

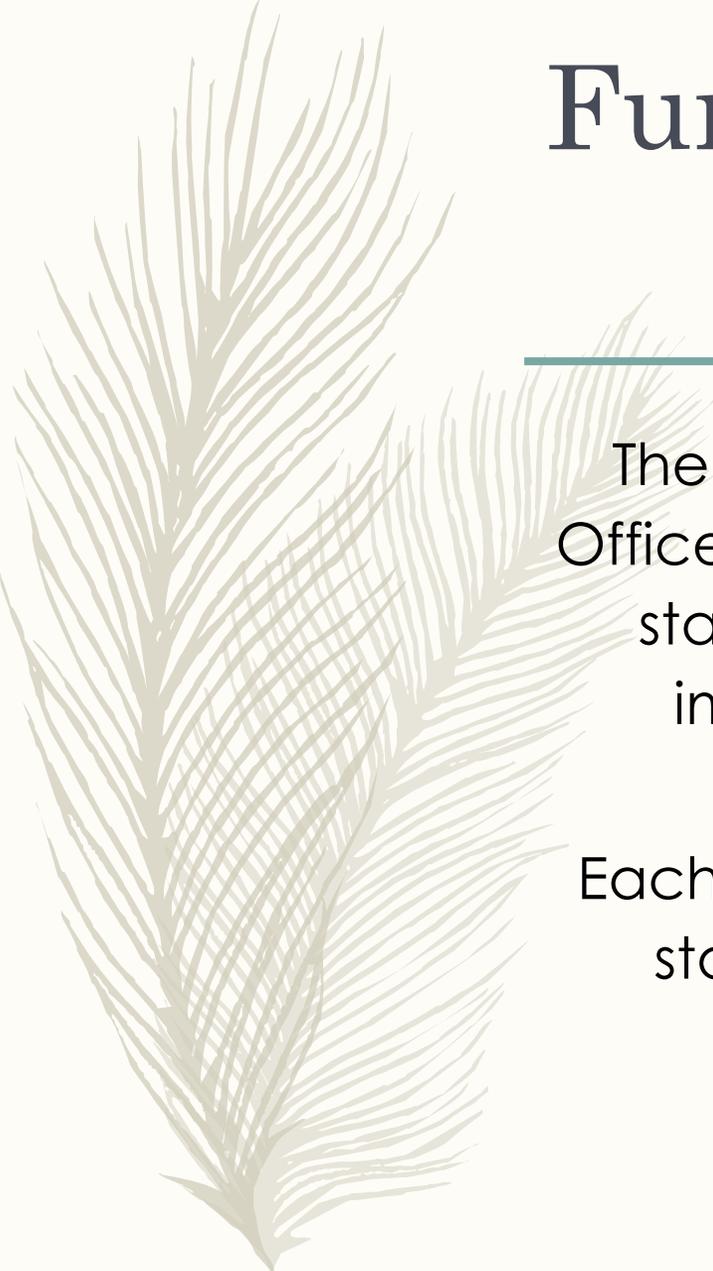
***Women Veterans-Understanding Reactions to Trauma and
Developing Stress Resiliency presented by Vanessa Meade***

***PsyD, LCSW, U.S. Army/Gulf War Veteran
Clinical Assistant Professor UAA-School of Social Work***

***Sponsored by The Rural Veterans Health Access Program
Now providing Tele-counseling services for All Veterans-Urban and rural & their
families as of July 1, 2018***

The Rural Veterans Health Access Program (RVHAP) has been part of the Rural and Community Health Systems Section, Division of Public Health, Alaska Department of Health and Social Services and funded by the Federal Office of Rural Health Policy, Grant #H3GRH26369





Funder:

The federal Health Resource Service Administration (HRSA), Office of Rural Health Policy has funded Alaska as one of three states in this model Telehealth demonstration program to improve the quality of mental health and other critical healthcare services for veterans living in rural areas.

Each state has a unique program. Alaska's RVHAP is the only state providing direct telehealth services to all veterans.

Grant number H3GRH26369



Welcome and Outline of the Webinar

What we'll be talking about tonight:

- 1. Short Introduction of the Presenter
- 2. Identifying Women Veterans Experiences
- 3. Understanding Reactions to Trauma
- 4. Developing Stress Resiliency



Introduction

- Brief Introduction of the Speaker: Vanessa Meade, PsyD, LCSW, Clinical Assistant Professor in the School of Social Work at UAA, U.S. Army/Gulf War Veteran
- Founded a non-profit for women veterans in Alaska in 2010 and also work with an organization that provides mindfulness and meditation programs for veterans in the Lower 48
- Use of PTS instead of PTSD
- Why I do this work
- Presentation and Q & A at the end



Women Veterans in the U.S. and Alaska

- Women veterans are the fastest growing veteran population.
- There are over 2.2 million women veterans in the U.S. and Puerto Rico
 - In Alaska, there are over 10,000 women veterans that made up 13.9% of the veteran population in 2014.
 - Alaska has the highest percentage of women veterans per capita, tied with Virginia, in the United States.
 - 335 identified as AIAN (American Indian/Alaska Native)
 - Discuss the limitations of this data in Alaska

(Only Veterans who reported a single race of AIAN are included in this group. Veterans who reported AIAN in combination with any other race are classified along with all other Veterans in the category "All Other Races." The single race of AIAN Veterans includes the Hispanic ethnicity.)

Source: U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs



Recent Changes Affecting Women's Military Service

- January 2016- Combat Specialties Open to Women
- June 2016-Announcement by Secretary of Defense, Ash Carter, that allowed transgender service members to serve openly.
- Widespread investigations regarding military sexual assault and the Invisible War (2012-2015)
- 2010-The Repeal of Don't Ask, Don't Tell for GLB service members



Issues for Women Veterans

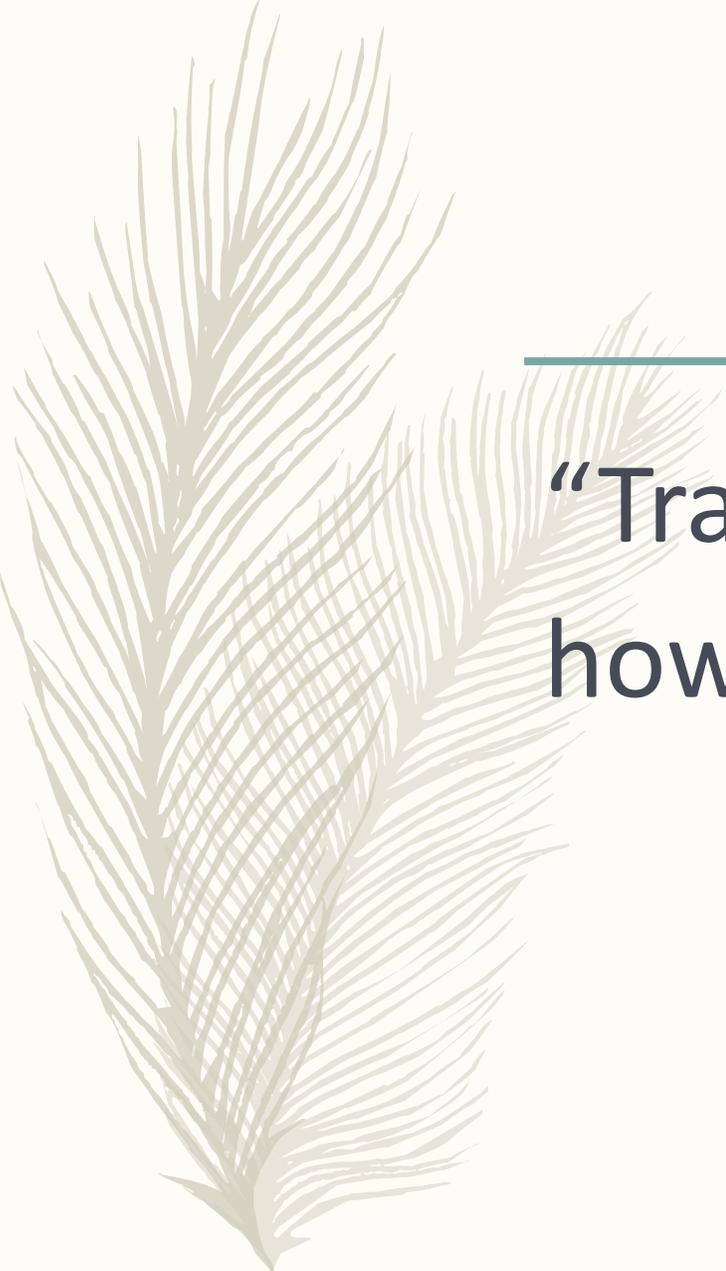
- Women veterans suicide rates are more than double those of civilian women
- Women veterans are 3-4 times more like to become homeless than civilian women
- Women veterans and VA services- Approximately 35% of women veterans use VA services in Alaska
- Combat related injuries and post-traumatic stress from combat zone deployments

Source: The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs



Trauma and Women Veterans

- Women veterans are twice as likely to develop PTS than male veterans
- Issues of Complex Trauma
- Military Sexual Trauma
- Sexual Harassment
- Combat Deployments
- Pre-enlistment Trauma



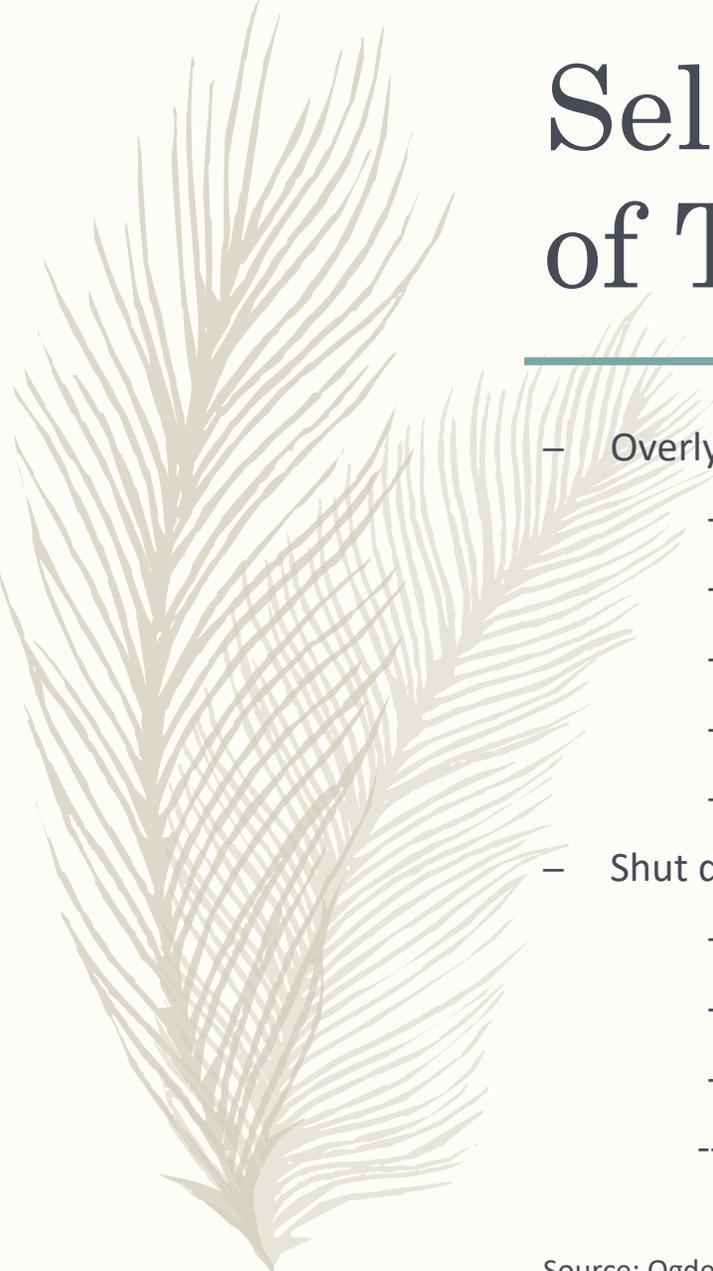
“Trauma is a fact of life. It does not, however, have to be a life sentence.

--Peter A. Levine



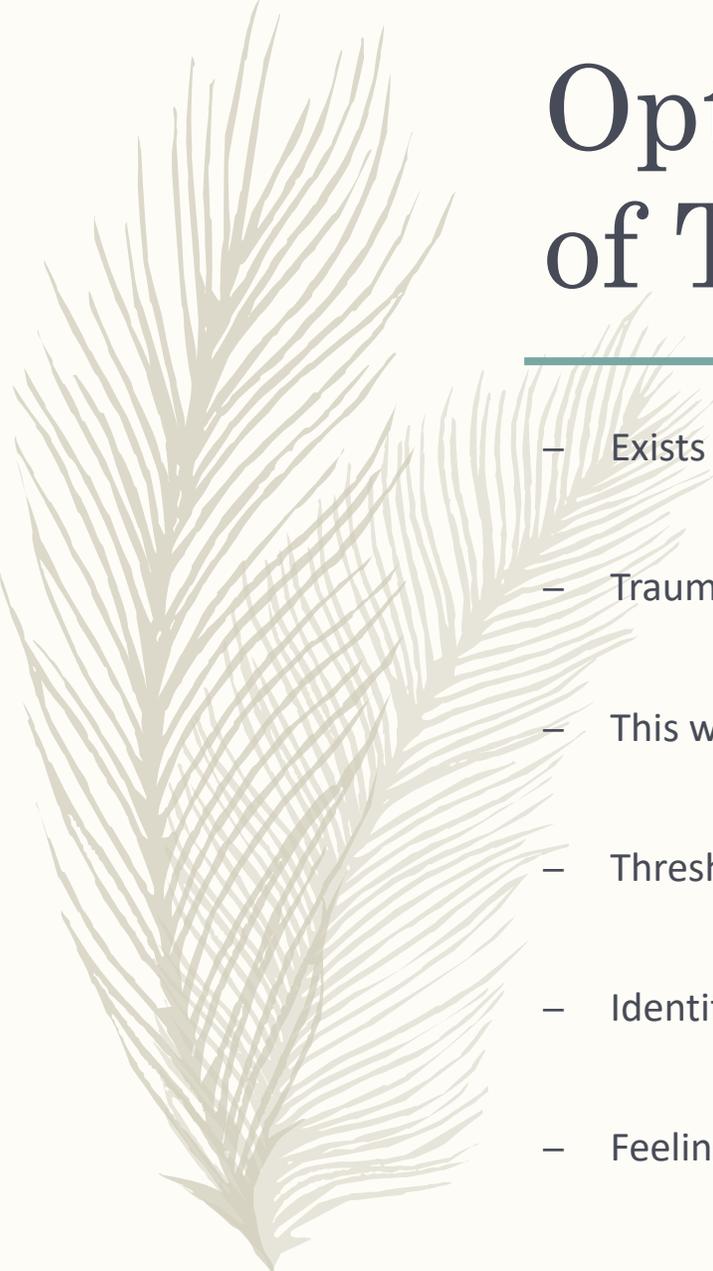
Women Veterans and Trauma

- Women tend to have more anxiety and depression symptoms in relation to trauma
- Women veterans often don't feel seen or heard as veterans
- Women veterans with PTS sometimes receive personality disorder diagnoses- often because of dysregulation related to trauma
- Women veterans often do not seek help because of the way they were treated in the military when an assault(s) happened
- Providers often do not understand the complex nature of MST on women veteran's experiences.



Self-Regulation and the Window of Tolerance

- Overly sensitized to reminders of trauma-Hyperarousal
 - Increased Sensation
 - Emotional Reactivity
 - Hypervigilance
 - Intrusive Imagery
 - Disorganized Cognitive Processes
- Shut down that occurs in response to reminders of trauma-Hypoarousal
 - Relative Absence of Sensation
 - Numbing of Emotions
 - Unable to cognitively process
 - Reduced Physical Movement



Optimal Arousal Zone-Window of Tolerance

- Exists between Hypo and Hyperarousal
- Trauma often causes people to go between extremes of Hypo and Hyperarousal
- This window can vary from person to person and situation to situation
- Threshold of response-The amount of stimulation needed to provoke a reaction
- Identifying and working with triggers-“Tundra Tires” Example
- Feeling Stable and Safe/Existing in the Window of Tolerance



Practices to Connect with the Window of Tolerance

- Yoga and other body practices
- Meditation/Mindfulness (Caution about overwhelm)
- Taking the time to develop safety/Learn limits and places to expand
- Being able to identify body sensations, thoughts, and emotions
- At the person's own pace and time/Allow choice and acknowledge small steps
- Breath Work-Can be used to activate or calm arousal
- Other ways to activate the parasympathetic response to regulate arousal
- Self-monitoring hyper/hypoarousal
- emWave-HeartMath Institute



Ways to Develop and Maintain Resiliency

- Connection with family and friends (even when you don't want to)
- Eating well
- Flexibility
- Humor
- Open-mindedness
- Facing Fears
- Spirituality
- Regular Exercise
- Mindfulness-Formal and Informal Practices
- Sleeping well
- Unplug
- Set limits and boundaries (Say No and some may need to say Yes)
- Practice yoga and other body-based practices
- Develop a support team
- Limit exposure to violence and trauma



Mindfulness Practice



Simple Ways to Develop Awareness and Resiliency

- Connection to Daily Living Activities
- Building Support and Maintaining It
- Practice and Activities that Promote Wellness and Connection
- Finding a therapist that has experience with somatic work/or as a therapist develop a somatic component, by receiving additional training, to your practice in working with trauma



References

www.va.gov/vetdata/docs/SpecialReports/AIANReport.pdf

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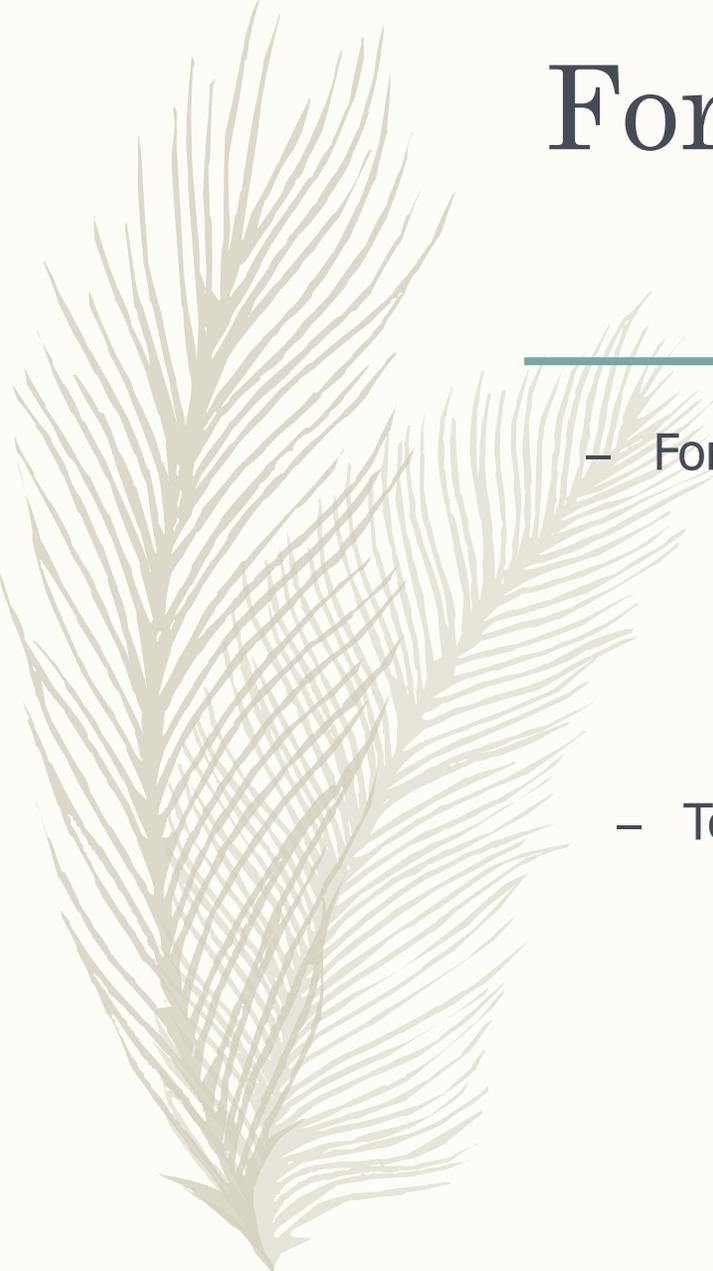


The RVHAP has now completed it's pilot project stage and the telecounseling services via computer video connections are continuing to be available through Sitka Counseling

1-888-889-6472 or visit www.sitkacounseling.org/services

Sitka Counseling is now providing services to **all** urban and rural Alaskan active Military members and Veterans and their families. This includes those not eligible in VA healthcare (who are over 50% of Alaskan Veterans) as well as those who are enrolled. Services include:

- Telehealth video-linked biofeedback 8 week series for stress reduction and coping skill building and ongoing counseling services, both focused on veteran's choice of issues.
- The counselors providing these services are trauma-informed and trained and certified in biofeedback techniques.
- Webinar presentations for awareness and treatment approaches for post-traumatic stress and traumatic brain injury. The link to this webinar and past ones is www.RVHAP.dhss.alaska.gov



For More Information:

- For more information on the past RVHAP program or this webinar contact the former Program Director:
 - Susan Maley, MPH, Ph.D.
 - susan.maley@alaska.gov, 907-269-2084
- To access the recording and PowerPoint slides of this and other RVHAP webinars
 - visit the RVHAP webpage
 - <http://www.RVHAP.dhss.alaska.gov>