

PSYCHOLOGICAL THERAPY IN THE MILITARY ENVIRONMENT: A PROGRAM OF MULTIMODAL THERAPIES FOR SOLDIERS DEPENDANTS

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The Families of Soldiers experience significant stress when their loved ones are deployed to combat areas. The psychological and social stresses lead to significant disruption in the emotional wellbeing and performance in the soldiers families. This leads to 'non-combat' reasons for recall from the frontline.

In 2010 a program of group, mother & child, and individual therapies was organised for a Regiment about to be posted to Iraq. Pre-deployment preparation of the families was an important role with great care taken to use familiar language and reduce resistance to novel and potentially threatening or destabilising ideas.

Over the year of the program the Regiment had a reduced recall rate compared to 'sister' units without the intervention; their rate was 2%, a third of the usual. In 2012 following a major incident with substantial loss of life the program was delivered to a front line unit deployed to Afghanistan. The expected morbidity rate was over 20% with an expected 5% mortality rate. Large family sizes, from multiple partners, were a way of keeping the dread of death at bay. Intolerance of 'weakness' was a further maladaptive behaviour.

Over the program the morbidity rate was triple the mortality rate (5%), with limb loss common. Soldiers presented as often as families. In light of the massive injury and death rate, the ongoing risks, and different population characteristics, the reduction in recall rates from the 2%, in the prior study, to less than 0.5% is remarkable. The program has received a recommendation for extension across the army.