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## **Women on war front more likely to get post-traumatic stress disorder than men, study finds**

By Shari Roan, Los Angeles Times

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Reporting from Honolulu

Women deployed in the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan are emerging as a group especially vulnerable to post-traumatic stress disorder, researchers reported this week at the [annual meeting](#) of the American Psychiatric Assn.

More than 230,000 women have served in Iraq and Afghanistan since 2001, according to a Los Angeles Times story published in April on PTSD among female military personnel. Women, however, have been denied insurance coverage for treatment for PTSD at a higher rate than men because of a former stipulation that required combat experience to qualify for the benefit. Under rule changes enacted last year, any veteran deployed to a combat zone can seek care for PTSD. But the story noted that VA officials know little about the scope of the problem among women.

In the study, presented this week, researchers studied 922 National Guard members -- including 91 women -- under mandatory deployment to Iraq in 2008. The guard members were screened using mental-health measures before deployment and three months after deployment. The study found that women were much more likely than men to meet the criteria for PTSD after returning home -- 18.7% of women had PTSD compared with 8.7% of men. There were no significant differences between men and women in their level of combat exposure.

The women were much less likely to feel well-prepared for combat before deployment and were more likely to report a lack of unit cohesion during deployment. Unit cohesion is the mutual support and bonds of friendship among members of a military unit. Another study presented at the APA meeting found such cohesion is emerging as a major factor in determining the mental-health effects of combat on troops.

U.S. Army researchers surveyed 1,600 soldiers from two combat brigades who had been deployed once. They found that unit cohesion was a key factor in whether soldiers developed thoughts of suicide. "Despite the evolving role of women in the military, few studies have examined gender-relevant issues in combat deployment," wrote the authors of the study on PTSD among women, led by the Department of Veterans Affairs-New Jersey Health Care System. "This study suggests that women may be at greater risk than men of developing combat-related PTSD in part because they are less likely to develop confidence in their own military preparedness or receive social support in the form of unit cohesion."

Although women are well-trained for combat and other aspects of military deployment, the authors noted, "training regimens may nevertheless fail to adequately address physiological differences between men and women, leaving women feeling less prepared for deployment to combat zones."

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