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Why PTSD rates keep climbing

Posted: May 14, 2009 08:04 PM EDT

Updated: May 14, 2009 08:11 PM EDT



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SHREVEPORT, LA (KSLA) - The murders of five military personnel at Camp Liberty in Iraq Monday came as a surprise to some experts, who say post-traumatic stress typically does not turn violent.

"They don't aggravate other people. They don't hurt anybody. What they do is they absorb it and they carry it around with them for years, sometimes decades," explained Dr. Dean Edward Robinson. He's chief of the Mental Health Services Division at the Overton Brooks VA Medical Center in Shreveport.

Last month in Natchitoches Parish, a Louisiana Army National Guard soldier threatened suicide according to police at the scene, still reeling from the combat deaths of two close friends. Dr. Robinson added, "when they do get to that point, it's absolutely critical that they get help." And in that case, fellow soldiers rushed him to the VA hospital in Shreveport.

But fear prevents many soldiers from getting help. Just ask Overton Brook's Transition Patient Advocate Keith Fontenot. "I don't want folks to think I'm crazy. I don't want folks to know I'm seeing a mental health provider."

Staff members tell us that one of the most common comments from family and friends of PTSD patients is that they 'want the old person back that they knew and loved.' But experts tell us, that original person isn't coming back. The patient is forever changed. So the goal, according to counselors, is to meet somewhere in the middle.

KSLA News 12 is told that Overton Brooks has doubled the size of its Mental Health Services Division in the last year-and-a-half. And, Dr. Robinson suspects the rate of PTSD is higher than 20-percent. "Now if you include traumatic, mild brain injury, then the percentage can go up even higher, above 30-percent," calculated Dr. Robinson.

And Robinson said each deployment raises the risk of post-traumatic stress even further. Dr. Robinson said he's seen some soldiers serve as many as four tours of duty. He recalled one such case. "Despite having symptoms of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) his solution was simply to volunteer for another tour because over there, he said, 'I feel normal.'"

They also re-assure worried veterans about privacy. "What's discussed here stays here. If your unit finds out you've told 'em or your buddies told 'em," concluded Fontenot.

The VA even provides a suicide hotline to help veterans. That number is: 1-800-273-8255.

There's also new information about the soldier accused of shooting those 5-military personnel at Camp Liberty. CBS News reports that the suspect, Army Sargent John Russell of Sherman, Texas may have become angry when doctors at a stress clinic said they did not believe he suffered from combat stress. That's according to a member of Russell's unit.

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