

# ANNUAL WARRIOR SURVEY

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



ADMINISTERED BY:  
 **NORC** at the  
University of  
Chicago

FUNDED BY:  


WRITTEN BY:  




# BACKGROUND

## ABOUT WOUNDED WARRIOR PROJECT

Wounded Warrior Project® (WWP) is a leading veterans service organization focused on transforming the way the post-9/11 generation and future generations of veterans are empowered, employed, and engaged in our communities. Our direct service programs, advocacy efforts, and collaboration among best-in-practice veteran and military organizations advance WWP's vision: to foster the most successful, well-adjusted generation of wounded service members in our nation's history.

**WWP programs, services, and advocacy efforts are all driven by the greatest needs of warriors, informed by the responses to this survey.**

## ABOUT THE ANNUAL WARRIOR SURVEY

Wounded Warrior Project's 2021 Annual Warrior Survey has grown to represent over 152,000 injured post-9/11 veterans across the continental U.S. and its territories. This data provides a 360-degree view of the warriors WWP serves and allows us to track and treat warriors' most pressing needs in areas such as mental, physical, and financial wellness. It guides WWP's efforts as well as the efforts of those who share and support our mission of honoring and empowering warriors.

The 2021 WWP Annual Warrior Survey is the 12th annual administration of the survey. The 12th Annual Warrior Survey has transitioned from a cross-sectional census (for which WWP previously attempted to collect data from all warriors) to a longitudinal sample survey (which follows the same warriors over time).

**Download the Comprehensive Report of Findings at [AnnualWarriorSurvey.com](https://www.annualwarriorsurvey.com) for more information about survey design, methodology, sampling, and administration.**



WWP is honored to thank CSX for funding the research reported by the Annual Warrior Survey. Through their Pride in Service initiative, CSX is dedicated to connecting our nation's heroes and their families to the resources they need and providing them with the recognition they deserve. Through the Annual Warrior Survey, WWP and CSX collectively aim to give warriors a platform to be heard by individuals and organizations that have the power to initiate change.



“The Annual Warrior Survey is something I participate in to help maintain my voice as a veteran. I feel we’re the first generation of veterans that is getting noticed, and I wholeheartedly believe that it has to do with this survey.”

— WOUNDED WARRIOR  
CONNOR MOORE WITH HIS WIFE

## WHO THIS REPORT REPRESENTS

**152,499** WARRIORS REGISTERED WITH WWP

**64.2%**

ARMY

**34.7%**

NATIONAL GUARD  
OR RESERVE

**17.1%**

MARINE  
CORPS

**15.2%**

NAVY

**12.2%**

AIR FORCE

**1.2%**

COAST  
GUARD

### AGE GROUPS

18 TO 24 | 0.6%

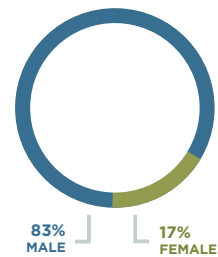
25 TO 34 | 16.6%

35 TO 44 | 47.9%

45 TO 54 | 24.2%

55 TO 64 | 9.3%

65 AND OLDER | 1.4%



### RACE

WHITE	64.1%
BLACK OR AFRICAN AMERICAN	15.1%
AMERICAN INDIAN/ALASKAN NATIVE	1.3%
ASIAN	2.2%
NATIVE HAWAIIAN/PACIFIC ISLANDER	1.1%
OTHER	8.5%
TWO OR MORE RACES	7.7%

### ETHNICITY

MEXICAN, MEXICAN AMERICAN, CHICANO/A	9.0%
PUERTO RICAN	5.3%
CUBAN	0.7%
OTHER HISPANIC, LATINO/A, OR SPANISH ORIGIN	6.5%
NOT OF HISPANIC, LATINO/A, OR SPANISH ORIGIN	78.5%

*Note: Hispanic origin is considered an ethnicity, not a race. The population that is Hispanic may be of any race.*



# WHOLE-HEALTH WELLNESS AND HEALTH CARE

## INJURIES AND HEALTH PROBLEMS

**93%** of warriors receive VA disability compensation.

**77%** of warriors have a service-connected disability rating of 70% or higher.

### CHRONIC PAIN



**97%** of warriors reported some level of pain.

**77%** of warriors indicated some degree of high-intensity to severely limiting pain.

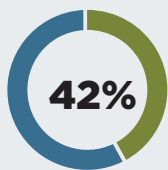


Important daily activities, such as exercise, can be more challenging for warriors with chronic pain.

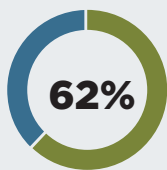


Warriors with chronic pain are significantly less likely to meet the World Health Organization (WHO) physical activity guideline recommendations, compared to those without chronic pain.

Met WHO's physical activity guideline recommendations:



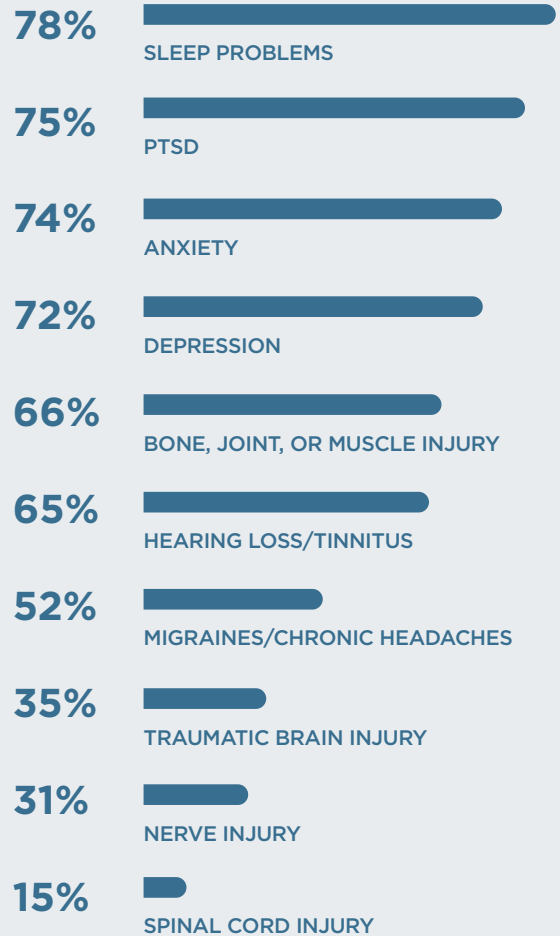
Warriors with chronic pain



Warriors without chronic pain

### TOP 10 INJURIES AND HEALTH PROBLEMS

warriors self-report experiencing as a result of their service:



"When I enlisted, I never thought I would get hurt. Being disabled never even crossed my mind."

— WOUNDED WARRIOR  
BRYAN WAGNER



The most **frequently self-reported injury or health** issue among warriors was **sleep problems**, which can be a result of both physical and mental health problems.



While **78%** of warriors self-reported sleep problems, **90%** screened as having poor sleep quality.

Warriors are **more than twice as likely** as the U.S. general population to get less than seven hours of sleep per night.

## HEALTH CARE AND COVERAGE

**90%**

of warriors have health care coverage through the VA.

### AMONG WARRIORS WHO DO NOT USE VA HEALTH CARE SERVICES, THE MOST COMMON REASONS CITED WERE:



Warriors predominantly use VA medical centers for primary, mental health, and specialty care:

**68%**

PRIMARY CARE

**57%**

MENTAL HEALTH CARE

**55%**

SPECIALTY CARE



Prefer to use other health care coverage



Too much trouble or red tape



VA locations are inconvenient



Appointment availability



About **7 IN 10 WARRIORS** have utilized telehealth services in the past 12 months.

**41%**

of warriors reported that they had difficulty or put off getting care for their physical injuries or health problems.



Of those who utilized telehealth, **81%** reported being satisfied with the services they received.

### TOP THREE barriers cited by warriors who had difficulty getting care:

**67%**

DIFFICULTY SCHEDULING APPOINTMENTS WITH PROVIDER

**60%**

DELAYS OR CANCELLATION IN TREATMENT

**56%**

LACK OF AVAILABILITY IN VA SPECIALTY CLINIC

**“I definitely would not be where I am today, physically, mentally, emotionally, spiritually, if it were not for Wounded Warrior Project.”**

— WOUNDED WARRIOR **BRYAN WAGNER**



# MENTAL AND BRAIN HEALTH

## MENTAL HEALTH

Top mental health issues warriors self-report experiencing as a result of their service:



**75%** PTSD



**74%** ANXIETY



**72%** DEPRESSION

Specific assessments were used to determine the percentage of warriors who were experiencing mental health symptoms at the time of the survey:

**49%**

PRESENTED WITH MODERATE TO SEVERE PTSD SYMPTOMS

**63%**

PRESENTED WITH MODERATE TO SEVERE ANXIETY SYMPTOMS

**53%**

PRESENTED WITH MODERATE TO SEVERE DEPRESSION SYMPTOMS

“PTSD has been the hardest injury for me to deal with. A lot of people think PTSD is just freaking out when you hear a loud sound, but it’s deeper than that.”

— WOUNDED WARRIOR  
SEAN KARPf



### What does PTSD feel like?

#### Top PTSD symptoms reported by warriors:

- Trouble falling or staying asleep
- Being super alert, watchful, or on guard
- Having difficulty concentrating
- Feeling distant or cut off from other people

## SUICIDE

**16%**

of warriors have attempted suicide at least once in their lifetimes, and the average number of suicide attempts doubled after military service.\*



Nearly **1 IN 4 warriors** have had suicidal thoughts in the past 12 months. Of warriors who reported having suicidal thoughts, **70% report having them in the past two weeks.**

\*Average number of suicide attempts before service: less than 1. Average number of suicide attempts after service: 2

## MENTAL HEALTH CARE AND SUPPORT

**46%**

of warriors visited a doctor, psychologist, or counselor in the past three months to get help with issues related to stress, emotions, alcohol or drugs, or family.



The likelihood of experiencing PTSD symptoms is **57% lower** among warriors who've maintained the social support of their military friends.

About

**1 IN 5**  
**WARRIORS**

reported that they have experienced barriers to mental health care.



The most common barriers are related to attitude and stigma, such as **wanting to solve the problem on their own** and **fears of being perceived as weak**.

## MILITARY SEXUAL TRAUMA

**16%**

of all warriors have experienced military sexual trauma (MST).

MST by sex:



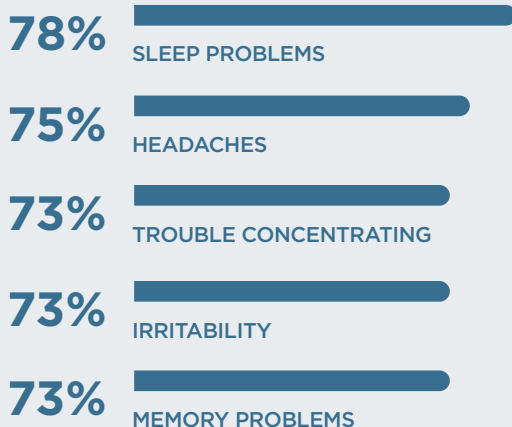
## HEAD-RELATED TRAUMA AND TRAUMATIC BRAIN INJURY



**64%** of warriors incurred head injuries.

**35%** of warriors incurred traumatic brain injuries.\*

Most common symptoms or problems that began or worsened after TBI or other head-related trauma:



**What is a traumatic brain injury (TBI)?**

A TBI is characterized as a loss of consciousness or altered mental status caused by a blast, blow, or penetrating force to the head.

Top 3 events or incidents cited as causing head-related trauma and TBIs:



\*Estimated: TBI was defined as WWP warriors who reported being injured as a result of a trauma-related event and lost consciousness immediately following the event.

**“What has helped me is being around other wounded warriors and being able to know that there’s somebody who’s always got my back.”**

— WOUNDED WARRIOR **SEAN KARPF**

# TOXIC EXPOSURE

## EXPOSURES AND TREATMENT



98%

of warriors report being exposed to hazardous or toxic substances during their service.



75%

of warriors report being exposed to burn pits, specifically.



**ONLY 9%**

report receiving treatment at the VA for toxic exposure\*



**Less than a third** of warriors who've filed a VA disability claim for an exposure-related condition have been **granted VA service connection**.\*



“Ever since there has been a military, there has been something that we learned after major engagements that we probably should have done better. We figured these things out, and then we pass that information along. **And for my generation, it's the burn pits.**”

— WOUNDED WARRIOR  
**ANDREW MYATT**

Photographed 9 months into cancer treatment

## EXPOSURE-RELATED SYMPTOMS AND HEALTH CONDITIONS

**TOP THREE** exposure-related symptoms reported by warriors



44%

Decreased ability to exercise



44%

Shortness of breath



33%

Chest pain

**TOP THREE** exposure-related health conditions reported by warriors



36%

Neurological problems



32%

Hypertension



23%

Chronic multi-symptom illness

\*Excludes active-duty warriors

**“The fact that as a community we're actually becoming aware of this and talking about it is amazing.”**

— WOUNDED WARRIOR **ANDREW MYATT**





# CONNECTION AND IDENTITY

## LONELINESS AND EMOTIONAL SUPPORT



62% of warriors are lonely.



Warriors who've been out of military service longer have higher overall loneliness scores.



65% of warriors have been able to maintain social support of their military friends.



The likelihood of experiencing PTSD symptoms is **57% lower** among warriors who've maintained the social support of their military friends.

To measure emotional support among warriors, the survey included the National Institutes of Health Toolbox Emotional Support Survey.

The average score among warriors (31.8) indicates low levels of emotional support.

### Emotional support mean scores:

Warriors: **31.8**

U.S. general population: **50**

HIGH

NORMAL

LOW



WARRIORS

U.S. GENERAL POPULATION



Warriors report higher levels of emotional support in areas like **having someone to talk to**, but lower levels in areas like **advice when dealing with a problem**.



"When you're alone, your mind can play tricks on you and lie to you. You can fool yourself into believing that no one understands. That's how I felt."

— WOUNDED WARRIOR  
SEVERA PARRISH

## VETERAN IDENTITY

90%  
AGREE

"People who aren't military don't understand my experiences."

83%  
AGREE

"People in my community respect that I'm a veteran."

80%  
AGREE

"I view my military experience as positive."

**"When warriors are involved with Wounded Warrior Project, we give each other hope. Individually, we're strong. Together, we're invincible."**

— WOUNDED WARRIOR SEVERA PARRISH

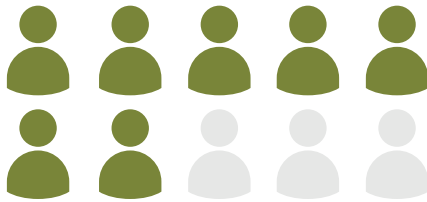


# WOMEN WARRIORS

## MILITARY SEXUAL TRAUMA

About  
**7 IN 10**

women warriors have experienced military sexual trauma.



**65%** of women warriors have experienced sexual harassment and **44%** have experienced sexual assault.



Women warriors experience **sexual assault** at a rate **2.5X higher** than females in the U.S. general population.

### MST SURVIVORS HAVE DIFFERENT PERCEPTIONS OF VA CARE:

ABOUT **1 IN 4** MST SURVIVORS BELIEVE:

**“VA providers are not sensitive enough to women’s needs”**

AND

**“There is not enough access to women’s services”**

Compared to about 1 in 10 women warriors who haven't experienced MST.

**“I’m a victim of military sexual trauma. The things they did – no one should endure. I carried that with me through my military career.”**

— WOUNDED WARRIOR  
**TONYA OXENDINE**



## WOMEN'S HEALTH CARE

**79%** of women warriors use the VA for women’s health services.

The majority of women warriors who use the VA for women’s health services...



are satisfied with the care they receive



find the VA to be “very” or “extremely” helpful in coordinating care

Top barriers to VA care cited by all women warriors:

**20%** not enough access to women’s services

**20%** lack of sensitivity to women’s needs

**16%** geographic location (“VA is too far away”)

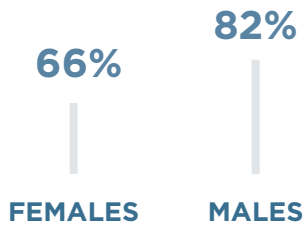


**15%** of women warriors report seeking reproductive or infertility services. Previous research has shown that women service members were **three times more likely** to have infertility issues compared with women in the general U.S. population.

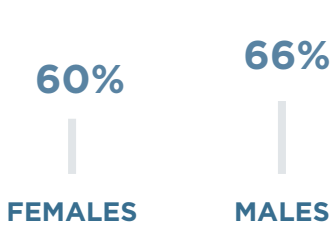
## WOMEN'S CONNECTION AND IDENTITY

Compared to male warriors, women warriors view their military experience less positively and struggle more with connection and veteran identity in their post-service lives.

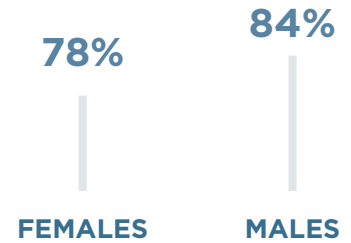
“My military experience was positive.”



“I’ve been able to maintain the social support of my military friends.”



“People in my community respect that I’m a veteran.”



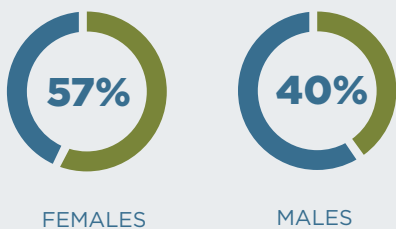
Women warriors were also **significantly more likely** to report being lonely than males (71% vs. 60%).\*

## WOMEN'S EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT



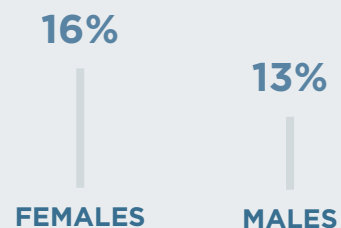
Women warriors are **more educated** than their male peers.

### BACHELOR'S DEGREE OR HIGHER



Despite higher rates of education, women warriors experience **higher rates of unemployment** than males.

### UNEMPLOYMENT RATE



Women warriors less often feel respected for their veteran status in the workplace:

“Co-workers respect that I’m a veteran.”

**79% FEMALES 86% MALES**

\*A chi-square test of independence was performed to examine the crude relationship between gender and loneliness.

**“Wounded Warrior Project has really helped me build resilience, and I’m not ashamed anymore. I’m strong, I’m bold, I’m courageous.”**

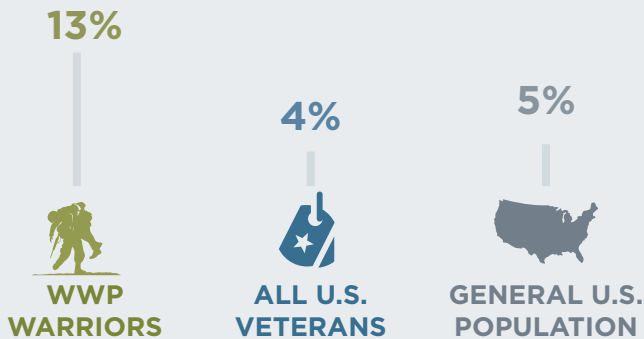
— WOUNDED WARRIOR **TONYA OXENDINE**



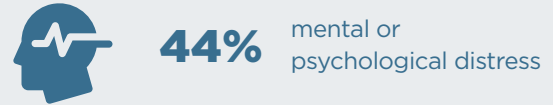
# FINANCIAL WELLNESS AND EDUCATION

## EMPLOYMENT

### UNEMPLOYMENT RATE



Top barriers to employment reported by unemployed warriors:



Most common industries in which warriors are employed:

- 30%** federal government
- 11%** health care and social assistance
- 7%** professional, scientific, or technical fields
- 7%** transportation and warehousing

“After service, I struggled with finding stable employment. In too many instances, veterans spend months looking for work after separation.”

— WOUNDED WARRIOR  
BILL JONES



Warriors employed by companies offering a resource group or a veteran mentorship program had higher scores of professional fulfillment compared with those employed by companies without such programs.

### EDUCATION

**43%** of warriors have earned a bachelor’s degree or higher — making them more educated than the general veteran population and U.S. general population.

**15%** of warriors reported that they are currently enrolled in school.

### FINANCIAL STRAIN

**42%** of warriors indicated that they, at some point in the past 12 months, did not have enough money to make ends meet.

**About 1 in 10** warrior households live in poverty.

“The WWP Warriors to Work® program bridges the gap between veterans and employers. I got help with my resume and connected with potential employers.”

— WOUNDED WARRIOR **BILL JONES**

# INDEPENDENCE AND CAREGIVING

## SUPPORT NEEDED



**25%**

of warriors need aid and assistance from another person due to service-connected injuries or health problems.

**8%**

of warriors indicated they are permanently housebound due to service-connected injuries or health problems.

Types of support needed among warriors who require aid and assistance:



**39%**

need aid for their mental health issues only



**23%**

need aid for their physical health injuries only



**38%**

need aid for both their physical and mental health issues or injuries

Challenges that are common among the warrior population seem to be exacerbated for those who require aid and assistance.

**Warriors who require aid and assistance report higher rates of:**



Suicidal ideation



Binge drinking



Loneliness



Financial strain

Warriors who require aid and assistance report needing an average of



**21-30 hours**

of assistance per week and **30% require 40 hours or more.**

## CAREGIVERS

Warriors' caregivers are:

**75%**

The warrior's spouse

**6%**

The warrior's parent

**4%**

The warrior's child

**2%**

The warrior's sibling

**"I assist and support my son because of the love I have for him, and I know he would do the same for me without hesitation."**

— CHRISTINE SCHEI, CAREGIVER FOR HER SON, WOUNDED WARRIOR **ERIK SCHEI**



**"Because of Wounded Warrior Project, my son is able to live in his own home, not in a nursing home."**

— CAREGIVER **CHRISTINE SCHEI**

**DOWNLOAD THE COMPREHENSIVE REPORT OF FINDINGS AT**  
**[AnnualWarriorSurvey.com](https://AnnualWarriorSurvey.com)**

