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## Army wives with deployed husbands suffer higher mental health issues

By Greg Zoroya, USA TODAY

WASHINGTON — Wives of soldiers sent to war suffered significantly higher rates of mental health issues than those whose husbands stayed home, according to the largest study ever done on the emotional impact of war on Army wives.

Those rates were higher among wives whose husband deployed longer than 11 months, according to findings that will be published Thursday in the *New England Journal of Medicine*.

For example, wives of soldiers deployed to Iraq or Afghanistan between one and 11 months had an 18% higher rate of suffering from depression than those whose husbands did not go to war, the study shows. When soldiers were deployed 11 months or longer, their wives had a 24% higher rate of suffering from depression.

The study looked at more than 250,000 Army wives, of which two-thirds had husbands who fought in Iraq and Afghanistan between 2003 and 2006.

"Mental health effects of current operations are extending beyond soldiers and into their immediate families," the study concludes.

"There's a very clear relationship between deployment and these mental health diagnoses in these women," said Alyssa Mansfield, an epidemiologist with RTI International, a non-profit research organization, and lead author on the study. "We find that these women are experiencing greater mental health problems and there's a need for services for them."

The study shows again "that when a servicemember deploys, the entire family deploys," said Air Force Maj. April Cunningham, a Pentagon spokeswoman.

She identified several programs designed to help families including Military OneSource, a hotline — 800-342-9647 — and Web-based program that provides counseling.

The study likely underestimates the mental impact of deployments on wives, Cunningham and Mansfield said, in part because of the continuing stigma within the military about seeking mental health care.

"We know there's a stigma," Deborah Mullen, wife of Joint Chiefs of Staff Chairman Adm. Michael Mullen, said at a suicide conference Wednesday. "Spouses tell me all the time that they would like to get mental health assistance, but they really believe — as incorrect as this is ... that if they seek help, that it will have a negative impact on their spouse's military career."

The results of the *Journal* study reflect findings in a RAND Corp. study of military children, said Joyce Raezer, director of the National Military Family Association, which sponsored the study. Children of deployed parents suffer more emotional issues, particularly if separations are long or the parent at home is troubled, says the study, which was published last month.

"What worries me (is that) ... kids do worse when Mom does worse," Raezer said. "So if spouses are more likely to need mental health services as deployment times increase, than their kids are more at risk."

Researchers in the *Journal* study identified how many additional cases of mental health diagnoses among wives were generated by the deployments of their husbands, findings which they said could help the Pentagon budget for additional mental health resources for families.

"What they should take away from this is that we may need to devote more services for the prevention of some of these problems," Mansfield said.



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