

# Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder

Leveraging Research to Improve PTSD Prevention and Treatment Services



From identifying the long-term effects of chronic combat-related PTSD to documenting the adverse outcomes of victims of Hurricane Katrina, Abt Associates' research is **informing decisionmakers** working to improve PTSD treatment and prevention services. Our work is designed to benefit our military members, veterans, their families and the public at large.

## Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder

Since September 2011, more than two million U.S. military service members have been deployed to Afghanistan and Iraq. Frequent deployments, exposure to combat, sustained injuries and separations from family have substantially increased the number of troops experiencing post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). PTSD cases are expected to continue to grow for our troops exposed to combat.

In coming years, we anticipate that traumatic events such as mass violence and natural disasters will threaten the psychological health of many more Americans. This concern is triggering the demand in both the public and private health sectors for effective, cost-efficient PTSD prevention and treatment programs.

## Understanding PTSD

The definition of, and treatment for, PTSD, has evolved since its recognition as a behavioral health disorder in 1980. In the past, critical incident stress debriefing was a common practice to prevent the onset of PTSD.

This practice has shifted to providing victims "psychological first aid"—focusing on re-establishing a foundation of security for them. Treatments of PTSD now include cognitive behavioral and prolonged exposure therapies as well as two antidepressant medications that are proving to be effective.

PTSD is frequently not an isolated condition. Health risks and conditions that can co-exist with this disorder include comorbidity with alcohol and substance abuse, depression, and cardiovascular disease. Add to these conditions the negative perceptions associated with mental health therapy held by many Americans and the trauma victim's fear of possible job loss, and the challenges faced mount considerably.



## Developing Effective Treatment While Containing Costs

Controlling behavioral health care costs requires experience with the funding, regulation, and administration of service systems. Abt has that experience, working closely with federal, state, and regional service systems, and with insurers and health plans, to evaluate the need for and impact of care.

## Reaching Hard-To-Reach Populations

Whether seeking to survey U.S. troops who have been deployed to Iraq or Afghanistan, Vietnam Veterans, or families, we are experts in reaching population segments critical to a study but difficult to locate. We accomplish this by tailoring technology, including using computer-aided surveys and Web-based systems.

## Our Specialties

- Research design
- Survey research
- Advanced quantitative and qualitative methodologies
- Large-scale, longitudinal studies
- Program evaluation
- Reaching diverse, hard-to-reach populations

## Our Experts

Our team is comprised of leaders in the mental health and addictions field and specialists with academic, legal, sociological, economic, political, and government backgrounds. These professionals approach each project with a deep understanding of the issues and draw on rigorous research and direct experience in behavioral health services development and delivery as well as financing to provide clients with the best possible solutions.

## Among Our Clients

- U.S. Department of Defense
- U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs
- U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
- Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration
- Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
- State and local agencies
- Private healthcare and insurance providers

## Our Work in PTSD and Other Trauma-Related Issues

### The Long-Term Course of Combat-Related PTSD

The focus of this congressionally mandated study—the National Vietnam Veterans Longitudinal Study—is to learn about the long-term course of combat-related PTSD and its relationship with chronic physical illnesses such as cardiovascular disease and diabetes. The study, funded by the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, involves re-assessing the 2,348 veterans who participated in the National Vietnam Veterans Readjustment Study in 1987. The re-assessment focuses on mental and physical health and includes psychiatric diagnostic interviews conducted by trained, experienced mental health clinicians.

### Health Effects of Deployment

Abt conducted this study of the health effects of deployment in Afghanistan and Iraq on U.S. Active Duty Service Members (ADSMs) for the TRICARE Management Activity of the U.S. Department of Defense (DoD). In it, we assessed and compared self-reported health outcome measures of 3,329 deployed and 2,671 non-deployed troops, stratified by service branch, rank, military occupation, age and gender. Participants completed a questionnaire assessing a broad range of health outcomes, with a focus on mental health and neurological outcomes.

### Checklist for Military Personnel/Unit Cohesion Scale From the Deployment Risk and Resilience Inventory

Abt assessed additional exposure data through collaboration with DOD in its ongoing studies of deployment health. The survey found that (ADSMs) deployed to Afghanistan and Iraq were twice as likely to screen positive for PTSD as those not deployed. The study's findings demonstrated the need to continue and enhance screenings for short-term mental health disorders among returning ADSMs in order to quickly identify and provide treatment and support to affected soldiers.

## The Psychological Impacts of Natural Disasters

The physical and mental health impacts of Hurricane Katrina on the population of New Orleans and surrounding areas were the subject of this literature review that Abt conducted for the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Interagency Performance Evaluation Task Force. The review, aimed at providing information that would be useful in future similar incidents, documented various toxic exposures and their health consequences as well as psychological trauma and its psychosocial consequences. Abt received an award of excellence for this review.

## Supporting Trauma-Informed Care Services

As a coordinating partner of the National Center for Trauma-Informed Care (NCTIC), Abt helped gather a broad coalition of stakeholders and nationally recognized mental health-oriented organizations and compile information about evidence-based practices for them so they could consider and promote “trauma-informed” mental health and substance abuse care. Funded by SAMHSA, NCTIC encourages the development of and access to trauma services that are consumer-driven and responsive to the needs of trauma survivors, and which support local and national system transformation.

## Contact

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**Abt Associates** is a mission-driven, global leader in research and program implementation in the fields of health, social and environmental policy, and international development. Known for its rigorous approach to solving complex challenges, Abt Associates is regularly ranked as one of the top 20 global research firms and one of the top 40 international development innovators. The company has multiple offices in the U.S. and program offices in more than 40 countries.

