

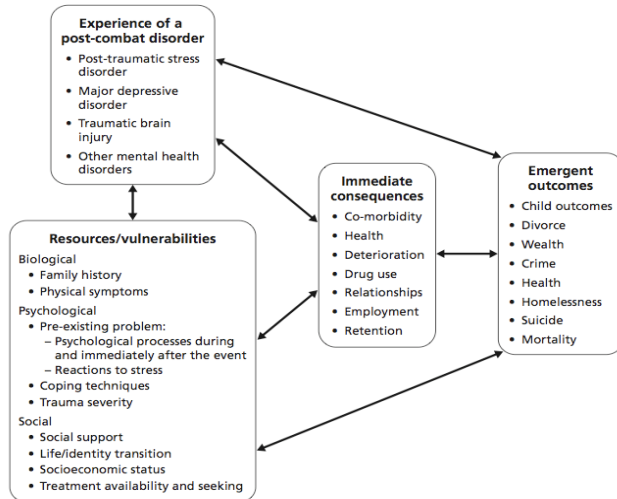
Celebrating the homecoming is not enough: The impact of post-traumatic stress disorder on veterans' families

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PUBLIC HEALTH CONCERN

- Since 2001, approximately 1.64 million troops have been deployed to Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF, Afghanistan) and Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF, Iraq) (Tanielian, 2008)
- Unprecedented number of psychiatric casualties (Tanielian, 2008)
- 26% of returning troops have symptoms of a mental health problem (Hoge et al., 2004)
- Combat exposure results in substantial morbidity lasting decades and accounts for significant dysfunction at the national level (e.g., PTSD, depression, substance abuse, job loss, divorce, partner abuse) (Prigerson et al., 2002)

CONSEQUENCES OF POST-COMBAT MENTAL HEALTH PROBLEMS (RAND CORP., 2008)



FINDINGS - PTSD IMPACT ON FAMILIES

- Research has focused primarily on Vietnam veterans and families, with little attention on more contemporary United States wars and conflicts including Desert Storm and OEF/OIF.
- Families with current PTSD show markedly elevated levels of severe and diffuse problems in marital and family adjustment, in parenting skills and in violent behavior (Jordan et al., 1992)
 - PTSD symptoms associated with higher rates of family reintegration problems. Veterans with current or recently separated partners -54% reported conflicts involving “shouting, pushing, or shoving,” & 28% reported that this partner was “afraid of them” (Sayers et al., 2009)
 - Families of PTSD sufferers experience more conflict and psychological distress that includes somatic symptoms, anxiety, insomnia, social dysfunction, depression and low self-esteem (Westerink et al., 1999)
 - Spousal abuse more prevalent and more severe in military families compared to civilian families (Griffin et al., 1988; Heyman et al., 1999; Rentz et al., 2006)

SUMMARY/RECOMMENDATIONS

There is little research available addressing the impact of combat-related PTSD and the impact on family functioning. While historical studies are useful to draw upon, more research is necessary to better understand the unique impact of OEF and OIF.

All servicemembers and families deserve the support necessary to recover and heal from the atrocities of war. It is easy to forget the realities of war: We celebrate the homecoming as the end of the struggle. In truth, as reflected in the literature, soldiers and their families not only struggle for the few months and years post-deployment but as seen in Vietnam veterans and their families, for decades to come. As our military and families continue to serve and suffer, we must honor their return home with the same vigor from which we sent them off to war. Soldiers and their families sacrifice and suffer enough. They deserve care and support, in policy and practice, to heal and recover from haunting psychological shrapnel.

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Supported in part by Project #T76 MC 00011 from the Maternal and Child Health Bureau (Title V, Social Security Act), Health Resources and