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Study: Troops still fear reporting PTSD

By [Patricia Kime](#) - Staff writer

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Even as military officials continue to work on easing the stigma of seeking help for mental health issues, many service members remain loath to admit they suffer post-traumatic stress disorder or have suicidal thoughts, according to a study published recently in the Archives of General Psychiatry.

A review of post-deployment screening questionnaires completed by an Army brigade combat team found that those who were allowed to complete the forms anonymously reported depression, PTSD and suicidal thoughts at rates two to four times higher than those who had to put their names on the forms.

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And more than 20 percent of the soldiers who screened positive for depression or PTSD said they were uncomfortable reporting their answers honestly in routine post-deployment screenings.

“Current post-deployment mental health screening tools are dependent on soldiers honestly reporting their symptoms. This study indicates that post-deployment health assessment screening process misses most soldiers with significant mental health problems,” wrote the authors, eight physicians stationed at military bases and the Uniformed Services University of Health Sciences, Bethesda, Md.

The Pentagon has launched several initiatives to reduce mental health stigma: Army Vice Chief of Staff Gen. Peter Chiarelli is lobbying the American Psychological Association to drop “disorder” from PTSD’s name; each service has its own marketing campaign to promote the positive effects of getting help; and physicians are explaining to patients that PTSD symptoms like hypervigilance, insomnia and agitation are normal in prolonged extreme circumstances such as combat.

“They report being ‘always on,’ which is normal, even desired in combat. It becomes a problem when you place them in an environment like being home,” said Dr. Greg Gahm, director of the National Center for Telehealth and Technology, at a December forum on combat trauma.

Still, the stigma remains, not only within the military but in the civilian mental health community.

“The study shows that more needs to be done,” said Dr. Harry Croft, a San Antonio psychiatrist who says he has screened more than 6,000 veterans in the past decade.

“Vets are telling me that if you fill the form out truthfully and you want to be a career soldier, your career is over.”

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