

New Survey of UK Military Post Traumatic Stress - Cases may be Double Reported Rates

Twice as many veterans and reservists of the armed forces could be suffering from military post traumatic stress as are diagnosed with PTSD: 95 per cent of those with symptoms feel suicidal at least part of the time - says UK charity [PTSD Resolution](#)

A new survey by UK charity [PTSD Resolution](#) (Registered Charity No. 1133188) - www.ptsdresolution.org - found that the number of ex-service personnel without a diagnosis that report symptoms are as many as those who officially have PTSD. The first group experience similar patterns of flashbacks and nightmares, anger, depression and social withdrawal.

According to MOD figures some five per cent of ex-service personnel who served in Iraq have suffered from PTSD. Numbers amongst the wider veterans' population, from Northern Ireland and other conflicts, are not available, as the condition has only been fully acknowledged in recent years. Over 300 Falklands veterans have committed suicide; more than were killed in the fighting in 1982 – whilst 20,000 ex-servicemen are in jail or on probation.

The charity's on-line questionnaire on www.ptsdresolution.org sampled 150 respondents, veterans and reservists of the UK armed forces. Retired Colonel Tony Gauvain, chairman of the charity, said:-

“ The results of the survey reflect the experiences of our network of 200 registered therapists who work in the community. Many veterans go undiagnosed – and often those with a diagnosis are not adequately helped. Left untreated, military PTSD and post traumatic stress conditions can cause emotional and behavioural difficulties leading to family break-up, job loss, criminality and worse.”

The survey confirmed that post-traumatic symptoms are strongly associated with depression and alcohol problems. Veterans who suffer without a PTSD assessment are nearly twice as likely to drink excessively as those who have a diagnosis. Disturbingly, 95 percent of those with serious post-traumatic symptoms feel suicidal at least part of the time.

“ Some people 'self-medicate' their various symptoms with alcohol: they don't have access to a doctor, don't want to visit one, or lack the social support to get them to the surgery,” says Tony Gauvain

“This result challenges the view in some quarters that alcohol is the biggest mental health problem for the military population; alcohol use is often the result, not the cause, of their problems. If someone is drinking too much – or has changed in some other way following military operations – it suggests that trauma should be considered as a likely cause before the sufferer is written off as a 'drunken soldier'.”

Note to Editor: Key Facts

1. PTSD Resolution is a registered charity, No. 1133188, offering free therapeutic treatment to UK armed forces' veterans and reservists, to relieve mental health problems resulting from military service and ease reintegration into a normal work & family life.
2. Resolution offers a national outreach therapy programme through more than 200 therapists on an outpatient basis, to support family and work routines. Treatment is confidential, on a one-to-one basis, with no waiting lists and no referrals needed.
3. Therapy through the Resolution network is brief – it generally takes between three and five sessions to reach a mutually agreed end of therapy. It is unusual for further treatment to be needed subsequently.
4. Resolution therapists are trained in Human Givens Therapy (HGT) (1). Used in psychological trauma as a form of Trauma-Focused Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT), this treatment for PTSD is compatible with the guidelines of the National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence (NICE).
5. The PTSD Resolution programme does not require the patient to talk about the events that may have caused the traumatic memory. Resolution's policy is that re-exposure is better done in the client's visual imagination and while in a relaxed state, protecting confidentiality and reducing distress. This is a relatively new development of trauma-focussed CBT, similar to Imagery Re-scripting and Reprocessing Therapy (IRRT). (2)
6. The Resolution network was launched in February 2010. This followed a three-year pilot programme, which included a project with the Falklands Veterans Foundation (www.fvf.org.uk) that helped ex-services personnel recover successfully after experiencing the symptoms of PTSD for 25 years in some cases.
7. Overall the programme has had a better than 83 per cent success rate (3) in resolving the condition for the 121 UK veterans of the armed services treated. This is similar to the recovery rate in the recent study of 599 stress-related cases from the general population who were treated using HGT: over 70 per cent reached a significant and sustained improvement after an average of 3.6 treatment sessions (4).
8. Treatment is complementary to the work of other armed forces charities, because it can resolve the immediate mental health issues that may be barriers to successful help and treatment under reintegration and resettlement programmes.
9. Therapists work in prisons where the authorities permit, and there is an active programme of engagement with the prison service nationally. The patron of the charity is Lord Ramsbotham, former Inspector of Prisons. There are an estimated 8,500 veterans in prison with 3,000 on parole (5). NAPO estimates that half suffer this number from PTSD and related disorders.
10. Resolution provides a service that has been missing in the national provision for veterans' mental health; of those veterans that access treatment through other channels, research suggests that the majority approach their GP and receive medication. One study of vulnerable veterans found that only 4% of those seeking treatment had been offered evidence-based therapeutic help (6).

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References:-

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- (2) Holmes, E. A., et al., 2007. Imagery rescripting in cognitive behaviour therapy. *Journal of Behavior Therapy and Experimental Psychiatry*
- (3) Bishop, P, O'Callaghan, B., 2010. *Effectiveness of HG Therapy for war veterans* [online]. Available at: http://www.bps.org.uk/conferences-and-events/proceedings/proceedings_home.cfm

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evaluation of the Human Givens approach in primary care at a general medical practice. *Psychology and Psychotherapy: Theory, Research and Practice*

(5) Ex-Armed Forces Personnel and the Criminal Justice System: NAPO Report, August 2008

(6) Iverson, A., van Staden, L., Hughes, J., Browne, T., Hull, I., Hall, J., et al. (2009) The prevalence of common mental disorders and PTSD in the UK military: using data from a clinical interview-based study. *BMC Psychiatry*. 9:68

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PTSD Resolution on www.ptsdresolution.org or 0845 021 7873 or e-mail sb@ptsdresolution.org

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