

Study suggests feelings of guilt may be a top factor in PTSD

By Gregg Zoroya, USA TODAY

Updated 1d 21h ago

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A leading cause of post-traumatic stress disorder is guilt that troops experience because of moral dilemmas faced in combat, according to preliminary findings of a study of active-duty Marines.



By Jae C. Hong, AP

A Marine holds his neck while waiting to take psychological tests at the Marine Corps Air Ground Combat Center in Twentynine Palms, Calif.

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The conflicts that servicemembers feel may include "survivor's guilt," from living through an attack in which other servicemembers died, and witnessing or participating in the unintentional killing of women or children, researchers involved in the study say.

"How do they come to terms with that? They have to forgive themselves for pulling the trigger," says retired Navy captain [Bill Nash](#), a psychiatrist and study co-author.

The idea of "moral injury" as a cause of PTSD is new to psychiatry. The [American Psychiatric Association](#) is only now considering new diagnostic criteria for the disorder that would include feelings of shame and guilt, says David Spiegel, a member of the working group rewriting the PTSD section.

Traditionally, PTSD symptoms such as nightmares or numbness to the world have been linked to combat violence, fear of being killed or loss of friends.

Half of all Iraq and Afghanistan veterans treated by the [Department of Veterans Affairs](#) have been diagnosed with mental health issues and the most common is PTSD, which is experienced by nearly 200,000 of these veterans, according to the VA.

PTSD caused by moral injury can lead to more severe reactions such as family violence or even suicide, says Jonathan Shay, a psychiatrist

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who has worked on military mental health policies.

The ~~Marine Corps~~ study helps expand the knowledge of the relationship between moral injury and PTSD, says Shira Maguen, a psychologist and VA researcher who has studied links between killing and the disorder among [Vietnam War](#), [Gulf War](#) and [Iraq War](#) veterans.

"This (Marine Corps) study is important because so little work has been done to understand moral injury in a scientific context," Maguen says.

The ongoing research involves about 2,600 Marines and sailors examined before and after combat tours.

The preliminary findings on moral injury were gleaned from 208 Marines involved in severe combat in Afghanistan in 2009 and 2010. It showed that three months after coming home, 7% of the Marines likely had PTSD. Their condition was more closely linked to an inner conflict rather than threats to their lives, the sight of bodies or blood or family problems, the study said.

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 [abby del abbey](#) Score: 23
7:29 PM on November 24, 2011

To quote from S. Sassoon, a WW 1 British : "sneak home and pray you'll never know, the hell where youth and laughter go."

 [Uncledrinky08](#) Score: 18
7:47 PM on November 24, 2011

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Of course the CEOs of the corporations who direct the government to send of young men and women to kill and be killed in the name of profit chasing sleep like babies with no signs of PTSD.

2 replies



Almosthome

7:56 PM on November 24, 2011

Score: -36

Young people of today are taught no coping skills.

3 replies



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LZzJeD

8:15 PM on November 24, 2011

Score: -14

Just refuse to serve in the military.

If it's good enough for GOP candidates and their families, it's good enough for everyone...

2 replies



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LancelotLink

8:35 PM on November 24, 2011

Score: 45

LZzJeD

8:15 PM on November 24, 2011

Just refuse to serve in the military.

If it's good enough for GOP candidates and their families, it's good enough for everyone...

+++++

As much as I like to bash Repubs, this is a bi-partisan problem. The upper class, regardless of political leanings, have been AWOL from military service since WWII but they enjoy all it affords them. It's a national shame.



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Related2what

8:58 PM on November 24, 2011

Score: 9

In spite of our rants about Iraqi WMDs, ...9/11, Islamic Jihad, & Muslim terrorists...these folks have to live with the consequences of our nations policies.

...We needed to rush to war in Iraq & Afghanistan, ...right??

After repeated deployments, ...sacrifice, ...tears,

...hardships, ...funerals, & sad good-byes,

...we wonder why these Military people are committing suicide??



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genxer65

9:01 PM on November 24, 2011

Score: 44



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I believe this study hits the nail on the head. My late father suffered from PTSD for at least 55 years of his 76 years on this planet.

My dad was a combat veteran from WW II. He didn't join for "economic reasons," he joined because the very life he lived in this country was in jeopardy. My dad saw some serious combat and death on a little tiny atoll called Tarawa.

I dealt with his PTSD for 33 of my 46 years on this planet! I learned as a child how to deal with his issues, mostly his nightmares and his little idiosyncrasies (sp). He was never violent, but it affected his ways of dealing with people.

This is a real condition that these veterans suffer from. If the military and the VA don't deal with this, they are doing these men and women a horrible blow.

1 reply



Shaggy
9:18 PM on November 24, 2011

Score: 29

Survival guilt....oh...my....

This is something that military has had to endure thru the test of time....

May all our servicemen and women have the best Thanksgiving possible.

I offer my thanks to them for their sacrifice during any holiday.....they ROCK!!

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nodebt
9:19 PM on November 24, 2011

Score: -13

They feel guilt because deep down inside they know that the war is unjust. Nobody felt guilty about killing a Nazi.

2 replies

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LZzJeD
9:41 PM on November 24, 2011

Score: 21

Soldiers today are fighting wars without causes. They've been reduced to expendable tools of the 1%'s military industrial complex, who wage wars for profit...

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