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New Study of the Mental Health Needs of Post-Combat Military Servicemembers Shows Only Half Are Getting the Treatment They Need

Joining Forces America, a study sponsored by Capella University, is featured on a website that allows the public to share their ideas on how to best welcome home servicemembers

MINNEAPOLIS--(BUSINESS WIRE)--Approximately 50 percent of military servicemembers returning from combat duty report experiencing a mental health issue, but only half of them have sought treatment. That is according to a recently released study titled [Joining Forces America \(www.joiningforcesamerica.org\)](http://www.joiningforcesamerica.org), a comprehensive survey of more than 1,000 military servicemembers, family members of servicemembers, and mental health professionals. The study, which was sponsored by [Capella University \(www.capella.edu\)](http://www.capella.edu), an [accredited online university](#)* that has been recognized as a Yellow Ribbon institution for its support of the military, is a follow-up to a similar study conducted in 2008 on the mental health issues impacting our returning troops and how prepared the rest of us are to welcome them home. Approximately 13 percent of Capella students are affiliated with the military.

The survey results showed some modest gains since the 2008 study:

- Among servicemembers, there is a slight increase in perceptions of both the quality of and access to mental health services. Among mental health providers, this increase is more pronounced.
- Servicemembers are slightly more likely to seek mental health assistance than they were in 2008.
- Mental health professionals believe that care is more accessible and of higher quality.

However, it is still the case that not nearly enough servicemembers are getting the level of mental health care they need, nor are their family and friends adequately prepared to assist them.

- Of those servicemembers reporting experiencing a mental health issue but who did not seek treatment, 46 percent reported that they were concerned that seeking mental health treatment would have a negative effect on his or her career.
- Of family members of servicemembers experiencing mental health issues, more than 60 percent reported that it was somewhat or very unlikely that the servicemember would seek professional help.
- According to servicemembers, only 1 percent believe their friends, neighbors and others are “very prepared” to support them in their post-combat transition, and only 15 percent reported that mental health professionals are “very prepared” to assist them.

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“Our biggest insight from this survey is that despite increased national attention on the mental health needs of returning combat veterans, too many servicemembers aren’t getting the help they need. And families are struggling, too,” said Capella University Interim President Deborah Bushway. “The conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan have lasted far longer than the American involvement in World War II, and they’ve challenged our armed forces in unprecedented ways. When servicemembers return from battle, many are clearly struggling to resume their ‘normal’ lives.”

To help achieve that quest to resume their normal lives, servicemembers who participated in the study identified the following strategies they use to help ease their post-combat transition:

- Stay in touch with fellow servicemembers
- Keep busy with activities
- Continue your education
- Find ways to use leadership skills, such as volunteering
- Focus on a new career
- Talk with friends and family about combat experiences

Those servicemembers also offered the following suggestions for how family, friends and coworkers can help with their readjustment:

- Respect my privacy and how much I want to share
- Be available to listen or talk
- Include me in events and activities, so I can re-connect
- Offer to help at home so I can focus on myself
- Verbally recognize my service

The full Joining Forces America report can be viewed at www.joiningforcesamerica.org. That website also allows visitors to post their own ideas and suggestions for how we can all help returning service members readjust to life back home.

To help build awareness and understanding of the mental health needs of returning servicemembers, Capella University produced *The Next Mission*, a documentary on the invisible wounds of combat duty. The film aired nationally on PBS, and earned a Regional Emmy Award. The Next mission can be viewed in its entirety at <http://www.capella.edu/military/thenextmission.aspx>.

About Capella University

Capella University (www.capella.edu) is an accredited online university* that has built its reputation by providing quality online degree programs for working adults. Nearly 80 percent of Capella students are currently enrolled in master's, specialist, or doctoral degree programs in business, counseling, education, health administration, human resource management, human services, information technology, nonprofit management and leadership, nursing, psychology, public administration, public health, public safety, and social work. Capella also offers bachelor's degree programs in business, information technology, nursing, psychology, public administration, and public safety. Within those areas, Capella currently offers 136 graduate and undergraduate specializations and 17 certificate programs. More than 39,000 learners were enrolled as of Dec. 31, 2010, from all 50 states and 59 other countries. Capella is committed to providing high-caliber academic excellence and pursuing balanced business growth. Founded in 1993, Capella University is a wholly-owned subsidiary of Capella Education Company, headquartered in Minneapolis. For more information, please visit <http://www.capella.edu> or call 1.888.CAPELLA (227.3552).

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