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Anxiety and Depression twice as prevalent in military says study.



The high levels of stress that soldiers experience could be a factor, researchers say

Members of the UK armed forces are twice as likely to develop depression or anxiety as members of the general working population, a study suggests.

The King's College London research compared surveys from 7,000 military personnel with people in other jobs.

It found 18% of men and 25% of women in the forces reported symptoms of common mental disorders, compared with 8% of men and 12% of women in other areas.

The MoD said it had improved mental health services for the military.

The researchers said the study, published in **Psychological Medicine**, was fairer than previous studies which included results from unemployed people and those with long-term health problems and disabilities - who researchers said were more likely to report symptoms of mental illness.

The findings could be explained by the frequency and intensity of stressful events experienced by those in the military, researchers said.

Military life also required extended periods spent away from family and friends, they added.

The survey included questions such as whether the subject felt they were "playing a useful part in things".

Respondents from the military were almost three times more likely to disagree with this statement than those from the general population, the study found.

Treatment needed

Lead author Dr Laura Goodwin said: "The findings were not what we expected. We didn't think there would be such a difference between members of the military and the rest of the general population.

"We know that other studies which recruit people just because they are in a particular occupation, such as teaching or social work, also find higher reports of anxiety and depression."

Prof Nicola Fear, from the King's Centre for Military Health Research, said: "This [report] highlights that symptoms of depression and anxiety are common in the armed forces. In fact, they are more common than alcohol misuse or post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).

"The findings draw attention to the need for Defence Medical Services to continue to focus on identifying and treating depression and anxiety in addition to PTSD."

Elsewhere, mental health charity, Combat Stress, said there had been a significant increase in the number of UK veterans of the Afghanistan conflict seeking help. It said it had received 358 new veteran referrals in 2013, a 57% rise on 2012.

'Support available'

The Ministry of Defence said it took the mental health and wellbeing of personnel very seriously.

A spokeswoman said: "The government has long recognised that service life can cause stress.

"Since 2008, the last data used in this study, the MoD has made a number of improvements to the mental health services available to the armed forces.

"These include pre and post-operational stress management briefings, decompression, Trauma Risk Management, and the Big White Wall online wellbeing service.

"In addition, the MoD has introduced several anti-stigma campaigns to encourage serving personnel who need help to come forward to access the wide range of support that is available."

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