



New Mental Health Program to Train Army Soldiers

Released: 1/18/2011 11:00 AM EST

Source: American Psychological Association (APA)

Program Aimed at Preventing PTSD, Building Psychological Strengths Featured in Special Issue

Newswise — Details of a new mental health training program being used throughout the Army to promote psychological resilience and improve soldiers' performance are featured in a special issue of *American Psychologist*, the flagship journal of the American Psychological Association.

In 13 articles, psychologists and military experts explore the science behind the first psychology-based approach to improving the psychological fitness of the Army's 1.1 million members.

"Like our physical fitness program, I believe that psychological resilience development can become not just something we in the Army 'do,' but rather a critical component of our culture that will be integrated throughout our community to develop better soldiers," Gen. George W. Casey Jr., the Army's chief of staff, wrote in the issue's introduction.

Extended campaigns in Iraq and Afghanistan have led to high rates of post-traumatic stress symptoms, and suicide rates of Army soldiers have reached a 28-year high, according to research published in the *Journal of the American Medical Association*. A 2008 RAND survey showed that up to 70 percent of soldiers are exposed to traumatic incidents in Iraq and Afghanistan.

"Modern warfare is characterized by demanding missions, extreme climates, sleep deprivation, cultural dissonance, physical fatigue, prolonged separation from family and the ever-present threat of serious bodily injury or death," wrote Brig. Gen. Rhonda Cornum, PhD, MD, director of what's being called the Comprehensive Soldier Fitness program. "Waiting for illness or injury to occur is not the way commanders in the U.S. Army approach high-risk actions, and it is not the way we should approach high psychological risk activities."

The Army has adopted the basic principles of positive psychology to help craft the Comprehensive Soldier Fitness program. Positive psychology's areas of focus include building mental toughness as well as identifying signature strengths, meaning, purpose and positive relationships, in addition to preventing pathology, according to positive psychology pioneer Martin Seligman, PhD. Seligman, a former APA president runs the University of Pennsylvania's Positive Psychology Center, which is the training hub of the program's master resiliency training program for noncommissioned officers.

"The program's overall goal is to increase the number of soldiers who grow through their combat experience and return home without serious mental health problems," said Michael Matthews, PhD, a professor with the Department of Behavioral Sciences and Leadership at the United States Military Academy at West Point. Matthews and Seligman are guest editors of the special issue.

Army researchers will be studying the effectiveness of the program on soldiers' resilience as well as the links among physiological, neurobiological and psychological resilience factors.

Keywords:

PTSD, Army Soldiers, Mental Health, Resilience

Contact Information

Available for logged-in reporters only

Description

Details of a new mental health training program being used throughout the Army to promote psychological resilience and improve soldiers' performance are featured in a special issue of *American Psychologist*, the flagship journal of the American Psychological Association.

The special issue details the development and implementation of the program's main components, including:

Assessment

An online assessment test will be administered to recruits when they enter the Army and periodically throughout their military careers. A group of military and civilian psychologists developed the evidence-based Global Assessment Tool, which measures a soldier's psychosocial fitness and will help track the psychological fitness of the entire Army. The individual results are confidential and only the individual soldier sees the results.

Global Resilience Training

All soldiers will receive training on techniques to improve resilience in themselves and their subordinates, starting when they enter the Army. This progresses to more specialized training as the soldiers continue to move up through the ranks. This training will help soldiers perform better as they face personal and professional challenges, including combat.

Individualized Resilience Training

More specialized training in different aspects of resilience (emotional, social, family or spiritual) will be offered as an option to soldiers, depending on their performance on the Global Assessment Tool.

Master Resilience Trainers

Soldiers with advanced training in building the mental, emotional and physical skills for maintaining and enhancing resilience will become master resilience trainers. These primarily noncommissioned officers implement a resiliency training program based on empirically validated interventions from positive psychology. These trainers will also be working with family members and Army civilians.

Special Issue: Comprehensive Soldier Fitness

Guest Editors – Martin E. P. Seligman, PhD, University of Pennsylvania; Michael D. Matthews, PhD, United States Military Academy at West Point. *American Psychologist*, Vol. 66, No.1.

Articles:

-“Comprehensive Soldier Fitness: A Vision for Psychological Resilience in the U.S. Army,” George W. Casey, Jr., General, U.S. Army Chief of Staff. <http://www.apa.org/pubs/journals/releases/amp-66-1-1.pdf>

-“Comprehensive Soldier Fitness: Building Resilience in a Challenging Institutional Context,” Rhonda Cornum, PhD, Comprehensive Soldier Fitness Program, Department of the Army; Michael D. Matthews, PhD, United States Military Academy at West Point; Martin E.P. Seligman, PhD, University of Pennsylvania. <http://www.apa.org/pubs/journals/releases/amp-66-1-4.pdf>

Reporters:

For access to other articles in the special issue, please contact the APA Public Affairs Office.

The American Psychological Association, in Washington, D.C., is the largest scientific and professional organization representing psychology in the United States and is the world's largest association of psychologists. APA's membership includes more than 150,000 researchers, educators, clinicians, consultants and students. Through its divisions in 54 subfields of psychology and affiliations with 60 state, territorial and Canadian provincial associations, APA works to advance psychology as a science, as a profession and as a means of promoting health, education and human welfare.