

**For Information Contact:**

Beth Casteel at APA, 703-907-8640

[press@psych.org](mailto:press@psych.org)

Bobbi Williams at Porter Novelli: 202-973-3656

[bobbi.williams@porternovelli.com](mailto:bobbi.williams@porternovelli.com)**Embargoed:**

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## **Study finds Stigma May Still be a Barrier for Many Military Members and Military Spouses Seeking Mental Health Care**

**ARLINGTON, Va. (April 30, 2008)** – The American Psychiatric Association (APA) today released a study conducted by Harris Interactive® that shows stigma may still play a significant role in preventing many military members and military spouses from obtaining the mental health care they need. The survey shows that six in ten military members (61%) think that seeking help for mental health concerns would have at least some negative impact on their career. In addition, about half of military members (53%) believe that others will think less of them if they seek help for mental health concerns.

A unique characteristic of this survey is that military spouses are given a voice, and share their perceptions of mental health issues, understanding, and treatment. “It’s important to remember that the mental health trials that service members experience can have a ripple effect throughout their immediate family while they are serving and upon their return home,” said Carolyn B. Robinowitz, M.D., president of the American Psychiatric Association.

While respondents generally rated their overall mental health as good or excellent (including 71% of military members and 75% of military spouses), many report regularly experiencing common symptoms of mental illness. This includes nearly half (48%) that report difficulty sleeping at least twice a week and about a third (34%) that report a lack of interest in daily activities at least twice a week. The majority of spouses also reported a lot or a little stress from handling domestic issues alone (60%) and single parenting (54%).

In addition, respondents reported low levels of knowledge when it comes to common warning signs of, and treatment options for, mental health issues that may result from being deployed to or serving in support of a war zone. The survey showed that about half of military members (49%) and military spouses (53%) say they are somewhat or not at all knowledgeable about the warning signs of mental health concerns from such service and about 6 in 10 military members (59%) and two thirds of military spouses (66%) say they know little or nothing at all about effective treatments that exist for mental health concerns that may arise from serving in a war zone.

“Of particular concern is the fact that over a quarter of military members (26%) and about a fifth of military spouses (18%) say they know *nothing at all* about effective mental health treatments for issues that may arise from their service in a war zone,” said Dr. Robinowitz.

While greater education about mental illnesses is clearly needed, most respondents did express belief in the fact that mental illnesses can be successfully treated (with 87% of respondents agreeing with this statement). “It’s encouraging that respondents understand mental illness is real and treatable,” said Dr. Robinowitz. “In addition, the vast majority of respondents, 92%, agree that seeking mental health treatment can help people take control of their lives.”

The National Alliance on Mental Illness and the National Military Family Association joined with the APA during a press conference in Washington, D.C. to release these findings and call for greater education and services for military members and their spouses. The APA is dedicated to promoting high quality mental health care for military members and their families. Its efforts in this area include ongoing advocacy work, testifying before congressional panels, special-focus internal groups – including the Society of Uniformed Services Psychiatrists and the Committee on Mental Healthcare for Veterans & Military Personnel & Their Families – and primary research such as this new survey.

For more information about mental illnesses associated with serving in a war zone, including brochures and fact sheets on post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), depression and anxiety disorders, please visit [www.HealthyMinds.org](http://www.HealthyMinds.org).

### **Additional Survey Findings**

Additional study findings highlight more thoughts on access to care for mental health issues within the military and the differing opinions of military members and military spouses relating to the military’s commitment to supporting their mental health:

- Military spouses were less likely to believe that the military cares about their mental health, with only 48% of spouses agreeing to this statement versus 62% of military members.
- Additionally, 63 percent of military members and 37 percent of military spouses say they avoid discussing any mental health concerns they might have with other people.
- While about seven in ten military members (73 %) say that it is currently very or somewhat easy for them to get mental health treatment, including treatment for substance abuse and alcohol dependence,

only 63 percent of military members who are currently not serving say it was very or somewhat easy to do so *while they were serving* in the military.

- Of those respondents who expressed an opinion as to whether there are enough psychiatrists available through TRICARE to meet the needs of military members and their spouses, about twice as many felt there are not enough (67% as compared to 33% who felt there are enough).

#### **About the American Psychiatric Association:**

The American Psychiatric Association is a national medical specialty society whose more than 38,000 physician members specialize in diagnosis, treatment, prevention and research of mental illnesses, including substance use disorders.

*“Healthy Minds. Healthy Lives.”* is APA’s consumer campaign to improve understanding of mental illnesses, psychiatry, and successful treatment options, as well as to reduce stigma. Learn more about these issues by visiting the campaign’s Web site at [www.HealthyMinds.org](http://www.HealthyMinds.org).

#### **About Harris Interactive:**

Harris Interactive is a global leader in custom market research. With a long and rich history in multimodal research, powered by science and technology, Harris Interactive assists clients in achieving business results. Harris Interactive serves clients globally through its North American, European and Asian offices and a network of independent market research firms.

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#### **About the Survey:**

The Military Mental Health Survey was conducted online within the United States by Harris Interactive on behalf of the American Psychiatric Association between March 5-18, 2008 among a total of 191 military members (n=78) and spouses of military members (n=113), using the Harris Poll Online Panel.

Military members are defined as U.S. adults ages 18 to 54 who are current or former members of the armed forces including active, reserve, and national guard, and report to ever have been deployed to or sent in support of a war zone since 2001 (e.g., Iraq, Afghanistan, and countries in the Horn of Africa such as Djibouti or Senegal).

Based on data from this study, the incidence of military members and military spouses among U.S. adults is 3% and 2% respectively. A full methodology is available.