
Medical journal warns of 'tidal wave' of mental trauma among servicemen

Medical services face a tidal wave of servicemen suffering from mental trauma as a result of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, a leading medical journal has warned.

By Thomas Harding, Defence Correspondent

Published: 7:30AM BST 13 May 2010

The Lancet report said the “absolute number” of troops needing treatment was increasing as a result of more people being deployed on operations.

There are an estimated 180,000 troops who have served in Iraq and Afghanistan and the Lancet research has shown that up to 4 per cent suffer from Post Traumatic Stress Disorder.

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Most PTSD victims present with the illness within a decade which on current figures would mean that up 7,000 troops will become sufferers.

Psychiatrists have warned that mental health services will come under severe strain as increasing number of service personnel present with mental health problems.

Prof Simon Wessely, King's College London's Military Health Research centre, and co-author of the report, said: “There are going to be more and more people with mental health problems coming back from Iraq and Afghanistan.

“Services that care for veterans are going to get busier and are going to get a higher workload. That's probably the single most important thing we need to get across. We will see more people but it does not mean a catastrophic decline in mental health.

“The numbers will increase as long as the deployment continues.”

He added that even a “steady stream” of victims could prove overwhelming for mental health services.

The mental health charity Combat Stress has already reported a 66 per cent increase in patients in the last five years with a record 1,300 veterans treated this year.

Dr Walter Bussutil, the charity's director of medical services, said: “We had better watch out because we are going to have

more people to deal with. The numbers are going to be vast

"I think there will be a large number of people out there who will present with PTSD as a result of the Iraq and Afghan war within the next decade."

The Lancet survey of just under 10,000 troops also found that more than 50 per cent in Afghanistan had seen comrades killed or wounded or had come under fire.

The report said with more forces being deployed on operations "the number of people needing help will inevitably increase".

"This finding should not be taken as evidence that the situation is getting worse, but it does mean that military mental health services, service charities, and the UK national health system should anticipate a steady increase in the number of serving and ex-service personnel needing support."

The study also found that 13 per cent of participants reported misusing alcohol after returning home.

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