

Whether combat or peacekeeping, PTSD impacts veterans' well-being

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Deployed peacekeeping veterans with post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) have significant impairments in health-related quality of life according to research by Dr. J. Donald Richardson of The University of Western Ontario and his co-investigators.

The research, published this month in the *Canadian Journal of Psychiatry*, found anxiety disorders such as PTSD are associated with impaired emotional well-being, and this applies just as much to peacekeeping veterans as to combat veterans. "This finding is important to clinicians working with the newer generation of veterans, as it stresses the importance of including measures of quality of life when evaluating veterans to better address their rehabilitation needs," says Dr. Richardson. "It is not enough to measure symptom changes with treatment; we need to objectively assess if treatment is improving their quality of life and how they are functioning in their community."

Richardson is a consultant psychiatrist with the Operational Stress Injury Clinic at Parkwood Hospital, part of St. Joseph's Health Care, London and a psychiatry professor with the Schulich School of Medicine & Dentistry at Western. His team studied 125 male, deployed Canadian Forces peacekeeping veterans who were referred for a psychiatric assessment. The average age of these men was 41, and they averaged 16 years of military service. The most common military theatre in which they served were the Balkan states (Bosnia, Croatia, former Yugoslavia, and Kosovo), with 83 per cent having exposure to combat or a war zone.

While the relationship among PTSD and physical and mental health impairment is well developed in combat veterans, it is less studied among the deployed peacekeeping veteran population. Peacekeepers are exposed to traumatic events which they are helpless to prevent under the United Nations rules of engagement, which state soldiers must show restraint and neutrality. The feeling of being unable to control a situation at the time of trauma is an important risk factor for developing PTSD.

Source: University of Western Ontario

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