

POST WAR EFFECTS ON LIVES OF UNITED STATES SOLDIERS

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### Abstract

Wars have more negative effects on the lives of soldiers than positive. This means that they have more to lose than just lives, legs, and families. Apart from the obvious effects of war as mass loss of lives and property, cities, economic downturns, destroyed infrastructure, reduced service provision and social order that civilians experience, soldiers and their families, spouses, and children experience wars and its effects differently. The close proximity of the soldiers during wartime, for instance, results in the transmission of such diseases as tuberculosis, asthma and trench foot caused by cold, unsanitary and wet conditions, they suffer short and long term effects owing to the physical, emotional and psychological impacts of war.

Veterans and serving soldiers cope with depression, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), traumatic brain injury and anxiety among others that result from the service (Gallaway, Millikan & Bell, 2011). There are also other mental challenges related to the war that these soldiers and their families face and may include sadness, loneliness, feeling overwhelmed, marital problems depression, domestic violence, sexual issues and sleep disturbances. The soldiers and their families also face a range of behavioral issues in their children related to absence attributed to deployment, hospitalization or death of their parents in combat. These can include temper tantrums, eating habits changes, separation anxiety, academic performance decline, anger, apathy, acting out, mood changes and physical complaints. This paper aims to review relevant literature on the effects on post wars on soldiers.

### Literature Review-Post War Effects on Lives of United States Soldiers

In a study that assessed the relationship between deployment-related posttraumatic growth and negative behavioral conditions of health among the United States soldiers by Gallaway, Millikan, and Bell (2011) surveyed 1834 combat experienced soldiers found that most soldiers that have been previously deployed on combat missions experience high overall Posttraumatic growth-personal emotional, economic, social growth after PTSD instead of degeneration . The study also found an inverse association between recent ideation of suicide and post-traumatic growth and concluded that combat deployments result in post-traumatic growth among soldiers. The authors argue that such construct as perceived burdensomeness, thwarted belongingness and acquired suicide capability are some of psychological effects and results of war on soldiers that lead them to develop post-traumatic disorders, insecurity, and suicidal thoughts and based on this, veterans are at risk of developing PTSD and suicide and using firearm compared to the general population.

The researchers conclude that results of combat exposure increase the risk of suicide among military service members and call for the identification of suicide protective factors for the servicemen and veterans. According to the authors, therefore, wars have such effects as PTSD and suicide ideation development that might lead to negative acts such as crime, attacks on other people, and mental instability among military servicemen and veterans. The article, therefore, insinuates that there is an intuitively obvious relationship between combat and psychological trauma as one of the resultant effects. This though varies as highly trained units experience fewer psychiatrist casualties compared to the less-trained soldiers due to a sense of helplessness that increases when they are discharged from the service and this is connected to neuroses, cowardice, and shellshock (Gallaway, Millikan & Bell, 2011).

Mckibben, Fullerton, Mash, Nock, Naifeh, Kessler, and Ursano (2014) conducted a study on suicidal behaviors and the use of mental health services that sampled 10, 400 army soldiers to find out if soldiers experience mental health burden during and after the war and multiple deployments. The researchers found that a significant number of the sampled soldiers had considered or attempted suicide at different times in their lives after the missions. The authors concluded that it is important to understand the correlation between wars and suicidal thoughts and behaviors for prediction, prevention, and containment of any unlawful act that the veterans might find themselves doing due to the effects of war. The authors also argue that apart from the physical injuries, it is the emotional injuries that soldiers encounter on battlefields that serve as foundation for the psychological disorders since the feeling of ending another person's life brings them to deep sorrow for those they kill and as a result develop thoughts of ultimate punishments or death for these acts. Deaths disturb soldiers and deprive them of the initial peace of mind. The constant emotional stress as an outcome of reflections of earlier happier days and family results in severe mental strain and stress. Soldiers, therefore, develop such behavioral effects as nightmares, irritability, sleeplessness, detachment feelings, insecurity and hyper-vigilance and concentration difficulties due to post-traumatic stress disorders.

A study by Griffith (2017) on post-deployment problems and the use of services among Army National Guard soldiers describes the amounts of problems and services responding to the literature research gaps on the community intervention needs of reservists. The researcher sampled 4668 soldiers and found that half of soldiers report psychological problems characterized by frustration and anger, troubled sleep and upsetting memories. The authors also list social support problems, inability to experience pleasure or interest in activities, alcohol use, low self-esteem, appetite, sleep, movement, isolation feelings, suicidal thoughts and financial

difficulties. In the study, the author identifies irritability, sleep disturbances, concentration difficulties, and agitation among veteran soldiers due to traumatic brain injury characterized by dizziness, recurrent headaches, poor balances, light sensitivity, and tinnitus at mild states. The author argues that post-deployment emotional transition symptoms are sometimes and should not be confused with mental health disorders and argued that this is one of the main reasons returning soldiers do not seek mental health services when faced with post-deployment adjustment issues as the existing stigma might taint their service record. Avoiding access to health services during emotional transitions carries the risk of persistence of stress-inducing symptoms and might also potentiate adjustment problems. Griffith (2017) posits that contributing factors to the development of these symptoms include the significant presence of physical injuries or illnesses, mental health issues co-occurrence, underlying communication styles and chosen strategy coping efficacy.

In a study that sought to investigate the reasons behind the continued good health and stress resiliency among veterans in the United States, Bartone (2018) found that personality hardiness formed the potential protective variable that shields soldiers against such effects of post-war on their lives as major life stressors, and stressors encountered in military operation areas, joblessness, job disruptions, family separations and post-traumatic stress disorders. The author argues that personality hardiness helped the soldiers manage ill effects of combat-related stress and stressful lives after service. The modern military forces operate in environments with increased complexity, full of uncertainty and change that lead to an increase in stress levels among the personnel and health problems and performance decrements. The study concludes that the effects of post-war can be managed by emotional hardiness and help soldiers abide by a meaningful and worthy life and control their futures and find interest and excitement in life.

Weaver (2016) approached the negative and positive post-war effects on the lives of soldiers and their families and found that just like any other encounter, wars to have positive impacts on the lives of the returning military servicemen. The author argues that the exposure of soldiers to stressful life experiences such as exposure to corpses, rights abuses, disasters and automobile accidents harden the personality of some soldiers who perceive some benefit from the experiences. The author argues that these positive effects include self-concept changes and benefits, positive growth potential and personality resiliency. Positive transformations, growth and perceived benefit that follow these traumatic events and experiences indicate that these individuals are prepared to deal with both positive and negative life experiences. Social and personal transitions after traumatic experiences have been reported as post-traumatic growth in self-perception, relationship with others and world perceptions. The author recommends that security organizations should focus on increasing psychological hardiness in a bid to enhance the health and performance in the workforce and prevent a range of stress-related problems.

Rona, Jones, Iversen, Hull, Greenberg, Fear and Wessely (2019) conducted a study that investigated the post-traumatic stress disorder among soldiers previously deployed in Iraq, and Afghanistan and found that different military personnel experience different PTSD-related effects emanating from experiences in the battlefields. The researchers list PTSD, acute stress and stress disorder as some of the after-war effects of experiences on the battlefield. The authors conclude that these effects also have other effects that affect the relationship of the soldiers and their families as well as other members of society. Other post-war effects are attributed to stress-related disorders that spread further into other spheres of life. The study concludes that there is a research gap into how post-war effects on soldiers can be mitigated or even prevented in a bid to reduce the suffering of the soldiers both in the battlefield as well as after the war.

In a paper that reviewed the literature on the social impacts of war on soldiers including behavioral and social effects that wars impact upon the servicemen, Modell and Haggery (2019) examined the military power training and recruitment implications and psychological and economic results and concluded that most of the negative impacts of war on soldiers are PTSD related. The authors posit that soldiers fail to get employment since employers have stigmatized view of the soldiers and hence deny them employment due to the belief that they at some point in developing PTSD. They argue the phobia even affects their relationship with other members of the society as well as members of their families and these feelings of alienation and isolation lead them to have suicidal thoughts and even suicide. The authors urge increased research on the social effects of war as it has been overlooked by recent studies as a way of informing the efforts to prevent, manage and mitigate the woes of the soldiers once they are back from missions.

Laufer, Gallops, and Frey-Wouters (2014) in a paper that looked into the effects of post-war on men's life by gender, with a focus on combat exposure divided the post-war effects into three elements of combat experience, witnessing abuse violence and participation in abusive violence. The authors argue that most previous studies and literature rely on combat exposure alone and define this in the traditional sense as sole indicator these traumatic experiences and ignore aspects present in the battlefields. The paper concludes that each of the elements has different post service psychological effects on veterans.

Kozaric-Kovacic, Ljubin, and Marusic (2019) conducted a study on the experiences of tortured soldiers in war and the attendant post-war effects. The study found that soldiers tortured in detention camps exhibited symptoms of acute post-traumatic stress disorder. Some of the later effects associated with the disorder included headaches, uncontrolled aggressive behaviors, psychic numbing, guilt feelings and lack of energy as well as panic attacks.

Merbaum (2017) a follow-up study post-war adjustment that focused on personality characteristics of soldiers previously exposed to war stress sampled 117 soldier psychiatric casualties discharged from a psychiatric ward found that there were very little differences between the conditions of the soldiers while in hospital and after discharge. The author concluded that prolonged combat stress and special problems faced by these men follow them after reentry into the social community and affect their relationships and productivity.

From the literature above, it can be concluded that most post-war effects on the lives of soldiers are stress related and have significant effects on their relationship with society and productivity. Soldiers have more to lose from war than to gain. There should be increased research on how to evade, prevent, manage or mitigate the effects of war on the lives of soldiers as an overlooked area in literature and practice.



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