

Putting Research to Work for Military Families



Focus:
Army

Coming home may hurt: Risk factors for mental ill health in US reservists after deployment in Iraq

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SUMMARY: National Guard Soldiers may face post-deployment stressors affecting mental health that Active Duty Service members do not (e.g., job loss, lack of employer support, financial hardship, negative effects on co-workers). The effects of combat exposure and military and demographic characteristics on PTSD and depression were examined among National Guard Soldiers at 3 and 12 months post-deployment. Few Soldiers experienced stressors specific to the National Guard, but those that did were at greater risk for PTSD and depression at 3 and 12 months post-deployment.

KEY FINDINGS:

- Overall, rates of depression and PTSD increased between 3 and 12 months post-deployment, particularly among Soldiers who were younger and male.
- More Soldiers screened positive for PTSD than depression; within all groups beside women and officers, reported PTSD rates were 20% or more.
- Although only a minority of Soldiers reported experiencing difficulties specific to National Guard service at 12 months post-deployment, including financial hardship (20%), job loss (11%), lack of employer support (10%), and negative impacts on co-workers (18%), Soldiers that did experience any of those difficulties had much higher rates of depression and PTSD at both 3 and 12 months.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMS:

Programs could:

- Offer financial education programs and financial planning workshops for Service members, including National Guard members, and their families
- Provide classes and resources to help National Guard members search for jobs, succeed in interviews, and find networking opportunities post-deployment
- Disseminate information about the signs and symptoms of depression and PTSD, as well as where to get mental health support, among National Guard members and their families post-deployment

IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICIES:

Policies could:

- Recommend education about potential financial and career difficulties of National Guard members post-deployment for professionals working with military families
- Encourage collaboration with national businesses and companies to develop initiatives to increase hiring of Service members post-deployment
- Promote the development of financial and career resources for Service members that can be utilized off-base (e.g., online courses, phone consultation, downloadable cellphone applications)

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METHODS

- National Guard Soldiers who had been deployed in OEF/OIF once between 2005-2007 were recruited from two brigades via briefings while in garrison; the response rate was 63%.
- Soldiers completed surveys regarding combat exposure, PTSD, depression, and military and demographic characteristics at 3 and 12 months post-deployment.
- The impact of combat exposure and military and demographic characteristics on Soldiers' PTSD and depression rates at 3 and 12 months was examined.

PARTICIPANTS

- Participants included 4,034 National Guard Soldiers who reported only one deployment to Iraq from 2005-2007.
- Participants in the 3-month follow-up (n = 2539) were primarily 18-39 years of age (82%), male (95%), parents (55%), married (56%), and junior enlisted (53%) or non-commissioned officers (42%).
- Participants in the 12-month follow-up (n = 1495) were primarily 18-39 years of age (80%), male (95%), parents (60%), married (60%), and junior enlisted (42%) or non-commissioned officers (50%).
- No additional demographic information was provided.

LIMITATIONS

- Both financial hardship and employer support of participants' military affiliation were assessed via unvalidated, single-item measures.
- Without pre-deployment data regarding mental health or job status, it is unclear whether difficulties were related to deployment.
- Several untested variables may have influenced results (e.g., family stress, social support, work environment).

AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research could:

- Conduct a similar study using validated, multi-item measures of financial hardship and employer support, as well as including other measures of social support and stressors
- Utilize a longitudinal study design to examine the direction of effects between deployment, mental health concerns, and financial and career difficulties post-deployment among National Guard Soldiers
- Compare post-deployment difficulties and mental health among Active Duty and National Guard or Reserve Service members from all branches

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