

# Putting Research to Work for Military Families



**Focus:**  
Multiple  
Branches

## Homecoming of Citizen Soldiers: Postdeployment Problems and Service Use Among Army National Guard Soldiers

Griffith, J. (2017). Homecoming of citizen soldiers: Postdeployment problems and service use among Army National Guard Soldiers. *Community Mental Health Journal*, 53, 766-777. doi:10.1007/s10597-017-0132-9

**SUMMARY:** National Guard and Reserve Service members have a significantly different experience than Active Duty Service members regarding the deployment and post-deployment process. In this study, the problems Guard and Reserve Soldiers faced upon return from deployment were examined. Most Soldiers reported relatively low numbers of problems, and those who reported problems more often than not quickly sought appropriate services upon returning from deployment. However, there was a significant minority of Soldiers that reported problems but did not seek services.

### KEY FINDINGS:

- Post-deployment problems were reported as follows: trauma symptoms associated with combat exposure (34%, e.g., anger and frustration, sleep troubles), lack of social support (18%), problem alcohol use (17%), feelings of isolation (13%), financial difficulties (11%), aggression toward family adults and children (3% each).
- Twenty-five percent of Soldiers experienced no problems, 50% reported one to two problem areas, 16% reported three problem areas, and only 11% experienced problems in four or more areas.
- Seventy-five percent of Soldiers who reported experiencing problems utilized services appropriate to their concern, such as posttraumatic stress treatment, relationship counseling, mental health counseling, or financial management.

### IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMS:

Programs could:

- Provide additional education for National Guard and Reserve Service members and their families regarding access to services for post-deployment problems both on base and once they return to part-time status
- Provide increased personalization of resources upon return from deployment when Reserve and Guard Service members are still on base, including resources for families
- Offer workshops to National Guard and Reserve Service members and their spouses on the symptoms of posttraumatic stress and effective ways to address these symptoms

### IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICIES:

Policies could:

- Encourage partnerships with community organizations for additional post-deployment resources for Reserve and National Guard members and their families
- Support continued Service member engagement with deployment teams to reduce feelings of isolation upon return from deployment and leaving the base
- Recommend professional development for community providers regarding the unique experiences of National Guard and Reserve Service members and their families

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## METHODS

- Participants completed the U.S. Army's Reintegration Unit Risk Inventory (R-URI), which is administered 90-180 days after return from deployment.
- The self-report survey assesses deployment and combat experiences, post-deployment problems, and services used during post-deployment.
- Statistical analyses were used to examine the data for underlying themes and relationships between reported problems and help-seeking through use of resources.

## PARTICIPANTS

- The sample was based on R-URI data for Army Reserve and National Guard Soldiers returned from deployment in 2010. This included 4,567 Soldiers in combat arms (56%), combat support (28%), combat service support (12%), and other (4%).
- Eighty-four percent of Soldiers returned from OIF and 16% returned from OEF. Most (90%) of Soldiers were deployed 7-12 months. This was the first deployment for 65% of the Soldiers.
- No data were provided regarding the participants' rank, race/ethnicity, or gender.

## LIMITATIONS

- The survey is designed to not ask about demographic data to ensure anonymity, which limits the author's ability to analyze the data according to various groups such as gender, race/ethnicity, age, etc.
- A self-report survey was the only source of data, and participants could have over- or under-reported with no verification, therefore, social desirability could have influenced their responses.
- The data were gathered shortly after return from deployment (90-180 days), and it is unclear how many additional Soldiers may have developed problems later related to this deployment, or sought help for current or future problems.

## AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research could:

- Examine Service members' reasons for not engaging with offered services when Service members recognize they have problems
- Explore whether recent policy changes in the military have increased access to services for returning Service members and Veterans
- Examine Service member attitudes regarding engaging in community-based services with civilian providers

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