

THE ORANGE COUNTY REGISTER

Military sexual trauma is commonplace, women vets say

By [TOM BERG](#)

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Editor's note: We are approaching two 10-year anniversaries. Sept. 11 we all remember. But Oct. 7 we seem to have forgotten. It marks 10 years of war: first in Afghanistan, then in Iraq – longer than any time in U.S. history. More than 6,200 dead. More than 45,000 wounded. Over four Sundays, the Orange County Register will tell the story of the more than 2 million troops who've fought in these wars. As we commemorate the anniversaries of Sept. 11 and Oct. 7, let us, as a nation, seek to understand the sacrifices made as a result of them.

"I was never sexually assaulted," says Army veteran Eui-Jo Marquez, 31, of Long Beach. "But I did experience sexual harassment. It's a daily thing for every woman in the military."

That's the ugly truth about military sexual trauma, or MST – its prevalence in today's military, says Dr. Lori Katz, director of the Women's Mental Health Center at the Long Beach V.A.

"MST is a huge issue," Katz says. "and people are more likely to develop PTSD (Post Traumatic Stress Disorder) from sexual trauma than from combat. There is a major sense of betrayal. You're not safe with your own buddies."

It also creates a trap for women: Accept the sexual come-ons, innuendos and pornography or be alienated.

"Do I make a big deal and be miserable?" says Marquez, who served in Korea in 2002. "Or do I put up with it? My choice was to put up with it."

Her sister, Tania Payne, 29, of Norco, spoke out and paid the price.

They turned against me," says the Army veteran who served in Kuwait in 2003.

Now she has nightmares. And issues with self-esteem – and men.

Iraq War veteran Mickiela Montoya, 26, of Irvine, bought a knife after a male soldier told her: 'If I was to rape you right now, no one would hear you.'

Many female vets in Iraq used homemade bedpans rather than walk to the latrines alone at night.

Eventually, she says, "I became very introverted. I just kept to myself."

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