



US DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE

BLAST INJURY RESEARCH PROGRAM COORDINATING OFFICE

Psychological and Quality of Life Outcomes

Factors That Contribute to Mental Health and Quality of Life in Combat-injured Military Women

As women enter roles in the military directly related to combat operations, they have greater risk of physical injury. Exposure to physical trauma can lead to psychological sequelae. For the purpose of prevention and treatment, it is important to identify the types of psychological issues that military women may face postinjury. To this end, researchers at the Naval Health Research Center (San Diego, CA) examined the prevalence of mental health conditions among female Service members one-year post-injury and analyzed factors which may place women at greater risk for mental health concerns and lower QOL. A total of 1,012 U.S. Service women, who sustained a combat-related injury in Iraq and Afghanistan between January 2003 and December 2015, were examined. Within the first-year post-injury, 404 women (40 percent) were diagnosed with at least one mental health disorder. The most common were post traumatic stress (20 percent), depressive (12.1 percent), adjustment (9 percent), and anxiety disorders (8 percent). Women with minor or moderate injuries were less likely to be diagnosed with a mental health disorder than women with severe injuries. Military occupations in combat support and communications were predictive of fewer mental health issues in injured women. Enlisted rank contributed to increased odds of mental health issues post-injury. Evaluation of QOL for 208 injured women in the cohort revealed that officers had a higher QOL compared with enlisted women. Women in the Air Force also had a higher QOL post-injury than those in the Army, Marines, or Navy. Women with mental health diagnoses post-injury had significantly lower QOL scores compared with those without mental health diagnoses. This study shows that combat-related injury has an impact on the mental health of a significant portion of women revealing a need to develop strategies to preserve optimal mental health and promote resiliency.

This effort was supported by the Navy Bureau of Medicine and Surgery under the Wounded, Ill, and Injured Program.

