

Deployment-related Post-Traumatic Growth among UK Armed Forces personnel



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The study



A questionnaire was sent to UK military serving and ex-serving personnel, across all services (Royal Marine, Navy, Army and Royal Air Force) investigating their health and well-being following deployment to Iraq/Afghanistan.



This study investigated the Post-Traumatic Growth (PTG) that may occur after a military deployment, and what factors were associated with PTG in military ex-/serving personnel.

The technical stuff

The PTG-Inventory was adapted to suit a military audience. A new stem question “As a result of my deployment to Iraq/Afghanistan since 2002:” was used and answers were reduced to a 4 point Likert scale ranging from ‘no change for the better’ to ‘a big change for the better’.

Only participants who had deployed to Iraq/Afghanistan (n=5239) were included. After excluding participants with >3 missing questions on the PTG measure, n=5212 were included for a linear regression analysis.

What is PTG?

Traumatic life events inflict significant changes to ones perception of the world, ourselves or others.



Trauma can come in many forms. It may be a physical trauma (e.g. car accident), an emotional trauma (e.g. childhood abuse/neglect) or a trauma that happens to someone else (e.g. a bereavement).

Post-traumatic growth occurs when a person experiences beneficial psychological change. This is usually defined in terms of developing relationships, a greater appreciation of life and the opportunities it holds, an understanding of one’s own strength and greater spritual understanding.



What is associated with PTG?

Those who reported more PTSD symptoms also experienced more PTG.



Females and reservists experienced more PTG.



Being in a combat role, reporting experience of being in immediate danger or impending death, greater number of combat experiences and longer time served in the military were associated with higher levels of PTG.

Reporting worse health, longer time passed since being deployed to Iraq/Afghanistan or being of higher rank were less likely to experience PTG.



What does this mean?

PTG has been shown to have beneficial mental and physical health consequences, though has a complex relationship with PTSD, as seen in our study.

Identifying the associated health, combat and demographic characteristics of PTG is a step towards understanding and perhaps one day facilitating PTG.

Limitations

A more accurate term for the growth reported in this paper is Post-Deployment Growth (PDG). It is not known if PDG and PTG share similar qualities, though the literature suggests they might.

There was a significant floor effect in the measure, indicating the PTG questionnaire does not measure the full range of post-deployment change, such as changes for the worse.