

Sleep problems are common in US soldiers returning from wartime deployment

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There is an extremely high prevalence of sleep disturbances in U.S. soldiers returning from wartime deployment, according to a research abstract that will be presented Tuesday, June 8, 2010, in San Antonio, Texas, at SLEEP 2010, the 24th annual meeting of the Associated Professional Sleep Societies LLC.

Results indicate that 86 percent of participants had [sleep disturbances](#) upon return from deployment and 45 days later even though the majority of them had no signs of post-traumatic stress disorder or depression. Soldiers were more likely to have sleep disturbances if they had a personal history of [sleep problems](#), symptoms of [physical illness](#) or mild [traumatic brain injury](#).

"This is the first study to describe the prevalence of sleep disturbances at two different time points in soldiers returning from deployment without any apparent physical trauma from blasts or amputation," said principal investigator Major Betty Garner, PhD, a nurse scientist in the Nursing Research Office at Landstuhl Regional Medical Center in Landstuhl, Germany. "The most surprising finding from this small preliminary sample was the extremely high percentage of sleep disturbances in soldiers even 45 days after they returned from wartime deployment back to the United States - the safe zone."

Major Garner conducted the study as a doctoral student at the University of Washington, where she screened 58 U.S. soldiers between the ages of 23 and 58 years. Participants were assessed immediately upon return from deployment and 45 days later using the Pittsburgh Sleep Quality Index, Post Deployment Health Assessment, Perceived Stress Scale and Combat Exposure Scale.

The U.S. has deployed more than one million soldiers in support of overseas operations in Iraq and Afghanistan since 2001. The researchers

noted that the stress and uncertainty involved with deployment may have an impact on the sleep quality of soldiers.

According to Major Garner, previous research studies have shown disturbed sleep can be a symptom of existing medical conditions or a risk factor for the development of mental and physical health disorders. Therefore, the prompt treatment of sleep disturbances in soldiers returning from deployment might mitigate future physical and mental health problems.

"It is anticipated that this knowledge will facilitate the identification of those at risk for sleep disturbances and the provision of education for health care providers in the crucial role of sleep in our soldiers," said Major Garner.

Provided by American Academy of Sleep Medicine

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