

Putting Research to Work for Military Families



Focus:
Army

Effects of Repeated Deployment to Iraq and Afghanistan on the Health of New Jersey Army National Guard Troops: Implications for Military Readiness

Kline, A., Falca-Dodson, M., Sussner, B., Ciccone, D. S., Chandler, H., Callahan, L., & Losonczy, M. (2010). Effects of repeated deployment to Iraq and Afghanistan on the health of New Jersey Army National Guard troops: Implications for military readiness. *American Journal of Public Health, 100*(2), 276-283. doi:10.2105/AJPH.2009.162925

SUMMARY: New Jersey Army National Guard Soldiers who were preparing for deployment to Iraq completed surveys to assess the effects of prior military service in OEF/OIF on their mental and physical health. Results indicate that compared to non-deployed Soldiers and civilians, a previous deployment negatively influenced Soldiers' mental health, physical health, and alcohol use.

KEY FINDINGS:

- Previously deployed Soldiers were more than three times as likely as non-deployed Soldiers to screen positive for posttraumatic stress (PTSD) and major depression, over twice as likely to screen positive for alcohol dependence, and over 90% more likely to score below the general population norm on physical functioning.
- A substantial proportion of previously deployed Soldiers (including 58% of those screening positive for PTSD) reported that they had not received a post-deployment mental health screen after their previous deployment.
- Previously deployed Soldiers who screened positive for PTSD reported significant concern about mental health stigma. Fifty-nine percent of previously deployed Soldiers with positive PTSD screens said they did not report symptoms after deployment to avoid "medical hold."
- Previously deployed Soldiers accessed treatment at higher rates than did other Soldiers, concerns related to mental health stigma negatively influence rates of help seeking.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMS:

Programs could:

- Tailor their pre-deployment educational classes for Service members who have had a previous deployment by incorporating skill building on resilience, self-care, and peer support to attempt to mitigate potential mental health problems
- Offer workshops during reintegration to help families and Service members adjust and cope with mental health concerns
- Distribute information to military family members regarding how to recognize mental health problems in their Service members and resources available

IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICIES:

Policies could:

- Continue to support the availability of confidential and accessible treatment of mental and behavioral health problems for Service members and their families
- Consider how multiple deployments influence military readiness and psychological adjustment of Service members
- Recommend training for service providers working with Service members regarding common mental and physical health issues, particularly as they relate to multiple deployments

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METHODS

- Anonymous surveys were administered to New Jersey Army National Guard Soldiers undergoing pre-deployment medical assessments in preparation for deployment to Iraq in the summer of 2008.
- Surveys contained assessments of PTSD, depression, alcohol use, physical health, general mental health, and use of mental health resources.
- Additional health data were obtained from the New Jersey Department of Military and Veteran Affairs.

PARTICIPANTS

- The sample included 2,543 New Jersey Army National Guard Soldiers (88% male).
- The majority of the sample was White (47%) or Latino (30%); the average age was 33.20 years.
- Twenty-five percent reported at least 1 previous deployment, 3% were deployed at least two times or more, 92% served in Iraq only, 5% in Afghanistan, and 3% in both.

LIMITATIONS

- This study used self-report screening instruments which may bias results.
- The results may not generalize beyond New Jersey Army National Guard units with similar demographics with experience in OEF/OIF conflicts.
- The significant differences found between deployed and non-deployed Soldiers could influence the results.

AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research could:

- Utilize longitudinal data to examine how these outcomes change over time
- Examine the impact of multiple deployments on military performance
- Explore how gender and number of deployments impacts mental and physical health outcomes

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