



IRAQ AND AFGHANISTAN VETERANS OF AMERICA

Mental Health Injuries *The Invisible Wounds of War* January 2008

At least 30 to 40% of Iraq veterans, or about half a million people, will face a serious psychological wound, including depression, anxiety, or PTSD.¹ Multiple tours and inadequate time at home between deployments increase rates of combat stress by 50%.²

- **Untreated mental health injuries can lead to unemployment, domestic violence, substance abuse, homelessness and suicide.**
 - Twenty percent of married troops in Iraq say they are planning a divorce.³
 - At least 40,000 Iraq and Afghanistan veterans have been treated at a VA hospital for substance abuse.⁴
 - The current Army suicide rate is the highest it has been in 26 years.⁵
 - Since the start of the wars, there have been a total of 147 military suicides in Iraq and Afghanistan.⁶

- **There are significant barriers to receiving mental health care in the Department of Defense (DOD) and Veterans Affairs (VA) system.⁷**
 - The DOD relies on an ineffective system of paperwork to conduct mental health evaluations, and access to mental health care is in short supply. As a result, less than 40% of troops with psychological wounds are getting treated.⁸
 - The number of licensed psychologists in the military has dropped by more than 20% in recent years.⁹ And only 10% of military psychiatrists, psychologists, and social workers are trained in the VA- and DOD-recommended treatments for PTSD.¹⁰
 - The VA has already given mental health diagnoses to over 100,000 Iraq and Afghanistan veterans, or 38% of new veterans who visited the VA for any reason.¹¹
 - The VA has consistently failed to accurately predict the number of returning veterans who would need care. In 2006, the VA expected only 2,900 new Iraq and Afghanistan veteran PTSD cases. The actual number was 17,827.¹²
 - The veterans' mental health system is overwhelmed by the influx; in April 2007, more than half of the 200-plus Vet Centers needed at least one more psychologist or therapist.¹³
 - A VA Undersecretary has admitted that, for many veterans, mental health and substance abuse treatment is “virtually inaccessible.”¹⁴

- **The stigma associated with psychological injuries is the most serious hurdle to getting Iraq and Afghanistan veterans the mental health care they need.**
 - More than half of soldiers and Marines in Iraq who test positive for a psychological injury are concerned that they will be seen as weak by their fellow servicemembers.¹⁵
 - Almost one in three worry about the effect of a mental health diagnosis on their career.¹⁶

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¹ Department of Veterans Affairs, *Fifth Annual Report of the Department of Veterans Affairs Undersecretary for Health's Special Committee on Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder*, r

² "Mental Health Advisory Team (MHAT) IV Brief," General James T. Conway, Commandant of the Marine Corps, April 18, 2007, p. 9: <http://www.militarytimes.com/static/projects/pages/mhativ18apr07.pdf>.

³ "Mental Health Advisory Team (MHAT) IV Final Report," November 17, 2006, p. 30:

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⁴ VHA Office of Public Health and Environmental Hazards, "Analysis of VA Health Care Utilization Among US Southwest Asian War Veterans," October 2007.

⁵ Pauline Jelinek, "Army Suicides Highest in 26 years," *Associated Press*, August 16, 2007:

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2007/08/15/AR2007081502027.html?hpid=topnews>.

⁶ "Global War on Terrorism—Operation Iraqi Freedom By Casualty Category Within Service, March 19, 2003 through August 4, 2007," Defense Manpower Data Center Statistical Information Division.

⁷ American Psychological Association Presidential Task Force on Military Deployment Services for Youth, Families and Service Members, "The Psychological Needs of U.S. Military Service Members and Their Families: A Preliminary Report," February 2007, p. 4:

<http://www.apa.org/releases/MilitaryDeploymentTaskForce.pdf>.

⁸ Department of Defense Task Force on Mental Health, "An achievable vision: Report of the Department of Defense Task Force on Mental Health," June 2007, p. 5: <http://www.ha.osd.mil/dhb/mhtf/MHTF-Report-Final.pdf>.

⁹ Dana Priest and Anne Hull, "The War Inside," *The Washington Post*, June 17, 2007:

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2007/06/16/AR2007061600866.html>.

¹⁰ Gregg Zoroya, "Psychologist: Navy faces crisis," *USA Today*, January 16, 2007:

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¹¹ VHA Office of Public Health and Environmental Hazards, "Analysis of VA Health Care Utilization Among US Southwest Asian War Veterans," October 2007.

¹² Rep. Michael Michaud, Dec. 1, 2006 letter to VA Secretary Jim Nicholson.



¹³ Gregg Zoroya, "Staffing at Vet Centers lagging," USA Today, April 19, 2007:

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¹⁴ Rich Daly, "New Freedom Commission Members Assess Report's Impact," *Psychiatric News* May 5,

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¹⁵ Mental Health Advisory Team IV Final Report, 17 November 2006.

¹⁶ Mental Health Advisory Team IV Final Report, 17 November 2006.