

Wives of deployed soldiers suffer more depression, sleep disorders

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(PhysOrg.com) -- Wives of soldiers deployed to Iraq and Afghanistan are more likely to be diagnosed with depression, anxiety, sleep disorders and other mental health conditions than women whose husbands are not deployed, according to a new study by researchers at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and the Uniformed Services University of the Health Sciences.

The study, published Jan. 14, 2010, in *The [New England Journal of Medicine](#)*, examined medical records of the wives of active duty U.S. Army personnel, comparing those whose husbands were serving abroad with those whose husbands were not deployed.

“This study confirms what many people have long suspected,” said Alyssa Mansfield, Ph.D., the study’s lead author, who conducted the research as a doctoral student at the UNC Gillings School of Global Public Health and is now a research epidemiologist at RTI International. “It provides compelling evidence that Army spouses are feeling the impact of recent deployments to Iraq and Afghanistan. The result is more depression, more stress, more sleepless nights.”

Understanding the scope of the problem can help the U.S. military better plan mental health prevention and treatment programs for the families of active duty personnel, she said. The study also may provide insight into families’ long-term medical needs.

The researchers examined medical records of more than 250,000 female

spouses of active duty Army personnel for outpatient care received between 2003 and 2006. About 31 percent of the wives' husbands were not deployed during that period, while about 34 percent were overseas for between one and 11 months and 35 percent were deployed for longer.

Although the three groups were similar in size, the study found almost 3,500 more diagnoses of mental health conditions among wives of soldiers deployed for less than a year, compared to the group of wives of non-deployed soldiers. Also, there were more than 5,300 additional diagnoses among wives of soldiers deployed for a year or longer.

Depression, anxiety, [sleep disorders](#) and acute stress reaction and adjustment disorders were the most commonly diagnosed conditions among both groups.

Spouses of deployed military personnel naturally fear for their loved ones' safety, Mansfield said. But they also often face challenges maintaining a household, coping as a single parent and dealing with the marital strain that comes with being apart for an uncertain amount of time.

"The majority of active duty soldiers are married, so we need to pay attention to the needs of their families, both short and long term," Mansfield said. "These findings should help the military medical system better plan [mental health](#) programs - not only for treatment, but also for support and prevention."

Provided by University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

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