OUT OF THE SHADOWS

What we know about the well-being and experiences of private contractors working in conflict environments

For the past decade, private contractors have been deployed extensively in conflict zones throughout the world, supporting U.S. and allied forces in Iraq and Afghanistan, as well as foreign governments, nongovernmental organizations, and private businesses. These contractors experience many of the same traumas of war faced by military forces—combat stressors known to have negative physical and mental health implications for armed forces personnel. Unlike military service members, however, many contractors don’t have access to mental health resources before, during, and after deployment. So how are they coping with the aftereffects of working in a war zone? RAND’s survey of more than 650 contractors gives us a glimpse into how this “shadow force” is faring.

CONTRACTORS REPORTING COMBAT EXPOSURE

The table below shows the percentage of respondents who reported exposure to various types of combat stressors during their deployment.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stressor</th>
<th>Contractors (100)</th>
<th>Veterans (100)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Combat stressors</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 or members of my team encountered land or water mines or bombs</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>46%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 or members of my team encountered terrorist or civilians</td>
<td>47%</td>
<td>53%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 or members of my team received hostile fire from small arms, artillery, rockets, mortars, or shells</td>
<td>73%</td>
<td>74%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 or members of my team witnessed someone from my team or an ally being seriously wounded or killed</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 or members of my team were attacked by IEDs or mines</td>
<td>39%</td>
<td>46%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 or members of my team were attacked</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

CONTRACTORS WITH PROBABLE MENTAL HEALTH OR SUBSTANCE USE PROBLEMS

- Probable PTSD: 25%
- Probable depression: 18%
- Alcohol misuse: 47%
- High-risk drinking: 10%

CONTRACTORS WITH PROBABLE PTSD OR DEPRESSION, BY LENGTH OF MOST RECENT DEPLOYMENT

- PTSD: 32%
- Depression: 23%
- Compared with up to 20% of service members

CONTRACTORS WITH PROBABLE PTSD OR DEPRESSION, BY CITIZENSHIP

- United States: 13%
- United Kingdom: 17%
- Other countries: 14%

CONTRACTORS REPORTING PHYSICAL HEALTH CONDITIONS, BY SPECIALTY

- Transportation: 45%
- Training/advising: 43%
- Land security: 40%
- Base support: 40%
- Logistics/maintenance: 38%
- Management: 32%
- Maritime security: 15%
- Other: 47%

For more information, see Molly Dunigan, Carrie M. Farmer, Rachel M. Burns, Alexis Warneke, and Claude Messan Setodji, Out of the Shadows: The Health and Well-Being of Private Contractors Working in Conflict Environments, RAND Corporation, RR-420-RC (available at www.rand.org/t/rr420), 2013. This research was conducted as part of our RAND-Initiated Research program and was funded in part by the generosity of RAND’s donors and by fees earned on client-funded research.

Infographics by Erin-Elizabeth Johnson and Dori Gordon Walker.

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