

Asking for help can be challenging for anyone, but there are particular concerns that may prevent service members and veterans from seeking support or care for invisible wounds. Surveys have consistently shown that some service members believe that seeking care for psychological health concerns will negatively impact their career and may cause their command and/or unit to lose confidence in them.

The Mental Health Advisory Team (MHAT), established by the Office of the Army Surgeon General, assesses deployment-related psychological health concerns of service members and provides recommendations on their psychological health care and support. In 2010, the assessment expanded to become a joint effort across the Offices of the Air Force, Army and Navy Surgeons General as well as the Office of the Marine Corps Medical Officer to create the Joint Mental Health Advisory Team (JMHAAT). According to MHAT and JMHAAT assessments, factors that discourage members of the military from seeking psychological health services include:

	MHAT II 2004 ¹ OIF	MHAT V 2007 ² OIF	MHAT V 2007 ² OEF	MHAT V 2007 ² OEF
It would be seen as weak.	65%	52.2%	56.7%	48.9%
My unit membership might treat me differently.	63%	53.7%	55.6%	46%
Members of my unit might have less confidence in me.	59%	44.9%	47.8%	41.8%
My leaders would blame me for the problem.	51%	40.2%	43.9%	33.9%
It would harm my career.	50%	31.7%	31.2%	29.2%
It would be too embarrassing.	41%	32%	35.1%	28.6%

These concerns may be particularly relevant for those individuals most in need of psychological health care or support. According to a study by the American Psychological Association, the proportion of service members who expressed anxiety about reaching out for care was approximately two times higher among service members who met screening criteria for a psychological health concern in comparison with those who did not.³

It has also been proven that there is an increased risk of experiencing psychological health concerns with each additional deployment. The MHAT VII survey showed that:³

- 14.3 percent of service members experience psychological health concerns during their first deployment.
- 21.8 percent of service members experience psychological health concerns during their second deployment.
- 32.5 percent of service members experience psychological health concerns during their third or fourth deployment.

Since September 11, 2001, approximately 2.4 million military personnel have deployed to Iraq and Afghanistan, according to the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs.⁴ Of these, more than 40 percent of service members have deployed more than once.⁵

Deployments have a significant impact on military families.

While many military families successfully adapt to the challenges of the military lifestyle, the cumulative impact of deployments can lead to increased emotional and psychological health concerns among military children and spouses. Within the U.S. military, 55 percent of service members are married and 40 percent have two children.⁶ More than 700,000 children have experienced one or more parental deployments.⁷

The 2010 Report to Congress, *The Impact of Deployment of Members of the Armed Forces on Their Dependent Children*, noted that young children (ages 0–5) are likely to exhibit anger and attention difficulties, while school-age children (ages 6–12) demonstrate increased “anxiety and fear, sensitivity to media coverage and reduced school performance.” Among adolescents (ages 13–18), the report cited an increase in “declining academic performance, depressive symptoms and behavioral problems in response to emotional stress.”

The effects of deployment on children are among the primary concerns reported by military families in the Blue Star Families’ 2012 *Military Family Lifestyle Survey*. Other top concerns include pay and benefits, military spouse employment and issues surrounding posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and combat stress.

