

Women warriors show resilience similar to men

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Women service members who experience combat are apparently as resilient as the men they serve alongside, according to a study published by the American Psychological Association.

Men and [women](#) deployed to Iraq and Afghanistan in 2007 and 2008 experienced very similar levels of combat-related stress and post-deployment mental health impacts during the first year following return from deployment, researchers reported in the *Journal of Abnormal Psychology*, published by American Psychological Association.

"Contrary to popular belief, women who go to war respond to combat trauma much like their male counterparts," said lead author Dawne Vogt, PhD, of the Veterans Administration National Center for PTSD and Boston University School of Medicine. "And with the unpredictable guerilla tactics of [modern warfare](#), barring women from ground combat is less meaningful."

The findings are particularly significant given the recent call for the Pentagon to reverse its longstanding policy that bars women from ground combat, Vogt said. As of 2009, more than 750 women had been wounded or killed in action during Operation Enduring Freedom in Afghanistan and Operation Iraqi Freedom, the paper states.

The research was based on survey responses from 595 service members drawn from a random sample from the Defense Manpower Data Center roster. It included 340 women and 252 men from active duty, National

Guard, and Reserve forces. The women, on average, were three years younger and more likely to belong to a racial/ethnic minority group. The men were more likely to be married, living with children, have higher incomes and to have served in the Marine Corps during their deployment.

Researchers used stress measures that included exposure to combat involving firing a weapon, being fired on, and witnessing injury and death; experiencing consequences of combat, such as observing or handling [human remains](#) and dealing with detainees; enduring difficult living situations in the war zone; and fearing for one's safety and well-being.

As expected, men reported more exposure to combat and battle aftermath, as well as difficult living conditions. "The fact that these differences were relatively small, however, suggests that women's exposure to these stressors in [Iraq and Afghanistan] may be, on average, only slightly lower than men's exposure on average," the study states.

Few gender differences were reported in post-deployment mental health. Specifically, levels of post-traumatic stress, [mental health](#) functioning, and depression were similar, though scores on substance abuse were higher for men than women.

The findings could reflect improved training of female service members in recent years and that combat duty may equalize risk due to its persistent level of threat, according to the study.

Provided by American Psychological Association

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