

Child abuse contributes the most to mental health problems in the Canadian Armed Forces

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Table 1. Military and Sociodemographic Descriptives of Serving Regular Force Personnel with (Unweighted $n = 3385$; Weighted $n = 29,040$) and without (Unweighted $n = 3,311$; Weighted $n = 35,340$) an Afghanistan-Related Deployment in 2013.

Characteristic	Regular Force Personnel					
	Without Afghanistan-Related Deployments		With Afghanistan-Related Deployments		Overall	
	Weighted %	95% CI	Weighted %	95% CI	Weighted %	95% CI
Sex ^a						
Male	83.8	82.6 to 85.1	89.0	87.9 to 90.1	86.1	85.3 to 87.0
Female	16.2	14.9 to 17.4	11.0	9.9 to 12.1	13.9	13.0 to 14.7
Age, y ^a						
17-24	21.5	20.0 to 23.1	3.3	2.6 to 4.0	13.3	12.4 to 14.2
25-34	39.1	37.5 to 40.8	35.8	34.3 to 37.3	37.6	36.5 to 38.8
35-44	20.5	19.1 to 22.0	36.4	34.9 to 37.9	27.7	26.7 to 28.8
45-60	18.8	17.7 to 20.0	24.4	23.1 to 25.8	21.4	20.5 to 22.2
Rank ^a						
JNCM	60.7	60.3 to 61.0	48.2	47.7 to 48.7	55.0	54.8 to 55.2
SNCM	17.4	17.1 to 17.8	32.2	31.7 to 32.6	24.1	23.8 to 24.3
Officer	21.9	21.6 to 22.2	19.6	19.3 to 19.9	20.9	20.8 to 21.0
Service ^a						
Navy	20.0	18.7 to 21.4	13.8	12.5 to 15.0	17.2	16.3 to 18.2
Army	43.7	42.0 to 45.5	64.6	62.9 to 66.2	53.1	51.9 to 54.3
Air Force	36.2	34.6 to 37.9	21.7	20.2 to 23.1	29.6	28.6 to 30.7
Marital status ^a						
Married/common	58.1	56.3 to 59.8	74.7	73.3 to 76.2	65.6	64.5 to 66.7
Single	35.4	33.7 to 37.1	16.5	15.3 to 17.8	26.9	25.8 to 28.0
Widowed/separated/divorced	6.5	5.6 to 7.4	8.7	7.8 to 9.7	7.5	6.9 to 8.2
Education ^a						
< Secondary school graduation	3.5	2.7 to 4.2	4.9	4.2 to 5.6	4.1	3.6 to 4.6
Secondary school graduation	22.0	20.5 to 23.6	30.2	28.6 to 31.9	25.7	24.6 to 26.9
Some postsecondary	8.6	7.6 to 9.6	9.2	8.2 to 10.2	8.9	8.2 to 9.6
Postsecondary graduation	65.9	64.2 to 67.6	55.7	54.1 to 57.4	61.3	60.1 to 62.5
Racial background ^a						
White	87.7	86.3 to 89.0	93.1	92.2 to 94.0	90.1	89.3 to 90.9
Nonwhite	7.6	6.6 to 8.6	4.1	3.4 to 4.9	6.1	5.4 to 6.7
Multiple	4.7	3.9 to 5.5	2.8	2.2 to 3.3	3.8	3.3 to 4.3
Household income ^a						
<\$40,000	5.9	5.0 to 6.8	0.8	0.5 to 1.1	3.6	3.1 to 4.1
\$40,000-\$59,999	13.8	12.4 to 15.1	4.1	3.4 to 4.9	9.4	8.6 to 10.2
\$60,000-\$79,999	23.1	21.5 to 24.8	22.1	20.7 to 23.5	22.7	21.6 to 23.8
\$80,000-\$99,999	16.0	14.6 to 17.3	18.9	17.5 to 20.2	17.3	16.3 to 18.2
\$100,000 or more	41.3	39.5 to 43.0	54.2	52.6 to 55.8	47.1	45.9 to 48.3
Difficulty meeting basic expenses						
Yes	6.1	5.1 to 7.0	6.1	5.3 to 7.0	6.1	5.5 to 6.7
No	93.9	93.0 to 94.9	93.9	93.0 to 94.7	93.9	93.2 to 94.5
Other deployments outside North America ^a						
Yes	28.7	27.1 to 30.4	56.6	54.9 to 58.2	41.3	40.2 to 42.4
No	71.3	69.6 to 72.9	43.4	41.8 to 45.1	58.7	57.6 to 59.8

CI, confidence interval; JNCM, junior noncommissioned member; SNCM, senior noncommissioned member.

^aSignificant at $P < .01$ when using a Wald chi-square test comparing Regular Force personnel who deployed in support of the mission in Afghanistan with those who did not.

Military and Sociodemographic Descriptives of Serving Regular Force Personnel with (Unweighted n $\frac{1}{4}$ 3385; Weighted n $\frac{1}{4}$ 29,040) and without (Unweighted n $\frac{1}{4}$ 3,311; Weighted n $\frac{1}{4}$ 35,340) an Afghanistan-Related Deployment in 2013. Credit: David Boulos, M.Sc. and Mark A. Zamorski, M.D., MHSA

Among the mental health disorders reported in the Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) in 2013, 8.7% of the burden of illness was attributed to Afghanistan-related military service while 28.7% was attributed to past child abuse experiences. This research is out today in *The Canadian Journal of Psychiatry*, published by the Canadian Psychiatric Association (CPA) in partnership with SAGE Publishing.

Examining the 2013 Canadian Forces Mental Health Survey (CFMHS), which includes data from 6,696 fulltime personnel, researchers David Boulos and Mark A Zamorski found:

- 18.4% of respondents who were deployed to Afghanistan reported that in 2012, they had significant symptoms of one or more of the following six common mental [disorders](#): generalized anxiety disorder, [panic disorder](#), thoughts about suicide, post-traumatic stress disorder, alcohol abuse or dependence, or had experienced a major depressive episode.
- Respondents that were deployed to Afghanistan were 2.4% more likely to have experienced child abuse than those that were not deployed to Afghanistan.
- The Afghanistan-related deployments accounted for 34.7% of the burden of panic disorder, 32.1% of post-traumatic stress disorder, and 9.3% of major depression.
- Child abuse accounted for 48.4% of the cases of alcohol

dependency, 37.1 % of post-traumatic stress disorders, and 33.8% of the cases of suicidal ideation.

- Together, Afghanistan-related deployments and child abuse experiences accounted for 38% of any mental disorder, 58.5% of post-traumatic stress disorders, 51.4% of panic disorders, and 37% of major depressive episodes.

"Our findings indicate that a significant proportion of past-year mental disorders in the CAF, particularly post-traumatic stress disorder and panic disorder, were attributed to Afghanistan-related deployments," wrote Boulos and Zamorski. "However, the contribution from [child abuse](#) experiences was much larger. These findings speak to the need for robust mental health systems that target the full range of determinants of [mental health](#) in military personnel, both in times of war and in times of peace."

More information: "Contribution of the Mission in Afghanistan to the Burden of Past-year Mental Disorders in Canadian Armed Forces Personnel, 2013" *Canadian Journal of Psychiatry*, 2016.

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