

# Treatment of PTSD in Women Veterans

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25 April 2012

[www.ptsd.va.gov](http://www.ptsd.va.gov)

# VA National Center for PTSD

Created by PL 98-528

- **Mission:** To promote the best clinical care and functional status of Veterans through research, education, and training related to the etiology, diagnosis, and treatment of PTSD and stress-related disorders
- 7 Divisions with unique areas of expertise, from neurobiology to dissemination and training
- [www.ptsd.va.gov](http://www.ptsd.va.gov)

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## TRAUMA AND PTSD

**Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)** is a mental health problem that can occur after someone goes through a traumatic event like war, assault, or disaster.

**Public SECTION** Veterans, the General Public, Family & Friends  
If you have gone through trauma or know someone who has, this section is for you.

**Professional SECTION** Researchers, Providers & Professional Helpers  
If you work with people who have experienced trauma or have PTSD, start here.

**PTSD 101**  
PTSD 101 is a web-based curriculum that offers courses related to PTSD and trauma.

**What's New**  
April is the Month of the Military Child. Learn more at [Children Coping with Deployment](#).

# PTSD Diagnostic Criteria

- Exposure to a traumatic event in which the person:
  - Experienced, witnessed, or was confronted by death or serious injury to self or others
- Severe and persistent symptoms
  - Re-experiencing, avoidance/numbing, & hyperarousal
  - Last >1 month
  - Cause clinically significant distress or impaired functioning

**PTSD is associated with increased likelihood of other psychiatric disorders, functional difficulties, reduced quality of life, and poor physical health**

# *Why focus on treating PTSD in Women Veterans?*

# The Number of Women Who Use VA Healthcare is Growing

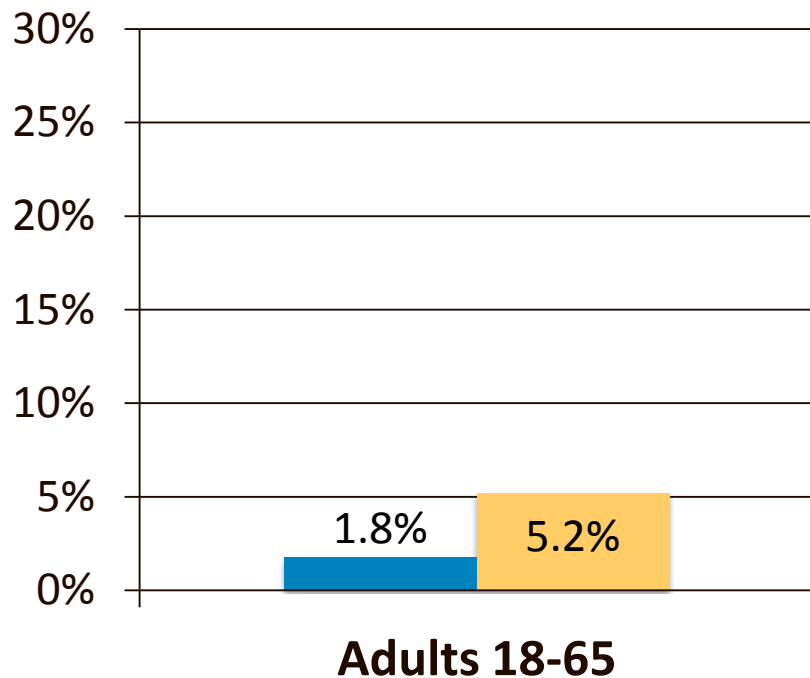
- In FY 2011, **6.1%** of the 5,372,354 Veterans who used VA healthcare were women (328,449 of total)
- **12.6%** of the 408,142 OIF/OEF/OND Veterans who used VA care were women (51,256 of total)



# PTSD is a Significant Concern for Women and Women Veterans

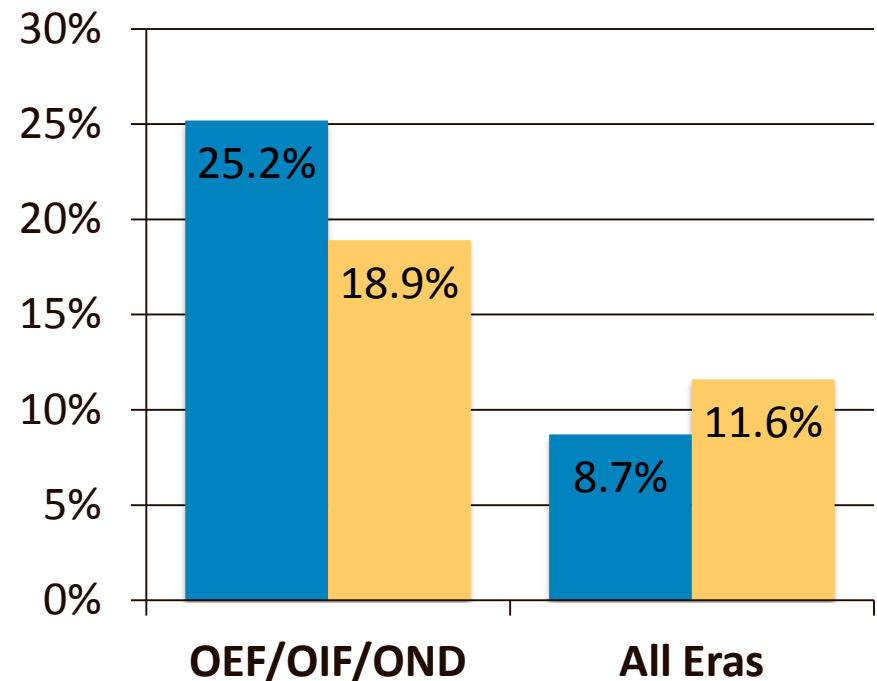
## 12-Month PTSD in US Adults

■ Men ■ Women



## FY 2011 PTSD in VA Patients

■ Men ■ Women



# Context for the Study in 2000

- Gap between evidence and practice
  - Best evidence for cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT), but most VA therapists were not trained in CBT and used other techniques
- Chose to study Prolonged Exposure, despite concerns that:
  - VA patients could not tolerate exposure
  - VA therapists could not deliver exposure
- No prior randomized clinical trials of PTSD treatment in Women Veterans
  - CSP #494: 1<sup>st</sup> VA Cooperative Study focused exclusively on women

# Key Information About Study Participants

- 284 women: 277 Veterans and 7 Army Soldiers
- Average age was mid-40s (range = 22 to 78)
- Almost half were ethnic or racial minorities
- 4 out of 5 had at least one other current psychiatric disorder
- Exposure to multiple types of trauma was common
  - 9 out of 10 had experienced sexual trauma
  - Almost 25% had experienced combat

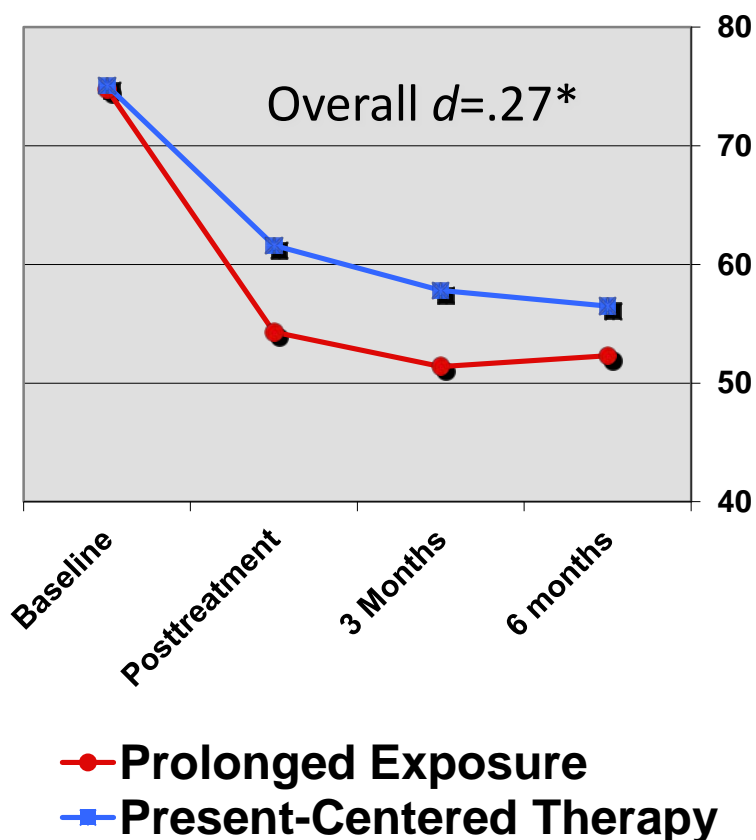


# Key Information About Study Therapists and Training

- 54 female therapists
  - Mostly psychologists; some social workers, advanced practice nurses, and psychiatrists
  - Few were experts in exposure therapy or CBT
- Training consisted of initial face-to-face workshops followed by 1-2 practice cases
- All treatment sessions were videotaped for review by remote supervisors
  - Supervision provided by telephone during the study

# PTSD Improved More in Prolonged Exposure than in Comparison Treatment

## PTSD Symptom Severity



Women who received Prolonged Exposure were:

- 1.8 times as likely to no longer have PTSD
- 2.4 times as likely to experience complete remission

\* $p < .05$

# Implications for VA Healthcare

- **VA patients can benefit from Prolonged Exposure**
- VA therapists can be trained to deliver Prolonged Exposure

# VA is A Natural Translational Research Environment



# Rollout of Evidence-Based Psychotherapy for PTSD

- VHA is implementing rollouts of Prolonged Exposure therapy (PE) and Cognitive Processing Therapy (CPT) – two evidence-based treatments for PTSD
- PE and CPT are recommended in the 2010 VA/DoD Clinical Practice Guideline for PTSD at the highest level
  - Efficacy of these therapies confirmed by the Institute of Medicine (2008)
- VHA has provided training to over 4,400 VA mental health staff in the delivery of PE and/or CPT
- All medical centers currently provide PE or CPT, and almost all provide both therapies

# My Future Research

## We have effective treatments for PTSD, but:

- How do we promote the fullest recovery and restore quality of life?
- What works for which patients?
  - Currently planning VA Cooperative Study #591, a comparative effectiveness study to identify optimal strategies for individual patients