

VETERANS AND DOMESTIC VIOLENCE: the Traumatic Impact on Women

Presented by

Helga Luest, President & CEO, Witness Justice

AND

Trina Parker, Marine Corps Veteran and
Community Case Manager,
Department of Veterans Affairs

Introduction and Issue Perspective



What is Trauma?

The experience or witnessing of physical violence, abuse, neglect, terrorism, disaster or war – and how a survivor responds to that experience.

What is Trauma?

- Events and experiences that are shocking, terrifying, or overwhelming to the individual.
- Results in feelings of fear, horror and helplessness.
- Triggering events may include witnessing, sensory exposure and media exposure.

Veterans and PTSD

People who have PTSD often “re-experience” traumatic events through memories or dreams... [and] symptoms often come with strong feelings:

- GRIEF
- GUILT
- ANGER
- SHAME
- ISOLATION

Coping and Adapting

- Alcohol and Substance Abuse
- Emotional “Numbness” and Dissociation
- Aggression and Violence
- Obsessive Behavior

Coping and Adapting

- Eating Disorders
- Smoking
- Self Injury
- Sexual Promiscuity

Coping and Adapting

- Job Change
- Learned Dependency
- Isolation

Process of Trauma for Women

RETREAT	SELF-DESTRUCTIVE ACTION	DESTRUCTIVE ACTION
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Isolation• Dissociation• Depression• Anxiety	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Substance Abuse• Eating Disorders• Self Harm• Suicidal Actions	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Aggression• Violence• Rages

Stephanie Covington, 2010

Veterans Avoid Triggers

- Places
- People
- Certain Activities

... results in isolation and disconnection

Hypervigilance Causes...

- Anxiety
- “On Edge” Feelings
- Grouchy Attitudes
- Anger

Survivors are:

- Scared Easily
- Suddenly Startled

National Survey Results– Witness Justice 2008

- The majority of OIF/OEF veterans have witnessed or experienced violence while deployed (88%).
- Most understand the traumatic effect of combat violence: 66% indicated the experience of combat (in general) is traumatizing and 64% felt that some of their experiences during deployment were personally traumatizing.

National Survey Results – Witness Justice 2008

- Despite the need for support, 39% said they would be reluctant to use military or veteran-specific services.
- 60% said family relationships changed after deployment (i.e. breakdowns in communication (29%), frequent arguments and conflicts (24%), lack of sexual intimacy(21%)).

National Survey Results – Witness Justice 2008

- Nearly half experienced an increase in conflicts and arguments (verbal and/or physical) at home after reintegration.
- 55% found family life challenging or very challenging after war.
- Changes in relationships may result from the top three reported post-deployment emotions: mood swings (11%), hostility (10%) and/or emotional numbness and withdraw (10%).

How This Can Feed Into DV

- Pre-existing DV Will be Worse
- Emotional and Explosive Responses can Heighten the Tension
- Unintended Interpersonal Violence
- Self-blame and Diminished Esteem for Survivors
- Greater Vulnerability
- Stigma and Workplace Obstacles/Discrimination

Changes that Impact Safety at Home

- When alcohol is used for some relief to the memories of combat and war;
- When a soldier can no longer enjoy her children tackling and tickling her because she's not able to be completely alert to her surroundings and is too anxious to enjoy it;
- When the tapping on a veteran's shoulder results in being pinned to the wall...

Societal Expectations

- Women are not recognized as “real soldiers” or veterans.
- Husbands/partners do not understand (no patience for) avoidance of intimacy as response to trauma.
- Society sees women as nurturers, not as people needing support and nurturing.

Domestic Violence and Female Veterans

- Family Separation
- Traumatic Impact and Responses
- Domestic Violence
- Custody Implications

CNN Story: “Female veterans report more sexual, mental trauma” (3.19.2008)

Violence Against Women

“Any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women.”

- U.N. General Assembly (1993)

Children Respond by...

- Taking on Parent's Coping or Trauma Response Behavior/Symptom
- Taking on Parental Responsibilities
- Displaying Struggles in Behavior, Relationships and Performance (at school)
- Showing Aggression and Hyperactivity
- Becoming Depressed and Anxious
- Less Creative/Expressive (especially in adolescence)

It will help to...

- Be aware of responses to trauma and how this can impact children.
- Prevent secondary trauma to kids who see symptoms by finding good ways to cope and manage.
- Talk and be open!
- Don't get into details of events. Be age-sensitive.
- Find ways to connect that are comfortable.
- Engage support, if needed.

Introduction: Trina Parker

My name is Trina Parker. I'm a United States Marine Corps Veteran. I work for the VA as a Certified Peer Specialist and Community Case Manager in Vocational Services (CWT). But, I'm here today to talk to you about my own personal experience with trauma and how my life has changed since finding out about the services at the VA.



Similarities Between Military and Childhood Trauma

Military Trauma

- Physical torture
- Psychological Torture
- Sexual assault
- Isolation and Deprivation
- Starvation and Neglect
- Humiliation and Degradation

Early Childhood Trauma

- Physical abuse
- Emotional abuse
- Sexual abuse
- Confined to your room for extended periods of time in total silence
- Sent to your room without one or more meals
- Being reprimanded or slapped in public

Early Childhood Messages and How They “Make or Break” Our Future

- Some [psychiatrists](#) say that women do better in therapy because they are more comfortable talking through their emotions, but it typically takes years for them to seek help. In interviews, female veterans with post-traumatic stress said they did not always feel their problems were justified, or would be treated as valid by a military system that defines combat as an all-male activity.
- What happens to this “norm” of women being able to talk about their feelings; “It’s okay to cry”, with lessons to the contrary?
 - “Shut up or I’ll give you something to cry about”
 - “If you tell anyone, they’ll never believe you”
 - “Everyone will just think you came on to me”
- I feel that the messages I learned from my childhood trauma made it more difficult for me to feel I could talk about it when it happened as an adult.

Role DADT Played in My Not Reporting MST

- When I joined in 1982 they DID ask... “Have you ever engaged in homosexual activity or conduct?”
- I lived in fear daily that I would be “found out” and dishonorably discharged and/or sent to prison... I was told as much from the man that watched me fill out my application
- Didn’t form close friendships because behavior would be observed and I couldn’t risk being on their radar
- Feared that if I reported sexual harassment and MST I would be found out
- Women who refused men were labeled a “Bitch” or “Dyke” which in turn, would draw unwanted attention to myself

The Impact of Trauma Throughout My Life

- Guilt and Shame
- Overwhelming Sadness
- Major Abandonment Issues
- Disproportionate Anger
- String of unsuccessful relationships
- Memory and Time Loss as if pressing the “Pause” button on my life
- Alienation of friends and loved ones
- Inability to trust
- Immaturity in dealing with stress... due to being “stuck” at the age of the trauma
- Feelings of “Making up for Lost Time”
- Used alcohol as a Band-Aid for 20+ years to suppress pain and sadness

Relief in the Diagnosis

- ALCOHOLISM
 - Something you did to yourself
 - Blamed for not stopping
 - MENTAL HEALTH
 - PTSD, Depression, Anxiety, Social Phobia, MST
 - All things thought of as “not my fault”
-
- ☐ The STIGMA associated with Alcoholism made it so that I preferred to be labeled Mentally Ill.
 - ☐ Not until I could get out from under the weight of the guilt I felt, could I begin to work through the pain.
 - ☐ It was the greatest day of my life when I found out that I wasn't alone.

Women Are Resilient

- Talk more easily and openly about experiences
- Look to community for support
- More easily recognize unhealthy paths and take action accordingly

... Men are resilient too, but in different ways

Trauma Effects Over the Lifespan

- Adoption of Health Risk Behaviors as Coping Mechanisms
- Severe and Persistent Behavioral Health, Physical Health and Social Problems and Early Death
 - www.acestudy.org
- Events in Life can Unearth the Trauma and the Need to Cope

Addressing Trauma, Not Symptoms

A Shift in How We Address Survivors

From: “What is wrong with you?”

To: “What happened to you?”

LOOK AT US!



EQUITY IN HEALING!

- Men receive more gender-specific services and resources.
- More federal attention given to reacting to justice involvement than to prevention (and prevention with women isn't on the table!).
- Advocacy needed for gender-specific attention.

Trauma-Informed Environments Help Because They Honor...

- Safety
- Choice, Voice and Control
- Collaboration and Power Sharing
- Empowerment (building on individual's strengths, experiences, expertise, while enhancing new skill development)
- Trustworthiness, consistency and transparency
- Respect

Women at Arms

- Link to view the video:
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JXUQIZqThfk>
- To View the News Article:
[http://www.nytimes.com/2009/11/01/us/01trauma.html?
_r=1&WT.mc_id=yt_nyt433&WT.mc_ev=click](http://www.nytimes.com/2009/11/01/us/01trauma.html?_r=1&WT.mc_id=yt_nyt433&WT.mc_ev=click)

Presenter Contact Information:

Helga Luest, President & CEO, Witness Justice

p: (301) 846-9110 ħ e: hluest@witnessjustice.org

Trina Parker, Marine Corps Veteran and Community
Case Manager, U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs

p: (203) 506-4096 ħ e: TLP06516@gmail.com

[http://www.facebook.com/pages/Veterans-Empowerment-Team/
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