After Nearly a Decade of War, Servicemembers and Families Report Stress, Resilience

The wars in Afghanistan and Iraq have put America’s all-volunteer force to its most severe test since its inception in 1973. Between 1996 and 2002, 31,000 to 77,000 U.S. servicemembers were deployed abroad on active duty at any given time. Between 2003 and 2007, however, that range reached 74,000 to 294,000.

This overall increase has been sustained through successful military recruiting and incentive strategies. But how are the troops and their families faring?

A growing body of RAND research is helping to illustrate the consequences so that support programs and other policies can better serve the populations in need.

For more information about RAND research on this issue, including insight into the ways the military is sustaining readiness, see www.rand.org/feature/military-well-being

Along certain measures of functioning and well-being, children from military families are no different from other children. However, they do report experiencing more anxiety symptoms, emotional difficulties, and problems with family functioning.

More than two million U.S. servicemembers have been deployed to Iraq or Afghanistan. Many of these troops experience trauma while deployed and return home with mental health conditions. A variety of barriers may be preventing many of those in need from seeking care.

The lives of spouses and caregivers from military families change dramatically during deployment. There are both challenges and benefits, but, for many, child- and employment-related problems appear to worsen.