

MS Military service: health, wellbeing and social integration

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MENTAL HEALTH OF DEPLOYED UK TROOPS IN AFGHANISTAN – OPERATIONAL MENTAL HEALTH NEEDS EVALUATION – OMHNE-A 2010

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Objectives The Mental Health of UK armed forces, is of growing political and societal interest. Studies have explored the mental health of troops, before and after operational deployment, but this is the first UK study to examine troops currently on deployment in Afghanistan. The aim of the study was to evaluate the mental health of the deployed force, at the time of the operational deployment.

Methods A team of 4 investigators deployed to Afghanistan in the Spring of 2010, to sample 15% of the deployed force, using a questionnaire based tool which included GHQ, PCL and measures of morale, cohesion, leadership and help-seeking. This involved the investigators visiting the troops in forward locations throughout Helmand Province.

Results The overall rates of common mental disorders and probable PTSD, were similar to both the UK general population, and previously published studies on UK AF. There was a significant improvement in GHQ caseness associated with good leadership, and a 10-fold reduction in probable PTSD rate associated with good leadership. There was seen to be an impact of stigma on the rates of presentation.

Conclusions This study has demonstrated that the rates of both common mental disorders and probable PTSD are similar in currently deployed troops, as the UK population, and previous studies of UK Armed Forces. There was evidence of higher rates in some specialist trades, which has led to increased support from deployed mental health teams.