

## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

### ***The Journey Home: Connecting Soldiers, Families, and Communities***

Preliminary Findings from a Michigan State University/  
Michigan National Guard Study of Returning Veterans and their Families

**Study team:** Adrian Blow, PhD; Barbara Ames, PhD; Phil Reed, PhD; Lisa Gorman, MA; COL James Anderson, PhD

#### **KEY FINDINGS**

- Many soldiers and their spouses/significant others are doing well 45 days post-deployment
- Mental health difficulties are present in a number of returning veterans in Michigan
- A number of spouses/significant others report mental health difficulties as well
- About 40% of marriages/relationships report distress
- A significant proportion of those with at least one mental health concern are parents of children
- Very few of those reporting mental health concerns report using a mental health service
- Significant treatment barriers exist
  - Stigma – concerns about confidentiality
  - Low availability of treatment for couples and families
  - Untrained treatment providers
  - High costs of treatment

#### **IMPORTANT CONSIDERATIONS**

- Mental health difficulties such as PTSD and depression have a clear connection to divorce, substance abuse, and homelessness
- Mental health difficulties can develop after an incubation period has passed (could be several years)
- Untreated mental health difficulties can lead to long term higher costs to states and to the country
- National Guard (NG) needs are unique:
  - Citizen force
  - Return to communities that may not understand military
  - Rural areas of the state may be most vulnerable

#### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

1. Need for continued support for returning veterans
2. Need for continuing support for families of veterans including couple and family therapy
3. Need to invest in research to inform knowledge and treatment
4. Need to make support services including mental health care accessible, affordable, and effective
  - Mental health professionals may not have training in military culture or evidence-based treatments
  - Stigma may prevent service members from seeking help; need confidential services
  - Rural areas may lack services
  - Services may not be affordable; reimbursement does not always include key services such as marital/family counseling, parent training, sex therapy

#### **OVERVIEW OF MSU/NG STUDY FINDINGS**

##### **MENTAL HEALTH CONCERNS**

- 48% of service members reported at least one mental health concern
- 43% of spouses/significant others reported at least one mental health concern
- 45% of those parenting children reported at least one mental health concern

- Only 14% of soldiers and 13% of spouses/significant others with a mental health concern reported using a mental health service of some kind in the past year

#### **MARITAL RELATIONSHIP DISTRESS**

- 40% of service members and 35% of spouses/significant others reported relationship distress

#### **POST-TRAUMATIC STRESS DISORDER (PTSD)**

- 16% of service members in diagnosable range for PTSD (in relation to a military event)
- 22% of spouses/significant others in diagnosable range for PTSD (in relation to a non-military event)
- 52% of service members vulnerable to PTSD

#### **DEPRESSION**

- 15% of service members have moderate to severe depression
- 13% of spouses/significant others have moderate to severe depression
- 7% of service members at risk for suicide
- 9% of spouses/significant others at risk for suicide

#### **SAMPLE DEMOGRAPHICS**

- 285 service members and spouses/significant others
- 63% service members; 35% spouses/significant others; 2% dual career military
- 67% married, 17% single, 6% divorced, 10% other
- 90% of sample 22-50 years old
- 81% have post-high school education of some kind
- 44% Female, 56% Male
- Deployments range from 12-18 months (some service members have been on more than one)
- Children range in age from very young (some born during deployment) to adolescents
- 70% parents; 22% step-parents; 12% single parents; 10% with a special needs child

For more information on Family Impact Seminars, please contact Dr. Esther Onaga at: Department of Family and Child Ecology, Room 4 Human Ecology Building, Michigan State University, East Lansing, MI 48824; 517- 355-0166; onaga@msu.edu; <http://www.fce.msu.edu/FIS.html>