

Putting Research to Work for Military Families



Focus:
Army

Association Between Number of Deployments to Iraq and Mental Health Screening Outcomes in US Army Soldiers

Reger, M. A., Gahm, G. A., Swanson, R. D., & Duma, S. J. (2009). Association between number of deployments to Iraq and mental health screening outcomes in US Army soldiers. *The Journal of Clinical Psychiatry*, 70(9), 1266-1272.
doi:10.4088/jcp.08m04361

SUMMARY: Retrospective data were used to determine the association between multiple deployments to Iraq and post-deployment mental health problems (e.g., posttraumatic stress disorder [PTSD], depression, anxiety), as identified by mental health screening outcomes for U.S. Army soldiers with one or two deployments to Iraq. Multiple deployments were associated with post-deployment PTSD.

KEY FINDINGS:

- U.S. Army Active Duty Soldiers with two deployments had odds 66% to 77% higher for screening positive for PTSD than Soldiers with one deployment.
- Positive screenings for PTSD were more prevalent in single, younger, lower-enlisted Soldiers than those who were married, older, and in higher-enlisted rank.
- Male Soldiers and those who were separated were at significantly greater odds of hazardous alcohol consumption, compared to female Soldiers and those who were married.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMS:

Programs could:

- Provide information to those with depressive, anxiety, and PTSD symptoms as well as hazardous alcohol consumption to help educate Service members on the individual risk related to multiple deployments
- Educate and prepare Service members, spouses, and children for deployment, particularly if this is not the Service member's first deployment
- Offer classes that provide psychoeducation for military families about mental health issues related to deployment

IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICIES:

Policies could:

- Continue to support programs for identification and prevention of mental health disorders after Service members are discharged
- Recommend education of professionals that work with Service members and families in need of mental health care, especially after experiencing multiple deployments
- Continue to assess the mental and physical health of Service members post-deployment

This product is the result of a partnership funded by the Department of Defense between the Office of Military Community and Family Policy and the USDA's National Institute of Food and Agriculture through a grant/cooperative agreement with The University of Minnesota.



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METHODS

- Retrospective data from routine mental health screenings between September 2005 and April 2007 were examined for the current study.
- This article is focused on Active Duty, Army Service members with either one or two deployments to Iraq.
- Participants had to have been screened within at least 60 days post-deployment.

PARTICIPANTS

- The sample included 1,322 Soldiers; 661 with one deployment and 661 with two deployments.
- Most Service members were White (one deployment = 65%, two deployments = 66%) and male (one deployment = 90%, two deployments = 91%).
- The majority of Service members had a job classification of Non-Combat Arms (70%).

LIMITATIONS

- Participants were from one U.S. Army installation and may differ from Service members at other installations.
- Without a pretest it is impossible to determine whether there is a cumulative effect of deployment on PTSD (i.e., more time deployed lead to higher levels of PTSD symptoms), or if a second deployment serves as a unique instigator of PTSD (i.e., a second deployment is a unique predictor of PTSD above and beyond any effect of the first deployment)
- Only Service members with one or two deployments were assessed in this study; Service members experiencing more than two deployments might show a different pattern of association between number of deployments and mental health.

AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research could:

- Attempt to replicate the current findings, and consider third and fourth deployments, in an effort to determine if multiple deployments increase the risk of mental health problems
- Examine a sample of Active, Reserve, and National Guard components from multiple branches of the military to be able to generalize findings across all military branches
- Examine mental health longitudinally over multiple deployments to see how it changes over time

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