Recovery From Sexual Assault and Trauma in the Military: A Narrative Review of Validated and Non-Validated Measurements

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INTRODUCTION

- In 2024, the US Department of Defense documented 8,195 reports of military sexual trauma/assault by active-duty members, and in 2019, the Veterans Affairs indicated that 1 in 3 female and 1 in 50 male veterans disclosed a military sexual trauma (MST).
- Although resources have been allocated to support survivors, including specialized treatment options, there has been less emphasis on how **recovery** from MST/sexual assault is measured.
- Recovery can be viewed through multiple models, including a personal framework focusing on identity, self-growth, well-being, relationships, and meaning-making, as well as a clinical/medical framework focusing on symptom reduction and return to baseline functioning.

Aim: To examine how MST/sexual assault recovery in the military is measured and conceptualized.

METHOD

- A narrative review used a PICO (Population, Intervention, Comparison, Outcome) framework to identify relevant articles in three databases, including DTIC, PsycINFO, and PubMed.
- Articles discussing both validated and non-validated assessments of recovery from MST/sexual assault in service members and veterans were reviewed.

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RESULTS

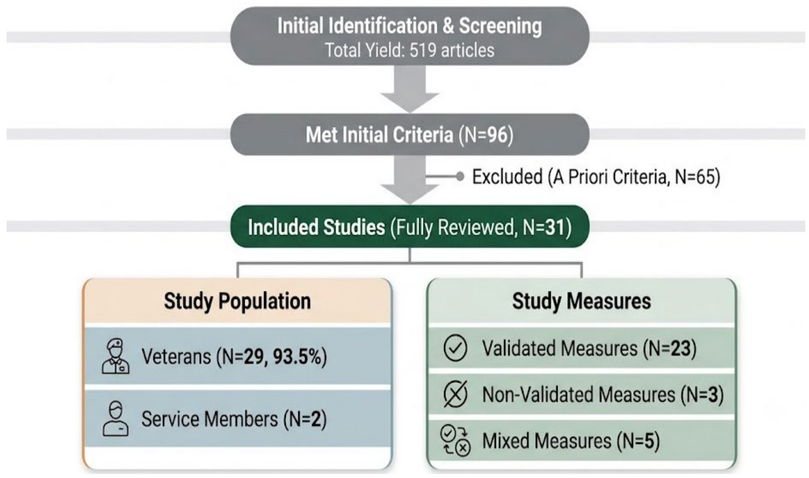

Figure 1. Narrative Review Process Results.

Category of Measurement	No. Articles	Types of Measurements
PTSD and Trauma-Related Measures	24/31	PCL-5, CAPS, Trauma Symptom Checklist, and Posttraumatic Diagnostic Scale
Cognition Measures	6/31	Posttraumatic Cognitions Inventory and Cognitive Fusion Questionnaire
Depression Measures	14/31	PHQ, Beck Depression Inventory, Quick Inventory of Depressive Symptomatology, and Center for Epidemiological Studies Depression Scale
Other Symptom Measures	17/31	Quality and Meaning of Life Assessments, Emotional Regulation Assessments, Suicide-Related Measures, GAD-7, Resilience and Psychological Flexibility, and "other" assessments.
Cross-Cutting Measures	4/31	Adapted Recovery Assessment Scale, Behavior and Symptom Identification Scale, Short Form-36 Health Survey, and the Veterans Health Administration Quality of Life Measure

Table 1. Validated Measures

RESULTS CONT.

Category of Measurement	No. Articles	How Recovery Was Assessed
Body Image	1/31	Self-perception of body image post-trauma
Interpersonal Functioning	2/31	Perceptions of improved relationship quality and better emotional regulation
Institutional Experiences	4/31	Self-reported satisfaction and overall experience with military-related resources and how they influence post-assault/trauma processing

Table 2. Non-Validated Measures.

Note. Twenty-three studies used validated measures (e.g., psychometrically evaluated assessments; Table 1). Three studies used non-validated measures (e.g., non-peer-reviewed measures; Table 2), and five included a mix of validated and non-validated measures

CONCLUSIONS

- Recovery from an MST/sexual assault is generally measured using symptom-based tools (e.g., PCL-5, PHQ-9)
- Effective measurement of MST/MSA recovery should:
  - Capture multiple domains of functioning,
  - Integrate health assessments, and
  - Include brief, open-ended questions that gather the survivor's perspective
- Future research should optimize cross-cutting measures to capture domains important to recovery after MST/sexual assault recovery that align with a personal model of recovery.

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