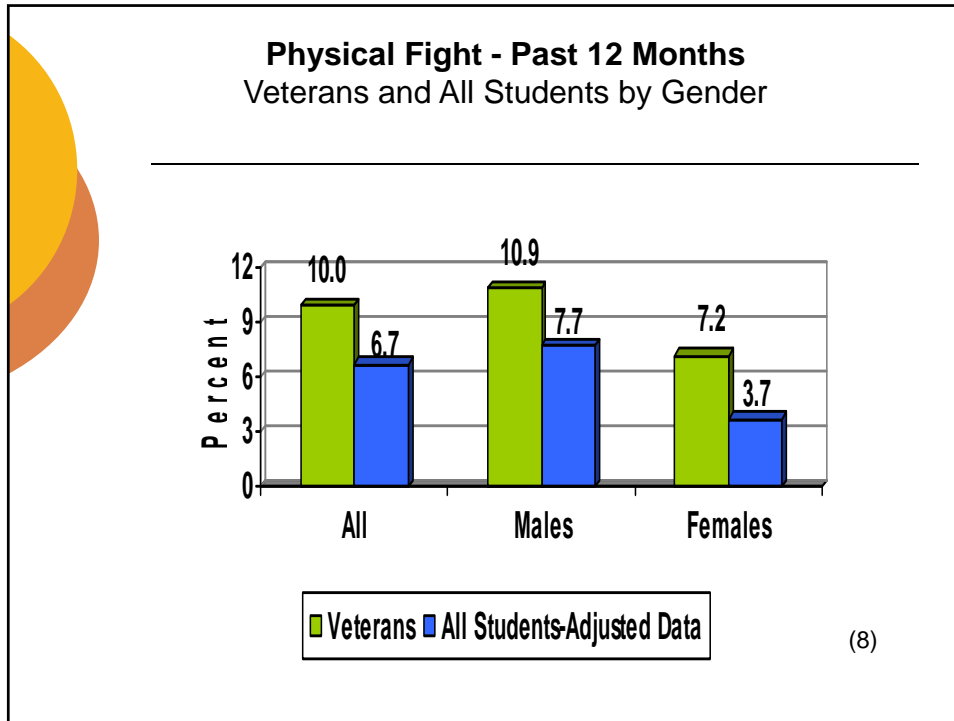




**Study of 230 women using VA medical center**

- 33% reported military sexual assaults.
- No differences between branches of the military
- MSA survivors have poorer health and quality of life
- MSA survivors have increased rates of depression, PTSD and alcohol abuse
- Unlike civilians, may not be able to leave their job/unit. May need to continue to interact with the perpetrator. Violation of trust in others and the system.
- Results are similar to other studies

(14)





## Factors Affecting Military Members Response to Serving in Combat

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- Personal characteristics
- Past experiences
- Cultural characteristics
- Coping ability related to stress and pain
- Pre-deployment training
- Military related experience
- Post-deployment environment
- Support from family and the community

(7)



## Changes

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- All life experience changes us, certainly the intensity of combat.
- Changes could be positive or negative, temporary or permanent, trivial or significant.
- Integrating combat experiences into a person's identity will take time and be stressful



## Post Deployment Screenings

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- 750 OIF/OEF veterans at a VA medical center:
- 338 received post deployment screening
  - 233 (69%) screened positive for mental health problems
  - Of those screened positive, 170 (73%) attended a mental health follow up visit

(13)



## Post Deployment Health Re-Assessment

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- 88,235 US OIF soldiers assessed by primary care provider
- Average of 6 months between assessments
- Combined 20% active, 42% reserve, required mental health treatment
- More mental distress reported on the PDHRA versus PDHA, referred at a higher rate as well
- Concerns about relationship problems increased the most
- PTSD, depression and overall mental health risk increased
- Alcohol concerns

(9)

## Mental Health Needs

Post-deployment	Depression	Anxiety	PTSD	Any	Overuse Alcohol	Reduce alcohol use
Iraq	14%	16%	18%	28%	24-35%	20-29%
Afghanistan	14%	17%	11%	24%	24%	18%
Pre-deployment	11%	15%	9%	20%	17%	12%

Army and Marines

(5)

## Post Traumatic Stress Disorder

1. Re-experiencing the trauma
2. Avoidance
3. Emotional numbing
4. Increased arousal



## Post Traumatic Stress Disorder

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- Reports increase over time post-deployment, symptom severity can increase, more functional disruptions
- Indications that early screening and interventions can be helpful
- Early and later post deployment screenings identify two distinct cohorts

(9)



## Necessary Skills for Counselors

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- Examine assumptions—for example about GI benefits, VA benefits,
- Advocate for student veterans or military members
- Explain university processes and help navigate them
- Refer to additional sources like support groups, Student Disability Services, Veterans Resource Center, VA medical center
- Ability to talk about trauma and anger
- Ability to educate veterans and their family members about traumatic stress reactions
- Ability to teach the skills necessary for dealing with
  - Anxiety
  - Anger
  - Trauma related guilt

(7)



## Barriers to Mental Health Care

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- Avoidance, low motivation, denial
- Geographic; family, work, or school obligations
- Being perceived as weak
- May affect career, fear being treated differently by leadership
- Fear of losing trust of members of unit
- “Don’t trust mental health professionals; mental health care doesn’t work” (13), (5), (6)



## Overcoming Barriers

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- Spouses may be more willing to seek care for their partner
  - Post deployment mental health screenings
  - Education about symptoms (ie: battlemind training)
  - Communication with a clinician
  - Messages that challenge stereotypes
  - Strong messages from leadership about importance of seeking help
  - Contact with someone who has sought help
    - Individual contact
    - Equal status
    - Environment is cooperative
- (4), (9)

## General Consideration for Care

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- Personal connection with returning veteran.
- Connect veterans with each other.
- Offer practical help with specific problems.
- Attend to the broad needs of the person.

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## General Consideration for Care

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- Provide training for the service member about post-traumatic stress reactions.
- Provide coping skills training.
- Utilize exposure therapy.
- Utilize cognitive restructuring therapies.
- Utilize family counseling.

(7)





## Veterans' unique concerns.

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- Classroom setting:
  - Sit next to door
  - Loud noises could be disturbing
  - Out of place items may cause anxiety
  - Hyper-vigilance



## Student Veterans & Faculty

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- Veterans need to be encouraged to make faculty aware of their situation
  - If active possibility of deployment, re-deployment, etc
  - If inactive appointments with VA, financial aid, etc.
- Meetings should be in faculty's office
  - Often they don't want to be identified as vets but as students



## Student Veterans & Faculty

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- Recognize the disparity between vets, both young and old, and other students especially the younger students
  - Vets appreciate the value of education
  - Vets respect and appreciate faculty who have classroom control, e.g., controlling unwanted distractions
  - Vets have little tolerance for activities which interfere with their educational experience



## Some Behavior Clues

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- Isolating behaviors
- Excessive irritability
- Inability to relate to peers & develop friendships
- Excessive absences
- Withdrawn behaviors
- Depressive behaviors & comments
- Hyper vigilance & anxiety
- Resentment
- Lack of focus
- Self-esteem & self-worth issues



## Distressed or Struggling Students

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- Use policies related to student conduct
- Campus veterans support person advocates for veteran
- Veterans centers used for debriefing and venting with peers



## Distressed or Struggling Students


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- Behavioral intervention teams (BIT)
- Team provides case review, consultation, follow up and assistance to faculty, staff and students
- Comprised of employees from Student Life and Development, Student Health Services, Counseling and Psychological Services, Student Disability Services, Women's Center, Residential Life, and Undergraduate Studies



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# Questions



## Veteran-Friendly Campuses

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### **Laws and Policies**

- In-state Tuition - Veterans and their Spouses
- Deployment Options – Hold Harmless
- Deferment of Tuition and Fees - Awaiting Benefits
- Space on Campus
- Applicable Transfer Credit – ACE Guidelines

## Campus Procedures and Attitudes

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- Strong Administrative Support and Leadership
- Adequate Funding
- Single Point of Responsibility
- Single Point of Information
- Safe Campus
- Timely and Accurate Advising
- Veterans Advisory Group
- Veterans Orientations
- Retention Services
- Reintegration Takes Time



## Identify a campus “veterans champion”

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- Employed by the campus
- Preferably a veteran
- Knowledge of ‘key players’ on campus
- Familiar with the ‘system’
- Serve as mentor, advisor and counselor
- Dedicated to veterans academic success



## Identify Campus Resources

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Identify people knowledgeable of veterans issues

- Financial Aid Office and the Registrar's Office
- Veterans take directions well - as long they are well defined.
- Veterans' Club - how to make contact
- Identify other faculty and/or staff who may be veterans – serve as mentors, advocates, etc.
- Health and counseling services
- Sports and recreation



## MN Department of Veterans Affairs Higher Education Veterans Programs

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Mission: Help Colleges Assist Veterans,  
Military Members and Their Families to

- Start College
- Stay in College
- Graduate from College

Higher Education Veterans Programs  
**MyMilitaryEducation.org**

MyMilitaryEducation.org is inclusive of all Minnesota Higher Education Institutions including Minnesota State Colleges and Universities, the University of Minnesota and Minnesota private colleges and universities.

Support Home | Answers | Ask a Question | Web Chat | Login

**MyMilitaryEducation.org**  
Search MyMilitaryEducation.org for Military Education Benefits, Getting Ready for College, Military Family Resources, MN Dept. of Veterans Affairs -HEVP Regional Coordinator contact information and much more.

**Higher Education Veterans Programs**  
Connecting veterans, military members and their families with educational benefits and resources to help them succeed in college.  
[For your state point of contact in your region, contact a Regional Coordinator.](#)

**Contact Us**  
**Online Support Services**  
Telephone Assistance  
7A to 9P M-F  
10A to 3:30P Sat-Sun  
Closed Holidays

To call Online Support dial:  
1.800.456.8519  
+1.651.556.0296 International  
TTY: 1.800.627.3529

**Ask a Question**  
**Live Chat**  
**Important Veterans Contacts**  
[Regional Coordinators Map](#)  
[County Veterans Service Officers](#)

**Need Immediate Crisis Help?**  
**Veterans Linkage Line**  
your link to support  
1-888-4LINKS  
1-888-456-8519

**Minnesota Online**

POWERED BY RIGHTNOW

## Simple Do's and Don'ts

### **DO**

- *Provide support and structure*
- *Recognize service and sacrifice*
- *Expect good performance, but remember it takes time to readjust*

### **DO NOT**

- *Assume the worst*
- *Label with PTSD*
- *Isolate or make them stand out from their peers*
- *Make them a spokesperson for the war or the military*

## Make Your Campus A Safe Landing Place



# THANK YOU

## Questions

[www.veterans.mnscu.edu](http://www.veterans.mnscu.edu)

[www.MyMilitaryEducation.org](http://www.MyMilitaryEducation.org)



Minnesota  
STATE COLLEGES  
& UNIVERSITIES

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