Bringing the War Home: Understanding and Responding to Domestic Violence in Military Families

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Active Duty Service Members

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Branch</th>
<th>Total Number</th>
<th>Enlisted</th>
<th>Officers</th>
<th>Women</th>
<th>Men</th>
<th>Civilian</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Army</td>
<td>541,291</td>
<td>438,670</td>
<td>98,126</td>
<td>75,507</td>
<td>465,784</td>
<td>299,644</td>
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<td>Marines</td>
<td>195,338</td>
<td>173,474</td>
<td>21,864</td>
<td>13,493</td>
<td>181,845</td>
<td>20,484</td>
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<td>Navy</td>
<td>317,237</td>
<td>260,253</td>
<td>52,546</td>
<td>51,385</td>
<td>265,852</td>
<td>179,293</td>
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<td>Air Force</td>
<td>333,772</td>
<td>265,519</td>
<td>64,290</td>
<td>63,310</td>
<td>270,462</td>
<td>174,754</td>
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<td>Coast Guard</td>
<td>42,357</td>
<td>6,790</td>
<td>6,790</td>
<td>35,567</td>
<td>7,057</td>
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<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>1,429,995</td>
<td>1,137,916</td>
<td>236,826</td>
<td>210,485</td>
<td>1,219,510</td>
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Reserve/Guard Members

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Branch</th>
<th>Total</th>
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<td>Army National Guard</td>
<td>358,200</td>
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<tr>
<td>Army Reserve</td>
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<td>Marine Corps Reserve</td>
<td>39,600</td>
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<td>Navy Reserve</td>
<td>62,500</td>
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<tr>
<td>Air National Guard</td>
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<td>Air Force Reserve</td>
<td>70,880</td>
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<tr>
<td>Coast Guard Reserve</td>
<td>9,000</td>
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<tr>
<td>Total Reserve Component</td>
<td>850,880</td>
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Decade (Plus) of War

• Since the U.S. went to war in Afghanistan in 2001 & Iraq in 2003, over 2.5 million service members have served in the Iraq (OIF) and Afghanistan (OEF) wars.
• Over 500,000 National Guard and Reservists have served.
• Service members leave behind spouses, partners, and children who all experience effects of the separation and trauma, as well as the difficulty reintegrating.

Decade of War, cont.

• Most service members have served multiple deployments.
  – 1/3 have deployed more than once. Approximately 400,000 have deployed more than 3 times. 37,000 have deployed more than 5 times.
• Most of war characterized by increased OPTEMPO; ie, longer deployments, shorter breaks = more time in combat, less time with family; less recovery time.
• Almost 5,000 American service members killed in Iraq. Approximately 2,000 killed in Afghanistan.
• Those who do come home often have difficulty adjusting and suffer from symptoms related to the trauma exposure.

Understanding PTS(D), TBI, and Combat Stress
**Impact of Combat**

- Most people returning from war zones will have stress reactions and will need to readjust to being home.
- It is often difficult to transition from battlemind (on guard, protective) to civilian (relaxed, connected) mindset.
- Studies show that men who served in combat roles in Iraq and Afghanistan were 53% more likely to commit violent offences than their fellow soldiers in non-combat roles.
- Men who had multiple traumatic combat experiences had a 70-80% higher risk of committing violent crime.
- Male combat veterans are approximately four times more likely to perpetrate domestic violence than other men.
- However, it's important to remember that most returning service members do not become violent.

**What is PTS(D)?**

- Post-Traumatic Stress (Disorder)
  
  The person experienced, witnessed, or was confronted with an event or events that involved actual or threatened death or serious injury, or a threat to the physical integrity of self or others; and the person's response involved intense fear, helplessness, or horror.
- Not a disorder, a normal reaction to a very traumatic experience.

**Who Experiences PTSD?**

Survivors of ...

- Child abuse
- Sexual assault
- Domestic violence
- Auto Accidents
- Natural disasters
- Crime/violence
- Combat
Symptoms of PTSD

- Re-experiencing
- Avoidance
- Numbing
- Hyper-vigilance
- Hyper-arousal

PTSD Prevalence

- As of last year, the VA’s health system had seen more than 270,000 Iraq and Afghanistan veterans for potential PTSD.
- DoD estimates that at least 20% of Iraq and Afghanistan veterans have PTSD.
- 30% of the 834,463 OIF/OEF veterans treated at VA hospitals and clinics between 2001-2011 were diagnosed with PTSD.
- About 50% of those with PTSD do not seek treatment.

PTSD and Reintegration

- PTSD symptoms are often exposed during reintegration—period after military personnel returns home from combat.
- Military personnel and families may mistake PTSD symptoms for common reintegration issues, until symptoms escalate.
- Family members may be confused, afraid, ashamed, uncertain how to help.
- PTSD may be compounded by reintegration issues, and vice versa.
Impact of Guilt and Shame

- Recent studies have found that PTSD is caused more by internal conflict and guilt ("moral injury") than by fear.
- PTSD that is linked to a moral injury is typically more severe than PTSD that results from being part of a near-death experience.
- Veterans who experience a moral injury may be more likely to commit suicide, or exhibit violent tendencies towards family members.

What is a TBI?

- Traumatic Brain Injury
  - Traumatically induced disruption of brain function/disturbance of consciousness, resulting in impairment of cognitive, emotional, and physical functioning.
  - TBI can cause changes in a person’s ability to think, control emotions, walk, speak, see, hear, control impulses, and communicate with others.

TBI Prevalence

- 10-20% of Iraq/Afghanistan veterans have a TBI. Among wounded troops, the rate is 33%.
- Blasts are the leading cause (69%) of TBIs in current Iraq and Afghanistan conflicts.
- Many TBIs are caused by repeated, smaller incidents, not one large, dramatic incident.
- Effects of concussion from blast injuries are not always immediately recognized and often go untreated.
Substance Use

- Some combat veterans self-medicate with alcohol or drugs to numb the thoughts, feelings, memories.
- Some combat veterans with substance abuse problems may be violent and some may not.
- Alcohol or drug use does not cause domestic violence, but may intensify it.
- If violence is already present, substance use may pose an increased lethality risk.

The Ultimate Loss

- A U.S. military service member commits suicide every 65 minutes (about 22 a day).
- Over 7,000 veterans commit suicide every year.
- Since 2011, there have been more suicides in the military than combat deaths.
- Record high in 2012:
  182 in Army, 60 in Navy, 59 in Air Force, and 48 in Marine Corps.

Why?

- Repeat combat exposure increases the risk of suicide, especially when veteran is experiencing guilt and shame.
- PTSD, depression, substance abuse, and TBIs also increase suicide risk.
- Military family members are also at a high risk of suicide, due to untreated and often unnoticed PTSD and depression.
Domestic Violence in the Military

- Difficult to determine exact numbers.
- 1 in 4 women will be abused by an intimate partner at some point in her life.
- In FY2011, reports made to Family Advocacy Programs (all branches of service):
  - 19,277 reports of spousal abuse
  - 15,081 reports of child abuse
  - 867 reports of abuse of former spouse/intimate partner abuse (many likely reporting to civilian authorities)
  - 18 fatalities

Domestic Violence in the Military

- Domestic abuse reported to Family Advocacy Programs (FAPs)
  - 94% of abusers were male
  - 81% of abusers were active duty
- Cases involved:
  - Physical abuse: 87%
  - Sexual Abuse: 2%
  - Emotional Abuse or Neglect: 11%
- The most common rank of the abuser was E-4 to E-6

Domestic Violence in Military Families

- Increased risk for violence and lethality due to:
  - Perpetrator's access to weapons
  - Cultural influence
  - Isolation of victim
  - Perpetrator's mental health and substance use
  - Perceived lack of resources
Barriers for Military Families

- Fear of repercussions
- Isolation
- Lack of confidentiality
- Lack of collaboration between civilian and military resources
- Distrust of non-military service providers
- Repeated trauma exposure

DV or PTSD: Recognizing and Responding

Domestic Violence Facts

- Perpetrators feel entitled to use coercive tactics and violence to gain and reinforce dominance.
- Perpetrators will use as much violence as they see necessary to maintain their power and control.
- Domestic violence is not caused by the perpetrator's culture, anger, the use of alcohol or drugs, financial struggles, or by stress.
- Domestic violence is not caused by combat exposure.
- Violence is a choice the perpetrator makes.
Understanding PTSD and Link to Domestic Violence

- Most returning military members do not become abusive.
- But, veterans with PTSD have been found to have higher incidence of violence against family members.
- Veterans with PTSD also report higher rates of general violent behaviors and aggression.
- 53.2% of OIF/OEF veterans who received care at one VA Health Clinic reported at least one act of violence against an intimate partner in the last 4 months (Jakupcak, et al., 2007).

PTSD or DV?

**PTSD Symptoms**
- Avoidance & isolation
- Hyper vigilance
- Irritability
- Increased anger
- Re-experiencing traumatic event
- Shame and remorse

**DV Behaviors**
- Isolating victim
- Stalking & surveillance
- Intimidation & threats
- Righteous rage (entitlement)
- Emotional abuse, economic abuse, coercion
- Minimizing, denying, blaming

PTSD or DV?

**PTSD**
- Perpetrator may be unaware that he is using violence; may be re-experiencing combat
- Stand alone violence with no pattern of coercive or abusive behavior
- Violence may be directed at multiple people
- Other power and control tactics not present
- Perpetrator is remorseful and takes responsibility for his actions

**DV**
- Perpetrator is using violence to gain or maintain control over his partner
- Other power and control tactics are present, and were likely present before and during the deployment
- Violence is directed almost exclusively at intimate partner
- Perpetrator minimizes, makes excuses for, denies, and blames the victim or others for his violence
Domestic Violence is all about context, context, context.

What do you think?
Before being deployed, husband was very jealous. During the deployment, he called his wife several times a day and became very upset if she did not answer. When he returned home, during an argument, he pinned her up against a wall and threatened to kill her if she ever left him. He blamed her for making him get this angry.

What do you think?
Wife reports that her husband was never violent before he deployed. He was not controlling. One night, he began screaming in his sleep, reached over, and grabbed her neck. She fought him off and was able to wake him. When he realized what he had done, he felt ashamed and disgusted with himself.
What do you think?

Wife reports that her husband has become increasingly irritable since returning from his third deployment. He has distanced himself from family and friends and gets angry easily. He constantly accuses her of cheating and interrogates her anytime she leaves the house. She states that he has always been very jealous and somewhat controlling, but never to this extent.

Importance of Context

- What is the perpetrator's intent?
- What is the meaning of the violence to the victim?
- What is the effect of the violence on the victim?

Important to Remember

- We can't know for sure the full cause of the violence.
- Every report of violence should be taken seriously.
- Victims should always be believed, supported, and receive information about advocacy services.
- Treatment for PTSD or TBI will not cure domestic violence behaviors.
- Batterers' intervention will not cure PTSD, TBI, or depression.
Barriers to Collaboration

**Misconceptions from Advocacy Community About the Military**

- Service members are all controlling and violent.
- Military encourages members to be violent toward their partners.
- Victims would be better off without the military.
- It's too intimidating to reach out to the military.

**Misconceptions from the Military About DV/Advocacy Community**

- All domestic violence committed by combat vets is caused by PTSD, TBI, or combat stress.
- Advocacy services are not necessary.
- The only interventions needed are through the chain of command.
- Advocates don’t care about the military.

It's Her Life, Too.

**Military Spouse’s View**

- The military is part of her life, too.
- Military spouses often form very close bonds with other spouses.
- Other military families may be the only support system she has.
- She may feel guilty leaving or reporting him after he returns home from combat.
- A military spouse may have difficulty trusting a civilian advocate.
- It's important to honor and respect her experience and views—whether pro-military or not.
Resources

- National Domestic Violence National Hotline:
  1-800-799-SAFE (7233)
- National Sexual Assault National Hotline:
  1-800-656-HOPE (4673)
- Safe Helpline (for DoD service members and civilians)
  1-877-995-5247
  Call, text, or chat online
  [https://www.safehelpline.org](https://www.safehelpline.org)
- Not Alone, national non-profit organization that provides confidential, no-cost programs and services to warriors and their families facing post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and other invisible wounds of war.

Goodbye, for now.

Questions?

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