

For many female soldiers PTSD is what their brains bring home from war



For July 4th my original intent was to post on **female soldiers who suffer from PTSD** as a result of their military experiences and its implication for brain performance.

As I launched into it, it quickly became apparent that this is a topic that deserves more than one post. Consequently, this first post will be about what is PTSD and how female soldiers encounter PTSD brain trauma during their military service.

PTSD stands for *post traumatic stress disorder*. It is only because Vietnam War veterans engaged in a prolonged battle for recognition by the military and VA hospitals that today we have a depth of knowledge of brain trauma as a consequence of war and other traumatic events.

PTSD is generally accepted as an extreme anxiety disorder arising from a traumatizing event that is physical, psychological or a combination of both and affects men, women and children of all ages.

Traumatizing events include

- Natural catastrophes, high magnitude accidents (as participant or witness)
- Verbal and/or physical assault
- Abuse in childhood and/or domestic relationship
- Threats and/or attempts to cause death
- Prison incarceration
- Rape – date rape, assault rape, incestuous rape, rape by a superior
- Acts of terrorism

- Combat and non-combat military/war events

For women serving in the military there are two primary sources of PTSD – rape and combat associated incidents.

National Public Radio (NPR) in 2006 reported on available findings of female soldiers being raped or sexually harassed.

*“In 2003, a survey of female veterans found that **30 percent** said they were **raped** in the military. A 2004 study of veterans who were seeking help for post-traumatic stress disorder found that **71 percent** of the women said they were **sexually assaulted** or raped while serving. And a 1995 study of female veterans of the Gulf and earlier wars, found that **90 percent** had been **sexually harassed**.”* Source: <http://newsjunkiepost.com/2010/01/26/13rd-of-women-in-us-military-raped/>

Brenda Moore, a military sociologist at the University at Buffalo-The State University of New York, identifies the demarcation between front-line and rear-line areas where females soldiers normally operate has become blurred.

While the Pentagon does not permit female soldiers in combat, many fulfill significant roles “ ... to fly combat aircraft and serve on combat ships ... offer support as truck drivers, gunners, medics, military police, helicopter pilots, and more.”

Add the changes in war tactics as witnessed in the Iraq and Afghanistan wars, female soldiers are exposed to more traumatic incidents coming from suicide bombs and bombers, and “ ... targeted mortar attacks and rocket-propelled grenades.”

Source: <http://www.examiner.com/women-s-health-in-chicago/ptsd-women-s-oldiers-combat-stress-or-rape>

The most recent information is by Damien Cave writing in the *New York Times* that –

“As of June 2008, almost 20,000 female veterans of Iraq or Afghanistan had received diagnoses of mental disorders from the Department of Veterans Affairs, **including more than 8,000 women with a diagnosis of post-traumatic stress disorder** – and this number does not include troops still abroad, or those who have never sought help from the Veterans Affairs system.” Source: <http://womenslawproject.wordpress.com/2009/11/05/female-soldiers-and-ptsd-%E2%80%9Cpeople-underestimate-what-these-women-have-been-through%E2%80%9D/>

Next, what causes the brain of female soldiers to be affected by the traumatic events of rape and military actions.

by Joyce Hansen