

Empowering Women Veterans Through Peer Groups

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BACKGROUND

Women Veterans are the largest growing group in the veteran community in the United States. The journey of women veterans is unique in that these women lived and worked in the military. Veteran women join the military with a 'Can-do spirit.' They have the pride of being strong. They work with dignity and respect and put service before their life but the military life and the transition to civilian life involve struggles. Grace After Fire veteran support group invited researchers to learn about their experiences. Peer-to-peer support groups were effective and meaningful in helping veterans transition to civilian life and address their unique healthcare needs.

METHODS

- 17 women veterans
- Community-based action research
- Ricoeur's Hermeneutic Phenomenology
- Semi-structured interviews with audio-taped Focus groups

ANALYSIS

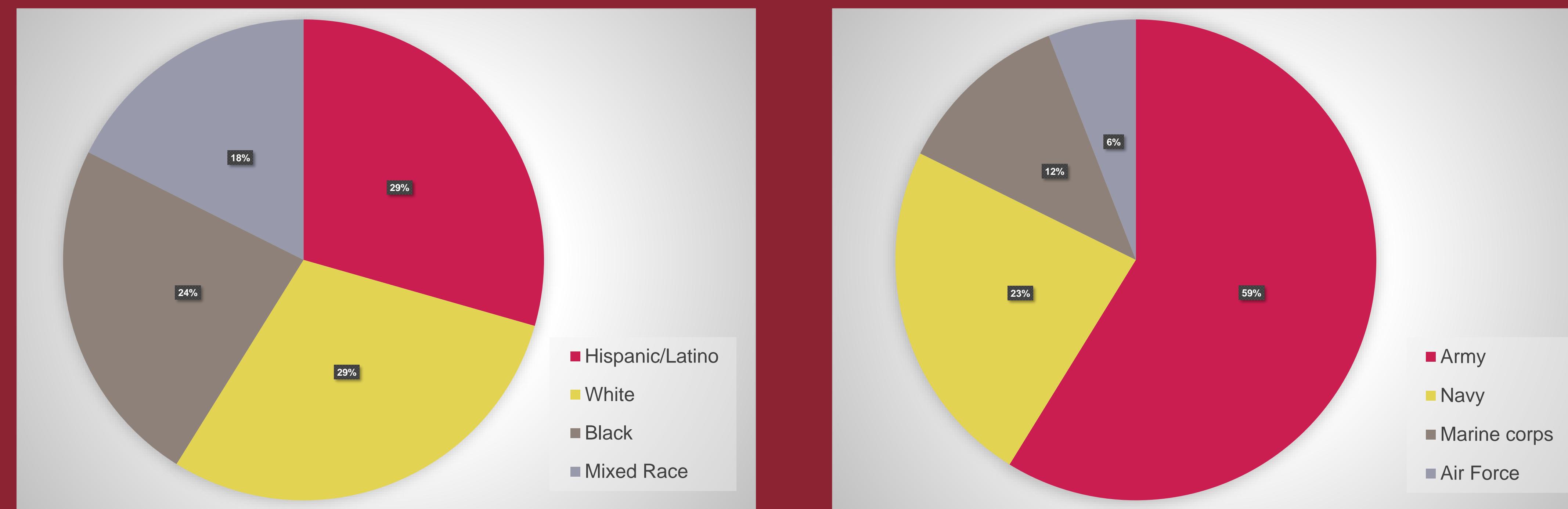
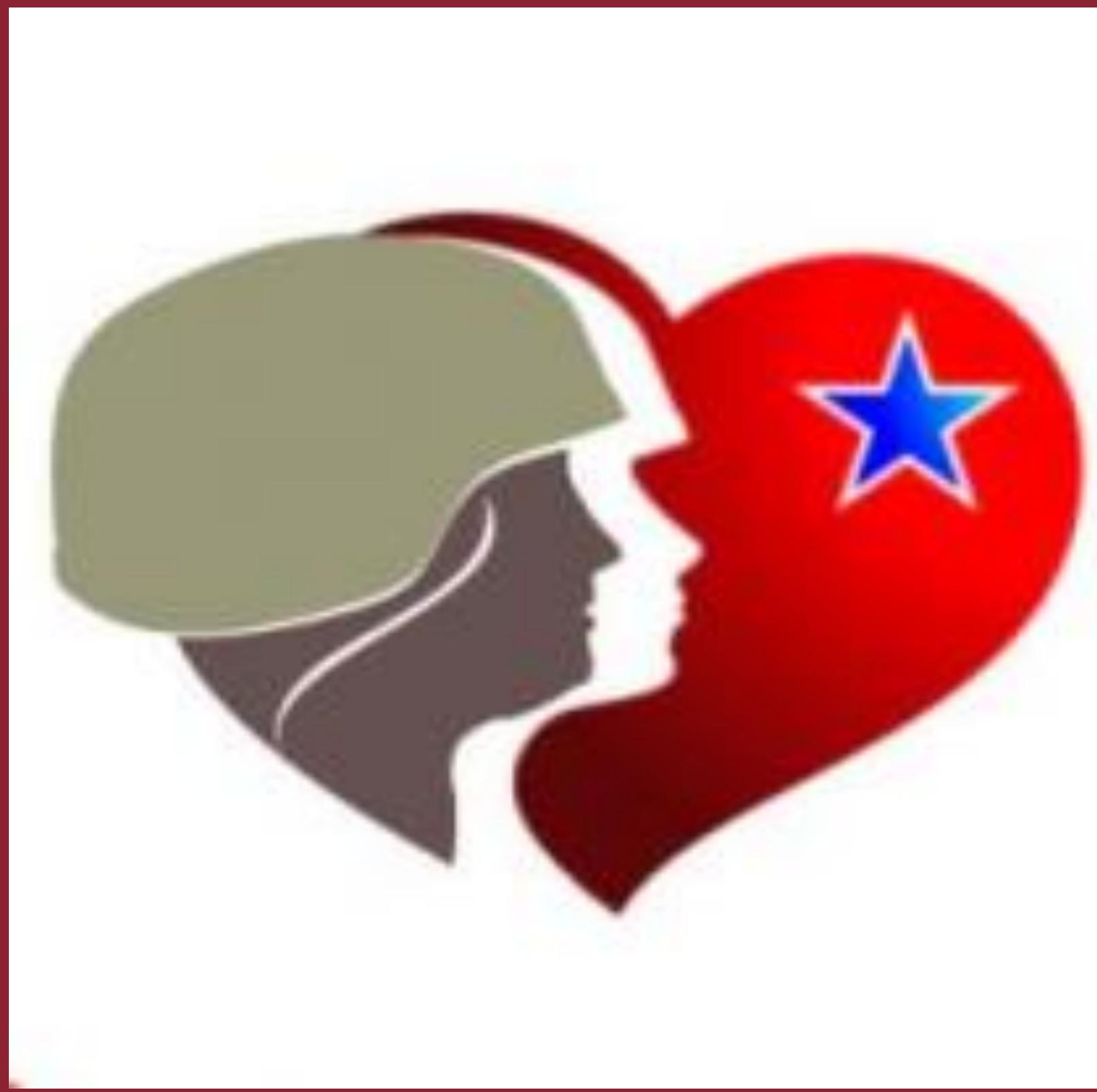
- Naïve Reading
- Structural Environmental Analysis
- Phenomenological Interpretation

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Demographics

Mean age: 42.24 ± 10.33 years
Race: Black (23.5%); Hispanic/Latino: 29.4%;
Mixed race (17.6%); White (29.4%).
Military service: Air Force (5.9%); Army (58.8%);
Marine Corps (11.8%); Navy (23.5%).



Themes With Relevant Quotes

- **Service to Confusion:** "You're left to figure it out yourself."
- **Pride to Embodied Shame:** "I got raped repeatedly through basic training."
- **Screaming in Silence:** "It will be nice to say that the military sexual trauma years later I've healed from that, but I have not."
- **Harsh Reality:** "I no longer had an Identity."
- **Creating a Village:** "We were able to let go of these burdens."
- **Taking the High Road:** "You're going to have to put in the intent to be happy."

RESULTS/ FINDINGS

Environment: Service to confusion; Pride to embodied shame.

Phenomenology: Screaming in silence; Harsh reality; Creating a village; Taking the high road.

DISCUSSION

The study is ongoing. The next step involve validation of the results with 3-4 veterans. The experiences and stories shared by the veteran women will enhance the peer-to-peer support groups.

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