



**Military Mission & Deployment:  
Impact on Service Members**

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**Disclaimer**

The ideas, attitudes, and opinions expressed herein are my own and do not necessarily reflect those of the US Army Medical Corps, the DoD, or other branches of the US government

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**Objectives**

1. Describe the range of psychosocial issues related to deployment and their potential effects on service member and family well-being
2. Highlight findings of Mental Health Assessment Team Studies of deployed Service Members
3. Briefly describe intervention approaches

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### Deployment: A Definition

A military operation in which the service member is sent from a home station, usually as part of a military unit to a distant location to accomplish a mission (e.g. combat operations, peacekeeping, humanitarian assistance)

Families not permitted

Deployments affect military members, families, communities, and the nation...

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### Deploying Soldiers & Their Families

- Worried about combat and terrorism
- Besieged by the Media
- Include National Guard and Reserves
- Are often Young/ Part of young families

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### Deploying Soldiers & Their Families

- Single Parents
- Dual military families
- Women
- Children: Parental absence
- Face Recurring Deployments/separations

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## Operational Stress Factors

**Environmental Stressors:** Weather, food, physical threats and vulnerabilities, fear of toxins, noise, communications

**Psychological stressors:** Reactions to individual and interpersonal events, separation from usual supports

**Moral Stressors:** Individual/unit sense of rightness or worthiness of the mission

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## Consequences of Deployment (+) Newby et al., *Military Medicine*, 2006

Made additional money

Experienced self-improvement

Improved marital relationship

Helped others; experienced different culture

Learned to appreciate USA

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## Consequences of Deployment (-) Newby et al., *Military Medicine*, 2006

\* Away from family missed events

\* Deterioration of marital/SO relationship

\* Personal change for the worse

\* Leadership Issues/Disappointment

\* No reason for the mission

\* Lost/wasted/mismanaged money

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## Compounding Factors

- \*Wounds and disabling injuries
- \*Uncertainty about recurring deployments/withdrawal
- \*Community attitudes/perceptions
- \*Changing political environment
- \*Career/Family issues
- \*Transitioning from the "cocoon" of support services

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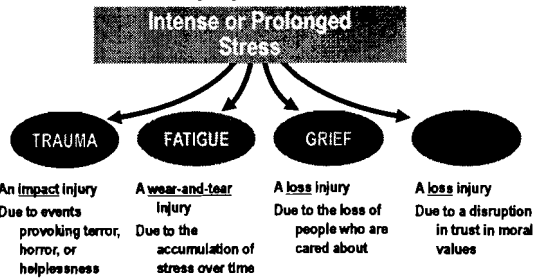
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## Deployment-Related Stress Injury Mechanisms



Briefing by Capt Koffman, 2008

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## Long-Term Impact of traumatic Experiences

May include:

- disappointment/resentment
- continued intrusive/arousal symptoms for some
- persistent sadness/resentment
- avoidance of triggers/reminders

For most: Characterized by a re-focus on life challenges & rebuilding of relationships

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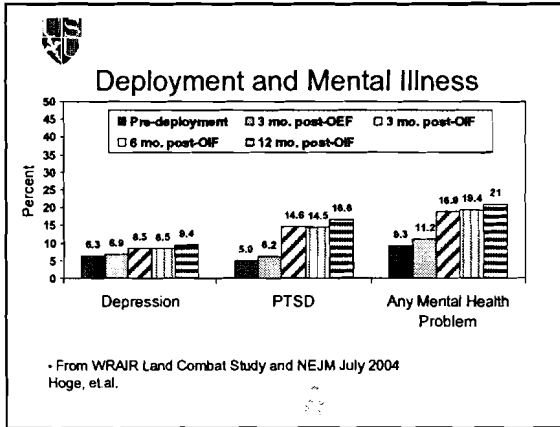
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**Assessment Considerations**

Pre-deployment history is an important consideration for post-deployment adjustment and recovery

Previous History of coping style/techniques, supports are important in ruling in/out or predicting potential contributions of alcohol/drugs, interpersonal stressors to deployment-related symptoms (somatic, mood, or anxiety) of distress

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**Assessment Considerations**

Deployment Experience and Exposures are also considerations

Not all deployments are the same

Total amounts of exposure to combat situations also appears to effect outcome for service members

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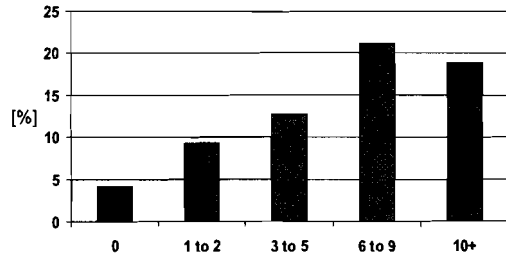
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### % Screening Positive for PTSD by combat exposure



From Hoge, et. al., NEJM July 2004

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### Enhancing the Recovery Environment

Recovery is promoted by

Finding benefit

Sense of relationship with the divine

Trauma exposure-type treatment and other forms of treatment

Social support

Welcoming social milieu

Seeing self as hero/survivor

Positive emotions

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### Treatment of Stress-related Illness

#### Psychotherapy

- CBT and Exposure-based therapies
- EMDR: effective—but why?

#### Pharmacotherapy

- SSRIs
- Other medications

#### Evidence Basis

Practice Guidelines (APA, VA/DoD)

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### **Management of Commonly Associated Illnesses**

**Substance misuse may contribute to the severity of overall symptoms and course of stress-related symptoms and illnesses**

**Treatment of co-morbid disorders should be initiated in parallel with treatment of PTSD or depression**

**Effects of injuries, pain, and pain management may complicate recovery**



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### **Summary**

**Military Operations present opportunities and challenges for those who participate**

**There are certainly positive effects but negative effects may include distress symptoms or illnesses**

**Mitigating the negative consequences of deployment involves investment of military leadership, medical professionals, family, and community**



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