



6411 E. Thomas Road  
Scottsdale, AZ 85251  
Phone: (480) 994-4407  
Fax: (480) 994-4744

Thursday, March 13, 2008

## **A Fifth of Soldiers at PTSD Risk**

By Gregg Zoroya  
USA Today

More than five years of recycling soldiers through Iraq and Afghanistan's battlefields is creating record levels of mental health problems, as about three in 10 GIs on their third tour admit emotional illnesses, according to an Army study released Thursday.

Soldiers in combat suffering emotional issues and who saw friends killed were twice as likely to abuse civilians by kicking or hitting them, or destroying their property, the study shows. Half of those soldiers admitted unethical conduct compared with a quarter of all other soldiers in combat.

From 15% to 20% of all soldiers fighting in Iraq and Afghanistan show signs of depression or post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), says the study of almost 2,300 soldiers finished last fall. That rate jumps to about 30% for soldiers who have been on three or four combat deployments.

The study, conducted by mental health teams from the Army Surgeon General's Office, is the fifth since the Iraq war began in March 2003.

"Mental health problems are just one of the cascading costs we're seeing after a five-year war," said Sen. Ben Nelson, D-Neb., who leads a Senate subcommittee on military personnel. "Psychological wounds affect families, both emotionally and financially, just as much as physical wounds."

FIND MORE STORIES IN: [United States](#) | [Afghanistan](#) | [Senate](#) | [Iraqi](#) | [Taliban](#) | [Office](#) | [GIs](#) | [D-Neb](#) | [Sen. Ben Nelson](#) | [Army Surgeon General](#)

The report underscores concerns raised by military leaders that the current year-long break soldiers receive between successive 12- to 15-month combat deployments is far too short for them to recover. In fact, certain mental illnesses such as PTSD grow more intense as the soldiers prepare to go back into combat, the report shows.

"People aren't designed to be exposed to the horrors of combat repeatedly. And it wears on them," Gen. George Casey, Army chief of staff, told reporters last month, adding that breaks between must be lengthened. The report also showed the mental health issues for troops in Afghanistan have equaled those for soldiers in Iraq. U.S. forces ousted the Taliban in 2001, and fighting against Afghanistan's Taliban rebels has increased over the past three years.

For the first time, the study reviewed how much sleep soldiers receive. An average soldier receives 5.6 hours of sleep per night, "too few to maintain optimal performance," the study says.

The study says overall soldier morale improved in 2007, as the United States added 30,000 more troops to stabilize the Iraqi government. Although more U.S. troops died in 2007 — 899 — than any other year, overall violence dropped in the second half because of the added U.S. troops.

Soldiers are more willing to seek mental health care, the study shows. However, some soldiers in remote parts of Iraq and Afghanistan told the survey they had difficulty accessing such care. Maj. Gen. Gale Pollock, a deputy surgeon general, said the Army is trying to get more counselors to remote areas.

One possibility, she said, is deploying civilian mental health workers into combat areas for the first time.