

PTSD less common than depression and alcohol misuse amongst UK troops

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Common mental disorders, such as depression and alcohol misuse, are the top psychological problems amongst UK troops post-deployment and not post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) as is widely believed. A study published today in the open access journal, *BMC Psychiatry*, also finds that reservists remain at special risk of operational stress injury.

Since the beginning of the Iraq conflict, over 100,000 UK Service personnel have been deployed to Iraq and Afghanistan. These personnel are at increased risk of operational stress injury, such as [mental health](#) problems. However a detailed clinical picture of their specific health needs has previously been lacking in the UK.

A study conducted by Dr Amy Iversen and colleagues from the King's Centre for Military Health Research and the Academic Centre for Defence Mental Health, Institute of Psychiatry, UK, reports that alcohol abuse is the most common mental health disorder amongst UK Service personnel returning from Iraq and Afghanistan, with disorders such as [depression](#) and anxiety being second most common. Dr Iversen said, "Although our perception is that PTSD symptoms are the main source of psychiatric illness in Service personnel, [alcohol misuse](#) and depressive disorders are actually much more common. Prevention and intervention in these areas should be high priority."

The London-based team set out to assess the prevalence and risk factors for common mental health disorders and PTSD amongst the UK military, as well as to compare the data with that from US forces. A total

of 821 participants undertook a structured telephone interview, which included the Patient Health Questionnaire.

They found that the prevalence of all common mental disorders was 27.2%, and PTSD symptoms, 4.8%. There were no substantial differences in the prevalence of PTSD symptoms between US and UK troops deployed to Iraq, which had been previously found. In UK troops, the most common diagnoses were alcohol abuse (18.0%) and depression/[anxiety](#) (13.5%). The data also indicated that reservists who deployed to Iraq are at greater risk of psychiatric injury than regular personnel, thus initiatives in the UK to provide enhanced assistance to reservists are still pertinent.

Dr Iversen concludes: "This research has helped build a detailed picture of the specific health needs of the UK military. These data should be particularly valuable for health service planners, providers and policy makers."

More information: The prevalence of common mental disorders and PTSD in the UK military: using data from a clinical interview-based study, Amy C Iversen, Lauren van Staden, Jamie Hacker Hughes, Tess Browne, Lisa Hull, John Hall, Neil Greenberg, Roberto J Rona, Matthew Hotopf, Simon Wessely and Nicola T Fear, *BMC Psychiatry* (in press), www.biomedcentral.com/bmcpsychiatry/

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