



Effects of Home on the Mental Health of British Forces Serving in Iraq and Afghanistan

Mulligan, K., Jones, N., Davies, M., McAllister, P., Fear, N. T., Wessely, S., & Greenberg, N. (2012). Effects of home on the mental health of British forces serving in Iraq and Afghanistan. *The British Journal of Psychiatry*, 201, 193-198. doi: 10.1192/bjp.bp.111.097527.



2,042 British armed forces personnel serving in Iraq or Afghanistan were surveyed to evaluate the influence of family life/home events on their mental health during deployment. Perceived problems at home were associated with severity of mental health problems while deployed, particularly for Service members who perceived that the military provided insufficient support for their family.

Key Findings:

- The prevalence of common mental disorders (e.g., anxiety, depression) among the Service members was 18%; the prevalence of probable PTSD was 3%.
- Problems (e.g., finances, parenting) and concerns related to home (e.g., difficulty communicating) were associated with greater mental health concerns, even after adjusting for demographic and military-related variables (e.g., combat exposure).
- For those experiencing a relationship breakdown, unit cohesion and leadership offered some protection from mental health problems including PTSD.
- Participants who perceived that the military provided insufficient support for their family reported more mental health problems.

Implications for Programs:

- Programs may provide pre-deployment education to military families about the supportive services available to them while a family member is deployed.
- Programs may offer creative opportunities to enhance support of military families while a family member is deployed, such as via peer support and informal social activities.
- Programs could perform outreach activities to military families during deployment via social media.

Implications for Policies:

- Policies could recommend enhanced in-theatre communication capabilities and flexibility to support Service members in communicating with family during deployment.
- Policies could recommend that military family members be routinely involved in the development and provision of support services, helping to ensure the content and activities are relevant and helpful.
- Policies could recommend routine screening of Service members during and after homecoming from deployment for mental health concerns.

Avenues for Future Research:

- Future research could utilize a longitudinal design to parse out causal relationships between problems/concerns related to home and mental health problems.
- Future studies could include more rigorous mental health assessments and additional non-military stressors.
- Future research could replicate this study with U.S. military samples.





Background Information

Methodology:

- British armed forces personnel on deployment in Iraq or Afghanistan (2009-2010) were surveyed as part of the United Kingdom's Operation Mental Health Needs Evaluation.
- Response rates were 99%, representing in approximately 15% of British forces deployed to Iraq or Afghanistan.
- Surveys evaluated military characteristics, deployment experiences, experiences related to family/home life, and mental health.
- Regression analyses, chi-square and t-tests were employed.

Participants:

- 2,042 British armed forces personnel deployed to Iraq or Afghanistan participated in the study.
- Although demographic information was not provided, the authors noted that the service and rank of participants were similar to the total deployed population.

Limitations:

- This is a cross-sectional study; therefore, causal relationships cannot be inferred.
- Demographic and military characteristics were not reported.
- Measurement of mental health problems and problems/concerns related to home life was relatively limited.

Assessing Research that Works

Research Design and Sample					Quality Rating:
	Excellent (★★★)	Appropriate (★★★)	Limited (★★★)	Questionable (★★★)	
The design of the study (e.g., research plan, sample, recruitment) used to address the research question was...	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	★★★☆☆
Research Methods					Quality Rating:
	Excellent (★★★)	Appropriate (★★★)	Limited (★★★)	Questionable (★★★)	
The research methods (e.g., measurement, analysis) used to answer the research question were...	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	★★★☆☆
Limitations					Quality Rating:
	Excellent Minor Limitations (★★★)	Appropriate Few Limitations (★★★)	Limited Several Limitations (★★★)	Questionable Many/Severe Limitations (★★★)	
The limitations of this study are...	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	★★★☆☆
Implications					Quality Rating:
	Excellent (★★★)	Appropriate (★★★)	Limited (★★★)	Questionable (★★★)	
The implications of this research to programs, policies and the field, stated by the authors, are...	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	★★★☆☆
<input type="checkbox"/> Not applicable because authors do not discuss implications					
Overall Quality Rating					★★★☆☆