

Running head: POST TRAUMATIC STRESS DISORDER (PTSD) WITHIN THE ARMY

Post Traumatic Stress Disorder Within The Army

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Class #58

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27 November 2007

### Abstract

Enormous demands are currently being placed on the military medical system due to a large percentage of Soldiers returning home from war with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). Prior to the current conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan, PTSD was often labeled as simple shell shock and only small amounts of research and funding were available for Soldiers. Popular opinion of the public now suggests that the military is not adequately caring for or treating Soldiers with PTSD. The military has recognized the importance of caring for these Soldiers and is dedicating the most resources ever in our history to treat PTSD. I will show how the military is educating, treating, providing resources, and helping family members overcome PTSD.

## Introduction

It is not difficult to pick up a newspaper or watch the news and form an opinion of the lack of healthcare the Army is providing for Soldiers with PTSD. Soldiers, families, and veteran's administrations are reporting neglect, harassment, and a lack of resources by the Army needed to treat Soldiers with PTSD. This issue must be examined from both sides and weighed equally based on facts and findings. We will examine both sides of each argument and determine the current outcome of healthcare provided by the military to treat Soldiers with PTSD. Even though popular opinion suggests that the military is not helping Soldiers with PTSD, both military and civilian leaders have aggressively taken steps to properly treat Soldiers. The military has recognized the importance of treating Soldiers with PTSD and have committed more resources than ever before in our history.

## The Public Speaks Out

### *Soldiers Speak Out*

Numerous Soldier statements about the lack of mental healthcare in the Army for PTSD have sparked investigations throughout Army installations. Soldiers from Fort Carson have made some of the harshest arguments against the lack of healthcare resources in the Army. Specialist Cory Davis of Fort Carson, Colorado went to the hospital to seek treatment for PTSD and was told he would have to wait over a month before he could get an appointment (Zwerdling, 2007). Other Soldiers have stated that they are harassed by supervisors when seeking care for PTSD. Soldiers are also claiming that they are discharged for numerous reasons other than PTSD so that the Army will not have to deal with them.

### *Family Members and Groups Speak Out*

Veterans groups representing Soldiers are surprised that the number of claims for PTSD has actually gone down since the war started. They cite the need for the military to reduce costs and claim that denying claims is saving the Army money right now. Independent studies have found that only 26% of Soldiers returning from Iraq are receiving care and treatment for PTSD (Gerad, 2005). Family members are also outraged that they must navigate through a medical system that is hard to understand and one that places intentional roadblocks in their path. Claims by families also state that the resources they need are extremely difficult to find and the Army does nothing to prepare them on how to deal with a spouse who has PTSD. Recent scandals at the Walter Reed Medical Facility have only given extra ammunition to the public on how the Army cares for its Soldiers. On the opposite side of the fence stood the Army and its medical system accused of denying and ignoring Soldiers with PTSD from current conflicts.

### *The Army Responds*

#### *Front Line Care and Added Personnel*

The Army immediately responded and has dedicated more resources towards PTSD than ever before in our history. Army personnel in the mental healthcare field are now being assigned to the front lines of the battles in Iraq and Afghanistan. Treating PTSD at the point of impact with immediate counseling is already starting to be a proven success. Soldiers identified with PTSD symptoms can now be seen within hours after an incident has occurred at the front lines. The Army has tripled its number of psychologists and mental healthcare specialists within the last year. Military and civilian leaders have also directed that veteran's healthcare facilities extend their hours in all the hospitals and clinics, so that all Soldiers have access to treatment at any given time. Veteran's healthcare facilities have not only extended their hours, but now have

over 9,000 mental healthcare specialists on hand to provide treatment for Soldiers with PTSD (Tyson and Lee, 2007). The Army also has received the largest amounts of money for research and treatment than they have ever received. The current amount of money released is going well into the billions and research is being conducted aggressively.

#### *New Pre-Deployment Programs*

Soldiers and leaders are being educated with new pre-deployment programs within the Army. One program is called the Battle Mind program. This program utilizes Soldiers with previous combat experience to work through scenarios with newly assigned Soldiers. This program is intended to identify Soldiers who may exhibit PTSD symptoms even prior to deployment. Leaders can focus on those Soldiers and continue additional training to ensure the Soldier is prepared for combat experiences. Soldiers and leaders are also given cards, pamphlets and needed material to help identify symptoms of PTSD quickly. They are also given training on how to identify resources quickly and where to take the Soldier for immediate treatment and counseling.

#### *Removing the Stigma*

The Army has quickly realized that the stigma associated with PTSD is a hurdle everyone needs to overcome. The Army also provides hotlines and services to Soldiers who feel they want to keep their case confidential. Keeping the information and cases confidential will help Soldiers seek treatment who otherwise are too proud to get help. The Army has also realized that some Soldiers do not seek treatment due to the fact that they believe it will end their career. Soldiers are now seeing first hand within every unit in the Army that seeking treatment does not end a career. Numerous Soldiers are now seeking treatment and continuing their military careers. Leaders are also keeping a close eye on supervisors at every level to ensure that adequate advice

and care is being provided by Army leaders. Senior leaders within the Army have additionally set up hotlines that Soldiers can call if they are not receiving support from their supervisors. The Army continued their pursuit in providing top notch healthcare and services to the Soldiers by establish the Wounded Warrior Transition Program.

### Wounded Warrior Program

#### *Purpose of the Program*

The purpose of the Wounded Warrior Transition Program is to give Soldiers an opportunity to focus solely on healing. This program has placed experienced senior Noncommissioned Officers in place to focus on meeting the Soldiers needs. The Soldiers are placed in a medical unit and have no other commitments other than healing and getting treatment. Each Soldier is carefully managed so they can attend all their appointments and therapy as needed. Once a Soldier is determined to be healthy again, they can return to their unit. The Army has also set the system up so a Soldier can return to his or her original duty assignment they had prior to entering the program. This clearly shows the level of personal commitment the Army is taking in order to ensure the needs of our Soldiers are met and ensure a continued military career. The Army continued to provide resources by establish rest and relaxation centers.

#### *Rest and Relaxation Facilities*

Rest and relaxation facilities are currently being established at military installations. The purpose of these facilities is to provide a place where Soldiers can relax and talk to their comrades. Soldiers do not need an appointment to go into the facility and can talk with available counselors if needed. This gives Soldiers a chance to unwind and talk about their experiences

with friends who are going through the same thing. The Army continued on its march to help Soldiers by reaching out to families also.

### Help For Families Arrives

#### *Resources for Families*

The Army responded rapidly to meet the needs of the family members. One of the best methods for the road to recovery is the support of a family. Family members can now use any search engine on the internet and simply type in the words help for PTSD and an abundance of resources appear. Brochures, educational materials, and videos are now available to family members at no expense. Family members can now identify the symptoms of PTSD and know where to go or who to call for help twenty-four hours a day. Military installations are also providing free childcare and establishing support groups geared specifically for family members. In addition to spouses, the Army is aggressively pursuing help for children also.

#### *Help for Children*

Recent research conducted is establishing that children also have a tough time dealing with a parent who has PTSD. The Army is currently launching new programs designed for children to help them understand what the parent is going through and how PTSD works. Children also face stress from this situation and had nowhere to turn until now. The stress between the parent and child can greatly be reduced now due to multiple programs available for the child, spouse, or a group program.

### Conclusion

You can see that not everyone believes the military is helping Soldiers and families cope with PTSD. It is clear and proven that the Army has launched several new programs and committed more resources towards PTSD than ever before in our history. With large amounts of

funding and research being conducted, Army leaders are showing how committed they are to helping. A simple look back into history defines what little resources were available to Soldiers and families. The Army is clearly rewriting history by providing an abundance of resources needed to educate, treat, and reduce PTSD health concerns for our Soldiers and families. I would challenge anyone to find a time in the past and show where our Army has committed more resources for PTSD than they are providing right now. Treatment for Soldiers who are keeping our freedoms free is truly taking front stage precedence within our Army.

#### References

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