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## Prevalence of Military Sexual Trauma and Sexual Orientation Discrimination Among Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Military Personnel: a Descriptive Study

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### Abstract

Despite the repeal of Don't Ask, Don't Tell, Don't Pursue (DADT) and the update to the Transgender Policy, there remain concerns about the persistence of military sexual trauma (MST) and sexual orientation discrimination against lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) service members. A sample of 253 participants (89 women, 164 men) completed an Internet-based survey that assessed the prevalence of sexual orientation discrimination (e.g., offensive speech, physical or discriminatory behaviors) and MST (e.g., sexual harassment and sexual assault). The survey was conducted between April 2012 and October 2013. Women and men reported similar levels of sexual orientation discrimination in the military. Participants reported experiencing more threats and intimidation, vandalism, and physical assault outside of the military than inside the military ( $p < 0.05$ ). Although the prevalence of MST (both sexual harassment and sexual assault) in the military was high among both genders, women were more likely to report experiences of sexual harassment compared to men ( $p < 0.05$ ). Our findings demonstrate the prevalence of MST and sexual orientation discrimination among LGBT service members in the military and point to the need for strong accountability and oversight to protect sexual minority persons while they are serving their country.

### Compliance with Ethical Standards

**Ethical Approval** All procedures performed in studies involving human participants were in accordance with the ethical standards of the institutional and/or national research committee and with the 1964 Helsinki Declaration and its later amendments or comparable ethical standards.

**Informed Consent** Informed consent was obtained from all individual participants included in the study.

**Conflict of Interest** The authors declare that they have no conflicts of interest.

## Keywords

LGBT; Sexual orientation discrimination; MST; Sexual harassment; Sexual assault

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## Introduction

The Don't Ask, Don't Tell, Don't Pursue (DADT) policy, enacted in 1993, prohibited lesbian, gay, and bisexual (LGB) individuals from disclosing their sexual orientation while serving in the United States Armed Forces, with the idea that the Don't Pursue aspect of the policy would protect service members from discrimination (Estrada & Laurence, 2009; Moradi, 2006). Six years after this policy was enacted, in 1999, a "Don't Harass" directive was added in order to better prevent sexual orientation-based discrimination (Moradi, 2006). Sexual orientation discrimination can include overt physical acts of harassment, such as violence directed at LGB individuals, as well as covert events, such as the use of derogatory language and assuming individuals are heterosexual (Wilder & Wilder, 2012). Military sexual trauma (MST), which also includes overt physical acts, such as unwanted sexual contact (i.e., sexual assault), as well as covert events, such as stalking and sexually charged language (i.e., sexual harassment) (Stander & Thomsen, 2016), can also occur as a form of sexual orientation discrimination (Groves, 2013); however, MST tends to be researched separately. Even so, despite the addition of the Don't Harass directive, the DADT policy explicitly penalized homosexuality, thus indirectly contributing to an anti-LGB environment and increasing sexual orientation discrimination (Burks, 2011; Estrada & Laurence, 2009). Another distinct policy explicitly penalized transgender individuals; this policy banned transgender individuals from serving, would discharge any transgender individuals who disclosed their identity, and banned these individuals from receiving trans-specific medical care within military-related health services (Crosbie & Posard, 2016).

These two policies combined contributed to an anti-lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) environment throughout the military, thus increasing the likelihood of victimization based on both sexual and gender orientation (Burks, 2011). In addition to an anti-LGBT environment, fear of being discharged in accordance with these two policies complicated researchers' ability to assess LGBT service members' experiences, leading to a limited amount of research focused on this population. Although LGBT service members are now allowed to serve openly, with the repeal of the DADT policy in 2011 and an update to the Transgender Policy in 2016, research regarding LGBT service members' experiences, specifically with MST and sexual orientation discrimination, still remains limited. Even so, by analyzing general military research in addition to the LGBT military personnel-specific research that does exist, it is clear that these issues plague LGBT military personnel and, thus, are important issues to address.

MST is a prevalent problem throughout the military occurring at a much higher rate than the rate of sexual assault and harassment among civilians in the general population (Turchik & Wilson, 2010). Within the military, although rates of MST tend to be slightly higher among women ranging from 25 to 33% (Suris & Lind, 2008), the actual number of men and women experiencing MST are approximately the same when considering that there are about 20

times more men than women in the military (Department of Defense, 2016; Suris & Lind, 2008). Even so, a review of reported prevalence and incidence rates of men's MST across 29 studies over 30 years revealed that 1.1% of male service members reported MST over the course of their military careers, with a range of 0.03 to 12.4% (Hoyt, Rielage, & Williams, 2011). As noted by the Department of Defense (DoD) and other researchers, however, due to the reporting rules the military have in place in addition to the stigma associated with reporting (e.g., being viewed as weak) and possible retaliation from perpetrators, many victims choose not to report the crime, especially men (Department of Defense, 2016; Groves, 2013; Suris & Lind, 2008). Therefore, the actual occurrence of MST is likely higher than the number of victims reporting the crime.

Although exact overall prevalence rates are difficult to determine due to a lack of reporting and varying methodologies across studies (Suris & Lind, 2008; Wilson, 2016), a recent meta-analysis estimates a prevalence rate of 15.7% among military personnel and veterans reporting MST across studies (Wilson, 2016). In the DoD's most recent Annual Report on Sexual Assault in the Military (2016), although sexual assault and sexual harassment are analyzed separately, the prevalence rates of sexual assault are estimated at 4.3% of active duty women and 0.6% of active duty men, totaling about 14,900 service members overall. The prevalence rates of sexual harassment were 21.4% of women and 5.7% of men; given that these rates are higher than sexual assault, the total number of service members experiencing sexual harassment is higher than 14,900 (Department of Defense, 2016). Taken together, it is clear that MST, both sexual assault and sexual harassment, continues to persist within the military and affect thousands of military personnel per year.

Considering the traditionally anti-LGBT military environment, LGBT service members are likely at higher risk of experiencing MST when compared to non-LGBT service members (Blosnich, Bossarte, & Silenzio, 2012; Groves, 2013). Although statistics specifically focusing on this issue are limited, in a prospective cohort study of women veterans at two large Veterans Affairs (VA) facilities, lesbian and bisexual veterans were significantly more likely to have experienced MST than heterosexual women (31 vs. 13%,  $p < 0.001$ ) (Mattocks et al., 2013). Furthermore, in the DoD's most recent Sexual Assault Report (2016), sexual orientation was included as a demographic factor for the first time and their findings also support that LGBT service members are at increased risk. Specifically, LGBT service members (6.3% of women and 3.5% of men) were more likely to indicate experiencing sexual assault than non-LGBT service members (3.5% of women and 0.3% of men). The prevalence rates of sexual assault were estimated at 4.5% for LGBT service members compared to 0.8% for non-LGBT service members. Similarly, LGBT service members (27.5% of women and 19.9% of men) were more likely to indicate experiencing sexual harassment than non-LGBT service members (18.3% of women and 4.3% of men). The prevalence rates of sexual harassment are estimated at 22.8% for LGBT service members and 6.2% for non-LGBT service members. Overall, these findings support that LGBT service members are at higher risk of experiencing MST (both sexual assault and sexual harassment) than non-LGBT service members.

Sexual orientation discrimination is also a prevalent problem both outside of the military and within the military. Outside of the military, this problem is well-documented showing that

LGB civilians experience discrimination across their lifetime at higher rates than non-LGB civilians (Balsam, Rothblum, & Beauchaine, 2005; Burks, 2011). Although this issue is less well-documented within the military, the research that does exist indicates that sexual orientation discrimination frequently occurs (Moradi, 2006; National Defense Research Institute, 2010), with one study reporting that 37% of its participants had at least one experience (Estrada, Probst, Brown, & Graso, 2011). However, sexual orientation discrimination tends to be underreported for various reasons including that it tends to be viewed as a normal form of hazing (Bowling, Firestone, & Harris, 2005) and it is less recognizable when other types of victimization (e.g., MST) are utilized as a form of sexual orientation discrimination and, thus, only the more easily recognizable type of victimization is reported (Groves, 2013).

Although the DoD has conducted anti-harassment/discrimination trainings and has started to factor sexual and gender identity into their analyses, sexual orientation discrimination was not analyzed in their most recent report (2016). Even so, an indication that this kind of discrimination might be taking place can be found through the analysis of sex-based Military Equality Opportunity (MEO) violations, which are any form of sexual harassment or gender discrimination that meet the legal criteria required for an MEO violation (Department of Defense, 2016). This analysis indicated that LGBT service members experienced a significantly higher number of sex-based MEO violations (31.4% of women and 21.5% of men) compared to non-LGBT service members (23.6% of women and 5.3% of men). The estimated prevalence rates of sex-based MEO violations, in general, are 25.3% for LGBT service members and 7.8% for non-LGBT service members.

Overall, it is important to note that the inclusion of openly LGBT service members throughout the military and the occurrence of anti-harassment/discrimination trainings, although significant steps towards equality, do not automatically cease discrimination especially in the military environment which is predominantly characterized by hyper-masculinity, gender discrimination, and homophobia (Groves, 2013; Joshi, 2014). Based on the scarce amount of research specific to LGBT service members, it is clear that more research is needed in order to provide effective support to LGBT service members, improve sexual and gender discrimination prevention programs, and thus improve LGBT service member's well-being. The principal aim of the present study is to add to the limited amount of research focused on LGBT service members. Specifically, the present study will examine the prevalence of MST and sexual orientation discrimination among service members. Gender differences will be presented in an effort to provide supporting evidence to the notion that both men and women experience MST and sexual orientation discrimination and, thus, both must be considered when implementing policy changes, improving care, and updating prevention programs. Finally, experiences of sexual orientation discrimination inside and outside of the military will be analyzed in order to compare the social environments of the civilian population, which has not been affected by the DADT or Transgender Policy, and the military population, which has been affected. If the prevalence of these experiences remains higher inside of the military, this analysis may indicate that anti-MST and discrimination trainings need improvement.

## Methods

The data for this paper were drawn from *Serving Proud*, a study of LGBT service members in the USA. The research team used the Internet to recruit a non-probabilistic convenience sample of LGBT service members between April 2012 and October 2013. To be eligible, participants had to be at least 18 years of age and enlisted currently or within the past year in the United States Armed Forces (i.e., on active duty or in the reserves). All procedures were reviewed and approved by the City University of New York's Human Research Protection Program (HRPP).

## Participants and Procedures

Participants were recruited via private military and veteran listservs and closed Facebook groups for military partners, families, and LGBT service members, which we were given access to by a service member. Additionally, an online recruitment flyer with information about the study, along with a link to access the study overview, consent form, and survey, was posted to LGBT service member Facebook groups and other websites such as Out Armed Forces; Out Military - The Gay Military Network; American Veterans for Equal Rights, Inc.; Gay Military Dating; and Gay Military Singles. A link to the study overview and survey was also sent to potential participants on Facebook via direct messages. The Qualtrics online survey site was used to administer the survey for this study, which took approximately 45 min to complete.

As compensation, all participants were given an electronic gift card in the amount of \$10 for completing the survey and were entered in a drawing for an additional \$50 gift card, which was held each time 50 surveys were completed. In total, 729 surveys were started, 467 participants provided informed consent, and 321 participants were eligible to complete the survey. Of those, 253 completed the survey. The primary reason for ineligibility was not being enlisted currently or within the past year.

## Measures

**Participant Characteristics**—Participants were asked to report several demographic characteristics, including gender, age, race/ethnicity, sexual orientation, relationship status, educational background, length of active duty service, last time served on active duty, most recent position in the Armed Forces, and branch of service. With the exception of age and length of active duty service, which were assessed using a free-response format, demographic characteristics were assessed using standard predefined response options.

**Sexual Orientation Discrimination**—In order to examine the degree of discrimination based on perceived sexual orientation, the survey items were derived from the DoD's evaluation report on military environment with respect to the homosexual conduct policy (Office of the Inspector General, 2000). Participants completed eight items on the frequency of discrimination which they had experienced or witnessed because of perceived sexual orientation in the last 12 months both in the military and during their daily lives outside of the military. These items included offensive speech, offensive/hostile gestures, threats or intimidation, graffiti, vandalism, physical assault, limited or denied career opportunities, and

unfair discipline or punishment. Frequency of sexual orientation discrimination items was scored on a 5-point Likert scale response format ranging from 1 (*never*) to 5 (*very often*).

**Military Sexual Trauma and Reporting Behaviors**—The 2010 Workplace and Gender Relations Survey of Active Duty Members was utilized to measure MST among LGBT military personnel (Holland, Rabelo, & Cortina, 2016; Rock, Lipari, Cook, & Hale, 2010). Participants were asked to complete 19 items on the frequency of sexual harassment and sexual assault experienced within the past 12 months. Out of these 19 items, 2 items assessed sexual assault behaviors ranging from attempted rape to completed rape. All other items were further categorized into gender harassment, unwanted sexual attention, and coercion. Responses to each item were reported on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*never*) to 5 (*very often*). Reporting behaviors regarding these incidents were also assessed. Specifically, whether participants reported the situation to any installation/service/DoD individuals or organizations was answered by the participants using a dichotomized response (yes, no). Participants who did not report the incident selected any and all applicable reasons for why they chose not to report the incident, and these reasons were also analyzed.

### Data Analyses

We examined data on personal experiences or witnessing of sexual orientation discrimination in the past 12 months using independent samples *t*-tests to compare men's and women's experiences in the military, and we used paired samples *t*-tests to compare experiences in the military versus outside of the military. To determine whether or not group differences existed between men or women in terms of gender harassment, unwanted sexual advances, coercion, or sexual assault in the military, we analyzed data from the MST measures using a between-group design (men vs. women). Specifically, a chi-square test was performed to examine if significant differences existed between gender groups in terms of various MST experiences. We also examined the reporting behaviors of those who reported witnessing or experiencing MST and identified any gender differences in relation to these behaviors.

### Results

Table 1 reports gender differences in demographic characteristics. More than half of the sample was men (64.8%) and was predominantly White (67.6%). Although 15 participants were identified as transgender service members, they were categorized as men or women based on how they identified their gender. There were significantly more White men than women (72.6 vs. 58.4%). Women were significantly more likely to report currently being in a relationship (75.3%) than men (48.8%). Most men (90.2%) identified as gay, and 83.1% of women identified as lesbian, and this did not significantly differ across gender. Nearly half (51.0%) had a college or graduate degree, and this did not significantly differ by gender. Most of the participants (70.4%) were currently in active duty, and this did not significantly differ across gender. Half (54.2%) were identified as enlisted personnel; 30.0, 8.3, and 7.5% were identified as officer, reservist, and national guard member, respectively; and this did not significantly differ across gender. Similarly, 34.0% served in the army, 29.2% served in the air force, 21.7% served in the navy, 8.3% served in the marine corps, and 6.7% served in

the coast guard, and this did not significantly differ by gender. Gender was not significantly associated with age, which was 30 on average ( $SD = 7.8$ ). Men reported serving longer than women (89 vs. 83 months), and this did not significantly differ by gender.

Table 2 reports on gender differences on the degree of sexual orientation discrimination in the last 12 months in the military and outside of it. Independent samples  $t$ -tests were performed to compare differences for each item of discrimination in the military by gender, and paired samples  $t$ -tests were used to compare discrimination in the military versus outside of the military context in everyday life. We found no gender differences in terms of reporting sexual orientation discrimination in the military. Participants reported the same trend across items of sexual orientation discrimination inside versus outside of the military, though only three reached significance—participants reported experiencing more threats and intimidation, vandalism, and physical assault in their day-to-day lives outside of the military than inside the military ( $p < 0.05$ ).

Table 3 presents the data on MST—perceived sexual harassment and sexual assault experienced by LGBT military personnel in the past 12 months. Overall, a greater proportion of lesbian and bisexual women (83%) reported at least one incident of MST in the military compared to gay and bisexual men (74%,  $p < 0.05$ ); both men and women were more likely to experience gender harassment and unwanted sexual attention and less likely to experience coercion and sexual assault. Nearly half (8 out of 19 items) of the chi-square tests performed to compare the differences in women and men in different types of MST were statistically significant. A significantly greater proportion of women reported MST than men on most of the different experiences of gender harassment and unwanted sexual attention. Four out of seven items reflecting gender harassment were found to be significantly higher among women than men—66.3% of women reported that people of their gender had been referred to insulting or offensive terms compared with 44.5% of men ( $p < 0.01$ ), 61.8% of women said that they had been treated differently because of their gender compared with 22.6% of men ( $p < 0.001$ ), 52.8% of women reported that offensive sexist remarks were made compared with 23.2% of men ( $p < 0.001$ ), and 48.3% of women said that they had been put down because of their gender at least once in the past year compared with 9.8% of men ( $p < 0.001$ ). Similarly, a gender difference was particularly pronounced in items reflecting unwanted sexual attention—38.2% of women reported that unwanted attempts to establish romantic relations were made at least once in the past year compared with 15.2% of men ( $p < 0.001$ ), 29.2% of women said that they had been repeatedly asked for dates despite refusals during the past year compared with 13.4% of men ( $p < 0.01$ ), 23.6% of women reported that they had been touched in a way that was uncomfortable compared with 9.8% of men ( $p < 0.01$ ), and 21.3% of women said that they had been intentionally cornered in a sexual way compared with 9.8% of men ( $p < 0.05$ ). We lacked sufficient statistical power to assess for coercion and sexual assault differences by gender due to the substantially lower prevalence of these experiences, although trends did suggest that these experiences were reported by slightly greater proportions of women than men.

Finally, we examined whether participants reported any incidents of sexual harassment and whether this was significantly different by gender. Of the 195 participants who reported at least one experience of sexual harassment, we found that only 17.6% of women and 10.7%

of men reported these incidents, and these proportions did not differ significantly from one another. Out of those who responded to the question regarding their reasons for not reporting the incident ( $n = 169$ ), 67% thought it was not important enough to report, 59% took care of the problem themselves, and 38% felt uncomfortable making a report or did not think anything would be done. We found that more men compared to women thought it was not important enough to report (44 vs. 23%), took care of the problem themselves (39 vs. 20%), and felt uncomfortable making a report or did not think anything would be done (23 vs. 15%). However, these proportions were not found to be significantly different between the two groups.

## Discussion

We examined the prevalence of MST and sexual orientation discrimination reported by LGBT military personnel in the United States Armed Forces and assessed whether this was significantly greater for men versus women. There were no gender differences in the prevalence of sexual orientation discrimination reported inside the military. Across genders, participants were more likely to experience intimidation, vandalism, and physical assault outside of the military than inside the military. It is important to note that we included sexual orientation as a demographic variable, and with the inclusion of “outside the military,” our study offers a promising approach for future research on LGBT service members. However, it is important to acknowledge that the measure of sexual orientation discrimination confounds both witnessed and experienced events and behaviors within the military and outside of it. This distinction is important because estimates of the reported incidents of sexual orientation discrimination using this measure may not accurately capture actual experiences of sexual minority personnel especially outside the military workplace.

Prior studies have noted that sexual orientation discrimination is less well-documented within the military (Moradi, 2006; National Defense Research Institute, 2010) and tends to be underreported for various reasons including that it is less recognizable when other types of victimization such as MST are utilized as a form of sexual orientation discrimination (Groves, 2013). Consistent with a recent review (Goldbach & Castro, 2016), our findings suggest offensive speech (e.g., derogatory names or offensive remarks) about LGBT service members within the past year (before the survey) which was most commonly reported among both groups although there were no gender differences. However, a study evaluating the psychometric and measurement characteristics of a measure of sexual orientation discrimination noted that the measure might assess items involving verbal behaviors better than items involving physical or discriminatory behaviors (Estrada et al., 2011).

Our findings suggest that a much larger problem remains to be MST among both groups with women experiencing significantly higher proportions of sexual harassment than men, ranging from sexual remarks to unwanted attempts to establish relationships to touching, as well as other conduct of a sexual nature. There were significant gender differences in many forms of gender harassment and unwanted sexual attention, with more lesbian and bisexual women experiencing these forms of harassment than gay and bisexual men (also worth noting is that gender harassment was experienced by the majority of women, as were certain forms of unwanted sexual attention). These findings were consistent with those reported by



other studies (Bastian, Lancaster, & Reist, 1995; Mattocks et al., 2013; Rosen & Martin, 1998). In the study conducted by the Department of Military Psychiatry (Rosen & Martin, 1998), 42% of women reported that they had been put down because of their gender at least once in the past year compared with 48.3% of women in our study, 49% of women said that they were treated differently because of their gender compared with 61.8% of women in our study, and 57% of women reported being subjected to offensive sexist remarks compared with 52.8% of women in our study. Similarly, in the study conducted by the Department of Military Psychiatry (Rosen & Martin, 1998), 25% of women reported that unwanted attempts to establish romantic relations were being made at least once in the past year compared with 38.2% of women in our study, 27% of women said that they were repeatedly asked for dates despite refusals compared with 29.2% of women in our study, and 25% of women reported that they were touched in a way that was uncomfortable compared with 23.6% of women in our study.

Similarities were also found for specific categories of gender harassment and unwanted sexual attention among men. In the study conducted by the Department of Military Psychiatry (Rosen & Martin, 1998), 10% of men reported that they had been put down because of their gender at least once in the past year compared with 9.8% of men in our study, 18% of men said that they were treated differently because of their gender compared with 22.6% of men in our study, and 39% of men reported being subjected to offensive sexist remarks compared with 36% of men in our study. Similarly, in the study conducted by the Department of Military Psychiatry (Rosen & Martin, 1998), 11% of men reported that unwanted attempts to establish romantic relations were being made at least once in the past year compared with 15.2% of men in our study, 10% of men said that they were repeatedly asked for dates despite refusals compared with 13.4% of men in our study, and 10% of men reported that they were touched in a way that was uncomfortable compared with 9.8% of men in our study. By conducting an observational study, the present study provides insight into the frequency of this type of sexual harassment and sexual assault and the prevalence of MST. Our use of both sexual orientation discrimination and MST measures provides a rigorous assessment of both issues in the military.

### Limitations

The strengths of our study should be understood in light of its limitations. First, the data was collected nearly 4–5 years ago, and the military culture and training could have changed. Second, the methodology used is a limitation. The cross-sectional design does not limit statements about causality. The fact that this was an observational design is what limits statements about causality. *t*-tests and chi-square tests provided us no opportunity to adjust for the demographics, type of service, length of service, etc. As a result, we are unable to make any causal inferences between the DADT policy and experiences of sexual orientation discrimination and MST among LGBT service members when compared across men and women. Third, no discussion of differences between lesbian, gay, and bisexual is a limitation given evidence that there are differences in these groups. Fourth, many of our participants may not have experienced much harassment but may simply have witnessed it—because we did not differentiate. We do not know whether they witnessed or experienced more violence outside of the military, whereas within the military, they are thinking about their own

experiences. We just know that they may have had the opportunity to witness violence outside of the military.

Fifth, participants in this study were recruited using digital advertising and listservs, impacting the generalizability of the findings to the population. By using probability sampling especially time-space sampling which is increasingly used for hard-to-reach populations including lesbian, gay, and bisexual individuals (Parsons, Grov, & Kelly, 2008) and HIV behavioral surveillance of men who have sex with men (MacKellar et al., 2007), external validity can be increased. Time-space sampling is an effective strategy to recruit members of a target population at specific locations and times (Parsons et al., 2008). With the use of time-space sampling method, future researchers can conduct recruitment of LGB service members at different installations and bases in the United States Armed Forces, enhancing the generalizability of the findings to the population.

Finally, being unable to analyze transgender service members separately is a limitation of this study. The transgender population was not protected in the repeal of the DADT policy (Kerrigan, 2011; U.S. Merit Systems Protection Board, 1988; Yerke & Mitchell, 2013). However, the Transgender Policy of the military has changed since this data were collected. Although this population represents a minority within a minority (U.S. Merit Systems Protection Board, 1988), our findings were focused on gender comparisons between men and women due to a small sample of transgender individuals. We had 15 participants who identified as transgender in a sample of 253. Unfortunately, we did not have enough data to analyze them separately and transgender service members were categorized as men or women. All of them were identified as lesbian, gay, or bisexual. These data suggest that there are many transgender individuals in the military. Research is needed to analyze their data, and more policy is needed to address gender minority priorities.

Despite such limitations, one of the strengths of this study is that we utilized established measures of sexual orientation discrimination and MST, thereby increasing the internal validity of our study. In order to overcome some of the aforementioned limitations, conducting a longitudinal prospective cohort study and stratifying the sample by gender identify and sexual orientation could be one approach. Future research should also consider implementation of respondent-driven sampling (RDS) by seeding in each branch of the military for sample representativeness.

## Conclusions

Despite the repeal of DADT and the update to the Transgender Policy, empirical research focused on LGBT service members remains limited. Although at the time of this study the Transgender Policy had not yet been updated, it is important to take advantage of the recent policy updates and begin bridging the gaps in the research in order to help improve LGBT service member's well-being. Future research on sexual orientation discrimination and MST (both sexual harassment and sexual assault) should focus on the impact for men, women, and trans-gender individuals in the military. The most daunting challenge is the need for cultural change among researchers and healthcare providers in the military. Because of the longitudinal influences such as stigma and discrimination, healthcare providers have to overcome challenges in obtaining honest communication from LGBT service members.

Since service members can openly disclose their sexual orientation, researchers need to focus on whether there is a trust between LGB service members and their healthcare provider. Given the needs of transgender service members and the unique experiences this community faces in their interactions with healthcare providers, more research is imperative.

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Table 1

## Demographic characteristics (N = 253)

	Total		Female		Male		Test statistic
	N = 253	n = 89	n = 164	n	n	n	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	
Race/ethnicity							
Black	13	5.1	7	7.9	6	3.7	$\chi^2(3) = 11.03^*$
Latino	38	15.0	12	13.5	26	15.9	
White	171	67.6	52	58.4	119	72.6	
Other	31	12.3	18	20.2	13	7.9	
Sexual identity							
Gay or lesbian	222	87.7	74	83.1	148	90.2	$\chi^2(1) = 2.70$
Bisexual	31	12.3	15	16.9	16	9.8	
Relationship status							
Single	106	41.9	22	24.7	67	75.3	$\chi^2(1) = 16.64^{***}$
Partnered	147	58.1	67	75.3	80	48.8	
Education level							
Some high school/GED or less	11	4.3	2	2.2	9	5.5	$\chi^2(3) = 2.83$
Some college, associate's degree, or currently in college	129	51.0	50	56.2	79	48.2	
4-year college degree	63	24.9	19	21.3	44	26.8	
Graduate school	50	19.8	18	20.2	32	19.5	
Last time served on active duty							
Currently serving	178	70.4	60	67.4	118	72.0	$\chi^2(6) = 5.85$
Within the past year	22	8.7	6	6.7	16	9.8	
1–2 years ago	18	7.1	8	9.0	10	6.1	
3–5 years ago	26	10.3	11	12.4	15	9.1	
6 or more years ago	7	2.8	2	2.2	5	3.0	
Never served on active duty	2	0.8	2	2.2	0	0.0	
Most recent position							
Enlisted	137	54.2	47	52.8	90	54.9	$\chi^2(3) = 5.30$

	Total		Female		Male		Test statistic
	N = 253	n = 89	n = 164				
Officer	76	30.0	22	24.7	54	32.9	
Reservist	21	8.3	10	11.2	11	6.7	
National guard member	19	7.5	10	11.2	9	5.5	
Branch of service							
Army	86	34.0	37	41.6	49	29.9	$\chi^2(4) = 5.54$
Navy	55	21.7	16	18.0	39	23.8	
Marine corps	21	8.3	7	7.9	14	8.5	
Air force	74	29.2	26	29.2	48	29.3	
Coast guard	17	6.7	3	3.4	14	8.5	
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	
Age	30.1	7.8	29.5	6.8	30.5	8.3	$t(251) = -0.95$
Length of active duty	87.4	71.7	83.4	74.0	89.4	70.8	$t(198) = -0.56$

\*  $p < 0.05$ ;

\*\*\*  $p < 0.001$

**Table 2**

Comparison of reported sexual orientation discrimination based on a Likert scale (1–5)

	Female			Male			Independent <i>t</i> -test statistic			Military			Outside military			Paired <i>t</i> -test statistic							
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>		<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>			<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>		<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>		<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>		<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>					
Offensive speech	2.4	1.3	2.4	2.4	1.4	0.08 (251)		2.4	1.3	2.5	1.2		2.4	1.3	2.5	1.2		2.4	1.3	2.5	1.2		-1.18 (252)
Offensive/hostile gestures	1.6	1.0	1.7	1.2	1.2	-0.52 (251)		1.7	1.1	1.7	1.0		1.7	1.1	1.7	1.0		1.7	1.1	1.7	1.0		-1.06 (252)
Threats or intimidation	1.3	0.8	1.4	0.9	0.9	-0.15 (251)		1.4	0.8	1.5	0.9		1.4	0.8	1.5	0.9		1.4	0.8	1.5	0.9		-2.30 (252)*
Graffiti	1.2	0.7	1.3	0.8	0.8	-0.94 (251)		1.3	0.8	1.4	0.8		1.3	0.8	1.4	0.8		1.3	0.8	1.4	0.8		-1.19 (252)
Vandalism	1.2	0.6	1.2	0.7	0.7	-0.07 (251)		1.2	0.7	1.3	0.8		1.2	0.7	1.3	0.8		1.2	0.7	1.3	0.8		-2.11 (252)*
Physical assault	1.1	0.5	1.2	0.6	0.6	-0.94 (251)		1.2	0.6	1.3	0.7		1.2	0.6	1.3	0.7		1.2	0.6	1.3	0.7		-2.57 (252)*
Limited or denied career opportunities	1.6	1.1	1.3	0.9	1.65 (251)		1.4	0.9	1.4	0.9		1.4	0.9	1.4	0.9		1.4	0.9	1.4	0.9		0.14 (252)	
Unfair discipline or punishment	1.4	1.0	1.3	0.8	0.63 (251)		1.3	0.9	1.3	0.9		1.3	0.9	1.3	0.9		1.3	0.9	1.3	0.9		-0.40 (252)	

\*  $P < 0.05$

Table 3

## Comparison of military sexual trauma by gender

	Female		Male		Test statistic				
	Never	Once or more	Never	Once or more					
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%					
	<i>n</i> = 89		<i>n</i> = 164						
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%					
<b>Gender harassment</b>									
Repeatedly told sexual stories or jokes	34	38.2	55	61.8	66	40.2	98	59.8	$\chi^2(1) = 0.10$
Referred to people of your gender in insulting or offensive terms	30	33.7	59	66.3	91	55.5	73	44.5	$\chi^2(1) = 10.97^{**}$
Treated you differently because of your gender	34	38.2	55	61.8	127	77.4	37	22.6	$\chi^2(1) = 38.38^{***}$
Made offensive remarks about appearance or sexual activities	50	56.2	39	43.8	105	64.0	59	36.0	$\chi^2(1) = 1.50$
Made offensive sexist remarks	42	47.2	47	52.8	126	76.8	38	23.2	$\chi^2(1) = 22.72^{***}$
Put you down because of your gender	46	51.7	43	48.3	148	90.2	16	9.8	$\chi^2(1) = 47.97^{***}$
Other unwanted gender-related behaviors	76	85.4	13	14.6	152	92.7	12	7.3	$\chi^2(1) = 3.44$
<b>Unwanted sexual attention</b>									
Made unwelcome attempts to discuss or comment on sexual matters	43	48.3	46	51.7	77	47.0	87	53.0	$\chi^2(1) = 0.04$
Made gestures or used body language of a sexual nature	56	62.9	33	37.1	110	67.1	54	32.9	$\chi^2(1) = 0.44$
Made unwanted attempts to establish romantic relations	55	61.8	34	38.2	139	84.8	25	15.2	$\chi^2(1) = 17.01^{***}$
Continued to ask you for dates despite refusals	63	70.8	26	29.2	142	86.6	22	13.4	$\chi^2(1) = 9.37^{**}$
Touched you in a way that was uncomfortable	68	76.4	21	23.6	149	90.2	16	9.8	$\chi^2(1) = 8.85^{**}$
Intentionally cornered or leaned over you in a sexual way	70	78.7	19	21.3	149	90.2	16	9.8	$\chi^2(1) = 6.50^*$
<b>Coercion</b>									
Made you feel you were being bribed to engage in sex	79	88.8	10	11.2	153	93.3	11	6.7	$\chi^2(1) = 1.55$
Threatened retaliation for being sexually uncooperative	82	92.1	7	7.9	155	94.5	9	5.5	$\chi^2(1) = 0.55$
Treated you badly for refusing to have sex	81	91.0	8	9.0	152	92.7	12	7.3	$\chi^2(1) = 0.22$
Implied better treatment for being sexually cooperative	84	94.4	5	5.6	155	94.5	9	5.5	$\chi^2(1) = 0.00$
<b>Sexual assault</b>									
Unwanted attempts to have sex but unsuccessful	83	93.3	6	6.7	157	95.7	7	4.3	$\chi^2(1) = 0.72$



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		Female		Male		Test statistic
		Never	Once or more	Never	Once or more	
		n	%	n	%	n
Unwanted sex against your will		86	96.6	3	3.4	158
						96.3
						6
						3.7
						$\chi^2(1) = 0.01$

\*  $p < 0.05$ ;

\*\*  $p < 0.01$ ;

\*\*\*  $p < 0.001$