

Combat exposure may jeopardize the behavioral health of women in the military

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In a recent study, combat exposure among Army enlisted women was associated with an increased likelihood of developing behavioral health problems post-deployment, including post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), depression, and at-risk drinking.

In the study, which was funded by the National Institute on Drug Abuse, 42,397 Army enlisted [women](#) who returned from Afghanistan or Iraq were assigned combat exposure scores of 0, 1, 2, or 3+ based on their self-reported experiences. Importantly, any report of combat exposure among Army women was associated with an increased likelihood of each post-deployment behavioral health problem (PTSD, depression, and at-risk drinking), suggesting that the impact of even one exposure event should not be overlooked.

The magnitude of the association between combat exposure and PTSD was most striking. Active duty and National Guard/Reserve women with combat exposure scores of 3+ had at least a 20 times higher likelihood of screening positive for PTSD compared with women with no combat exposure.

"Our findings suggest that injuries, assaults, and combat exposures experienced by women during deployment may have an additive, negative effect on their post-deployment behavioral health," said Dr. Rachel Sayko Adams, lead author of the *Journal of Traumatic Stress* study. "Ongoing force-wide screening for [behavioral health](#) problems should be coupled with development and evaluation of programs to

improve the psychological wellbeing of the Armed Forces."

More information: The Association of Combat Exposure With Postdeployment Behavioral Health Problems Among U.S. Army Enlisted Women Returning From Afghanistan or Iraq. *Journal of Traumatic Stress*. [DOI: 10.1002/jts.22121](https://doi.org/10.1002/jts.22121)

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