



Department of
Veterans Affairs

Office of Public Affairs

Washington, DC 20420

(202) 461-7600

www.va.gov

News Release

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

November 10, 2011

**Risk Factors for Posttraumatic Stress Symptomatology
in Iraq and Afghanistan War Veterans Similar
to Those Observed in Vietnam Veterans**
Women Veterans Face New Risk Factors

WASHINGTON – Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) researchers from Boston report in the November issue of the *Journal of Abnormal Psychology* that risk factors for posttraumatic stress symptomatology (PTSS, short of full-blown posttraumatic stress disorder, or PTSD) in Afghanistan and Iraq Veterans were found to be similar to those observed in Vietnam Veterans. This suggests that there may be generalized mechanisms and pathways, common to different Veteran populations, through which risk factors contribute to PTSS.

“This research underscores the vital importance of VA’s outreach to Veterans, and their families, in helping them cope with posttraumatic stress,” said Secretary of Veterans Affairs Eric K. Shinseki.

The study subjects were a national sample of 579 (333 female and 246 male) Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans exposed to combat operations who had returned from deployment in the 12 months preceding the study. Using data from mailed surveys, the researchers assessed, as predictors of posttraumatic stress symptomatology, several risk factors which were previously documented among Vietnam Veterans. Examples include exposure to combat, predeployment stress exposure, dysfunctional family during childhood, lack of post-deployment emotional support from family and friends, and post-deployment stress exposure.

- More -

Risk Factors for PTSS 2/2/2

An interesting finding was that the women Veterans surveyed had new risk factors that were not seen in Vietnam-era women, such as exposure to combat and perceived threat. The authors ascribed that finding to the significantly different experiences of female Vietnam War and Afghanistan and Iraq war Veterans. Women Vietnam Veterans were primarily nurses or clerical staff. In contrast, women Veterans' roles in Afghanistan and Iraq have substantially expanded, with much higher levels of exposure to combat. Thus, women Veterans in these more recent conflicts may have more in common with their male contemporaries, in relation to PTSS risk, than with their female counterparts from the Vietnam era. However, in terms of postdeployment readjustment, family relationships during deployment appeared to play a more prominent role in female compared to male Veterans.

“Our findings highlight the impact and role of family disruptions in increasing the risk for posttraumatic stress symptomatology, particularly for female servicemembers,” said Dr. Dawne Vogt, the paper's lead author, from the VA Boston Healthcare System. “It is particularly noteworthy that women who experienced relationship problems during deployment, also reported less postdeployment social support.”

Veterans who believe they are experiencing symptoms of PTSS or PTSD may call the crisis hotline number at 1-800-273-TALK (8255) and then push 1 on their telephone keypad to reach a trained VA mental health professional who can assist the Veteran 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

#