

A quick glance at some of the more critical concerns of soldiers and their families:

- The suicide rate among soldiers in 2008 was the highest rate since the Army began tracking suicides three decades ago (CNN, 2/5/09), and this year the numbers are looking even worse. "This is terrifying," an Army official said. "We do not know what is going on."ⁱ
- Homicides by active-duty military personnel and new veterans for the six years before and after the invasion of Afghanistan in 2001 increased by 89 percent during the current wartime period, about three-quarters of which involved Iraq and Afghanistan war veterans. About one-third of the victims were family members.ⁱⁱ
- More than one-third of Iraq and Afghanistan war veterans enrolled in the V.A. health system received a diagnosis of a mental health problem, most often post-traumatic stress disorder or depression, and the number of veterans with mental health problems rose steadily the longer they were out of the service.ⁱⁱⁱ
- Children of U.S. military troops sought outpatient mental health care 2 million times last year, double the number at the start of the Iraq war, and there was also an alarming spike in the number of military kids actually hospitalized for mental health reasons.^{iv}
- Children with parents deployed to Iraq and Afghanistan age 18 months to five years are more likely to have behavioral problems than children whose parents aren't deployed. Nationwide, over two million children have deployed parents.^v
- Thirty-nine percent of returning vets say they are reluctant to use military or veteran-specific services for help with PTSD and related problems.^{vi}
- Sixty percent of returning soldiers said family relationships changed after deployment, i.e., breakdowns in communication (29%), frequent arguments and conflicts (24%), and lack of sexual intimacy (21%). Nearly half experienced an increase in conflicts and arguments (verbal and/or physical) at home after returning.^{vii}
- The number of female service members who have become homeless after leaving the military has jumped dramatically in recent years.^{viii}
- About one out of seven female veterans of Afghanistan or Iraq – 15% -- who visit a V.A. center for medical care report having been sexually assaulted or harassed during military duty, and more than half of these women have post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).^{ix}

- The V.A. also found that 22 percent of women diagnosed with PTSD suffered from "military sexual trauma," which includes sexual harassment or assault, compared with 1 percent of men.^x
- Military doctors estimate that 10 percent to 20 percent of soldiers sent to Iraq or Afghanistan suffer a Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI). Symptoms include excessive sleepiness, inattention, difficulty concentrating, impaired memory, faulty judgment, depression, irritability, emotional outbursts, disturbed sleep, diminished libido, difficulty switching between two tasks, and slowed thinking, and it can take some soldiers a significant period of time to realize how severely they've been affected.^{xi}
- The number of soldiers seeking help for substance abuse has climbed 25% in the past five years, but the Army's counseling program has remained significantly understaffed and struggles to meet the demand, according to Army records.^{xii}

If you'd like to get involved in this effort to explore how we, as a community, can increase support for our returning soldiers and their families, please call our office, 521 1846 or email marya@mentalhealth-hi.org.

ⁱ CNN, 6/11/09

ⁱⁱ *New York Times*, 1/13/08

ⁱⁱⁱ *New York Times*, 7/17/09

^{iv} Associated Press, 7/7/09

^v 11/08, *Archives of Pediatrics & Adolescent Medicine*

^{vi} 10/24/08, Congressional Issue Briefing by Witness Justice, Veterans Initiative Center and Research Institute, in collaboration with bipartisan U.S. House Caucuses

^{vii} *Ibid.*, Congressional Issue Briefing

^{viii} *Boston Globe*, 6/6/09

^{ix} *USA Today*, 10/28/08

^x CNN, 3/18/08

^{xi} Associated Press, *USA Today*, 4/9/09

^{xii} *USA Today*, 11/21/08