

Deployment Experiences

VA College Toolkit Handout

Research on deployment related stress suggests that most Service Members experienced chronic, daily stressors, as well as traumatic events during deployment. Service members may have experienced some of the following daily stressors:

- Insect bites
- Uncomfortable climate (heat, cold)
- Poor access to and use of bathrooms or showers when needed
- Long workdays
- Disturbing smells
- Frequent/constant loud noises
- Unsanitary conditions
- Food/water in short supply or of poor quality
- Concerns about family at home (children, spouses)
- Loss of contact with friends
- Lack of appreciation and support from unit

Of course, in a war zone, there is always concern about safety. Over 50% of Service Members reported experiencing the following:

- Being attacked or ambushed
- Receiving incoming artillery, rocket, or mortar fire
- Being shot at or receiving small-arms fire

Loss is also a common experience with over 50% of Service Members reporting:

- Seeing dead bodies or human remains
- Knowing someone who was seriously injured or killed

Other traumatic experiences that may have been experienced include:

- Witnessing a horrific accident
- Smelling decomposing bodies
- Being knocked out by an explosion
- Being hospitalized for an injury
- Witnessing or participating in brutality toward others
- Being responsible for the death of a civilian

It is important to remember that these events and experiences are life changing, even if they do not always lead to a diagnosis of PTSD.

References

- Hoge, C.W., Castro, C.A., Messer, D., McGurk, D., Cotting, D.I., & Koffman, R.L. (2004). Combat duty in Iraq and Afghanistan, mental health problems, and barriers to care. *New England Journal of Medicine*, 351, 13-22.
- Tanielian, T., & Jaycox, L.H. (2008). *Invisible wounds of war: psychological and cognitive injuries, their consequences and services to assist recovery*. Santa Monica, California: Rand Corporation MG 720-CCF.

