

SA Podcasts: Introduction to Sexual Assault

Project Description:

- **Short description of product:** This is an outline of the content for the Podcast for SA. This is a conversational style interview with a member of the VACO Megabus team (Dr. Knetig).
- **Target audience:** Veterans and general public
- **Length of product (time/pages):** Approximately 10 minutes
- **Delivery/distribution method (electronic, print, use in person):** IPVAP Website, Outreach events

Introduction to Sexual Assault Part 1: Basic Information

Interviewer: Hello and welcome! My name is Dr. Ali-Abbas Asghar-ali from the VA South Central Mental Illness Research Education and Clinical Center, and I will be the host for podcast. Please note, the podcast will cover sexual assault which some listeners may find difficult to hear. This is part 1 of a two-part series on sexual assault. Today we will be introducing foundational information about sexual assault with Dr. Jennifer Knetig.

Dr. Jennifer Knetig is the National Program Manager for the Megabus Pilot, a two-year project run by the VA's Intimate Partner Violence Assistance Program, also known as IPVAP.

Dr. Knetig: Thank you for inviting me, Dr. Asghar-ali.

Interviewer: To start, could you tell our listeners how VA defines sexual assault?

Dr. Knetig: Sexual assault is when someone forces, or tries to force, another person into a sexual activity they do not want, or cannot agree, to do. This can include unwanted touching, attempted rape, or penetration using any kind of object. Verbal harassment can be threatening as well, such as inappropriate sexual comments about someone's appearance, repeated flirting or pressuring a person for sex.

Interviewer: Thanks for explaining the many ways in which sexual assault can occur. My next question is, how often is sexual assault occurring?

Dr. Knetig: Unfortunately, just about every 68 seconds, a person in the United States experiences sexual assault. Though sexual assault affects all people, Women are much more likely to experience it. 90% of reported experiences of sexual assault are by women. Of course, sexual assault is harmful to all people. When we think about the Veterans we serve, it's important to consider how their experiences intersect with their identity, including their experiences as Veterans.

Interviewer: From what I hear you describing, sexual assault occurs much more frequently than most people might think. Could you tell us where sexual assault occurs?

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Dr. Knetig: Many different places. work, school campus, military base, or home. Really, it can happen anywhere.

Interviewer: We learned about what sexual assault is, where it happens, and how often. Could you tell us about who can use sexual assault?

Dr. Knetig: I think many of us are raised learning about stranger danger. But the unfortunate truth is that a person is most likely to be sexually assaulted by someone they know, such as a friend, neighbor, coworker, or intimate partner.

Interviewer: I agree, that may come to a surprise to many; it's important to remember that sexual assault is most likely from someone we know. Now, moving the discussion specifically to Veterans, is the experience of sexual assault different for Veterans?

Dr. Knetig: Well, in many ways it is similar, when providing care for Veterans who have experienced sexual assault, it is important to consider our patients' experiences while active duty, as that can impact their recovery.

Interviewer: In considering Veterans' lived experiences over their lifetime, many may come from areas that are historically underserved, such as those who identify as Native American. Are Veterans from underserved areas and groups affected by sexual assault differently?

Dr. Knetig: Unfortunately, yes. Veterans who identify as Native American have some of the highest rates of sexual assault. LGBTQ+ Veterans are also at an increased risk for experiencing sexual assault. Veterans who identify as men, compared with non-Veterans who identify as men, are at increased risk as well. VA recognizes there can be increased vulnerability for certain groups, and barriers to receiving needed care. For example, some groups have historically experienced less access to healthcare. Some have been hesitant to ask for help due to concerns about not getting culturally sensitive, affirming care. That is why we want to share with our Veterans that we have a program an Intimate Partner Violence Assistance Program that strives to be trauma informed, affirming and inclusive for all Veterans who have experienced sexual assault. We encourage any Veteran who would benefit from services to reach out to any VA staff and ask to be connected with your local Intimate Partner Violence Assistance Program Coordinator. There is no wrong door to get help.

Interviewer: Thank you so much for your time today, Dr. Knetig. This brings us to the end of part 1. Really appreciate all the information you have provided and are looking forward to discussing resources for Veterans who have experienced or used sexual assault in part 2.

Introduction to Sexual Assault Part 2: Resources

Interviewer: Welcome! My name is Ali Abbas Asghar-Ali from the VA South Central Mental Illness Research Education and Clinical Center, and I will be the host for the podcast. This is part 2 of a 2-part series about sexual assault. We want to caution

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listeners that we will be discussing sexual assault, which might be difficult for some to hear. Part 1 was an introduction to the topic. Today, we will learn about resources VA has for Veterans who experience or use sexual assault. We are joined again by Dr. Jennifer Knetig, the National Program Manager for the Megabus Pilot, a 2-year project run by the VA's Intimate Partner Violence Assistance Program, also known as IPVAP. Welcome Dr. Knetig!

Dr. Knetig: Thanks so for inviting me back. I am looking forward to sharing the work we are doing at VA!

Interviewer: Let's get started. Dr. Knetig, could you tell me about the resources VA offers for those using or experiencing sexual assault?

Dr. Knetig: Gladly! Every medical center has an Intimate Partner Violence Assistance Program Coordinator, or IPVAP Coordinator as we call them, and they provide resources and care to Veterans who are using or experiencing sexual assault. Many other VA clinicians are also trained to work with Veterans, I think that's important to highlight, those veterans who've either experienced or used sexual assault. I really want to emphasize that there is "no wrong door" to getting care. You can talk to your primary care team, any social worker, a mental health provider, care manager, or contact the local IPVAP Coordinator. They can help you connect to individual counseling, group therapy, and support in the community when needed. These VA services are available in person or virtually. We strive to really empower Veterans to take a lead in their care.

Interviewer: It's good to know that VA is so open to care for Veterans who may have experienced or used sexual assault. As we move forward, could you share information on the programs VA offers, specifically for those who have experienced sexual assault?

Dr. Knetig: Yes, there's is a range of services for Veterans. COURAGE is a group therapy for Veterans who have experienced sexual assault. RISE is an individualized therapy for Veterans who have experienced IPV, including sexual assault. Many VAs can also get Veterans connected to general mental health or trauma focused care as needed. The IPVAP website is a great resource for Veterans to learn more. More information, resources and the IPVAP Coordinator directory can be found on our website at www.socialwork.va.gov/IPV/.

Interviewer: It's great to hear the VA has specialized treatments for Veterans who have experienced sexual assault. Could you tell us a little more, for those interested in seeking care?

Dr. Knetig: Sure. So, many Veterans who have experienced sexual assault may struggle with trusting others, feeling safe, needing to be in control, or feeling insecure about themselves. Courage is approximately 12 weeklong group for any Veteran who might need help in some of these areas. For those a Veteran who is currently in an unhealthy relationship in where they have experienced sexual assault by their partner, RISE might be a helpful option. Veterans come to session each week and they get to

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pick the topic they want to work on, the Veteran is in charge of their own treatment.

Interviewer: Thank you for sharing all these resources. Dr. Knetig, what steps do you recommend for a Veteran who may have experienced sexual assault?

Dr. Knetig: First, we really don't want to push reporting sexual assault or push care on anybody. We honor where people are in their comfort talking about sexual assault. If they are ready, they can talk with a clinician with whom they feel safe. If they do not have a trusted provider, they can reach out to the IPVAP Coordinator for help to seek a provider who meets their needs. Veterans can ask any staff member for a referral to their local IPVAP Coordinator

Interviewer: A Veteran who has experienced sexual assault has a number of resources and pathways for care. However, Veterans may also use sexual assault. What are the services for Veterans who use, or worry that they may use, sexual assault?

Dr. Knetig: IPVAP also offers services for Veterans who use IPV, which can include sexual assault. Strength at Home is for Veterans who use violence. While it is not specifically focused on the use of sexual violence, I think it can be helpful for our Veterans who are struggling with their anger and want to develop healthier relationships with their partners. Many IPVAP Coordinators are also connected with local domestic violence organizations who can help Veterans with relationship health and safety.

Interviewer: Thank you so much for joining us today, Dr. Knetig. To recap, VA offers several forms of assistance for those who may be experiencing or using sexual assault. Before we end though, would you like to share any additional resources for Veterans who are underserved?

Dr. Knetig: In addition to the local IPVAP Coordinator and MST, many facilities have an LGBTQ+ Care Coordinator who can help connect Veterans with care. The Office of Minority Veteran Health also has coordinators who can connect Veterans to needed care. I want to add that VA strives to meet Veterans where they are and support their recovery. If you, or a Veteran you know, has experienced or used sexual assault, talk with them about seeking help from VA or with the Veterans Crisis line by dialing 988, then press 1.

Interviewer: Thank you for letting us know about those additional resources. This brings us to the end of the podcast. Thank you to our listeners for joining us and learning about the VA resources for Veterans who use or experience sexual assault.