

Health // Monday, March 2, 2009



**Stress, suicide: tough wounds for the US Army**

Time is GMT + 8 hours  
Posted: 2-Mar-2009 08:24 hrs

A US Army soldier who was injured in Baghdad, Iraq, tries out his prosthetic limbs after having them adjusted at Walter Reed Army Medical Center in Washington, DC, in 2006. Anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorder and record-high suicide rates are haunting American veterans of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, amid a taboo over mental distress.

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At the Walter Reed Army Medical Center in Washington, psychological help is part and parcel of the care provided to soldiers wounded in combat, according to Colonel John Bradley, chief of the hospital's psychiatric department.

"We don't wait for a declaration of emotional distress or dysfunction but we rather see the patient right from the beginning. We are looking for early signs of PTSD (post-traumatic stress disorder), depression or difficulty coping with their battle injuries," he told AFP.

Insomnia, violent nightmares, high agitation and a constant state of high alert are some of the more common PTSD symptoms, he explained.

"When I came back, initially I would have dreams that I wouldn't

remember, things like that. You go through some pretty nasty things," Staff Sergeant Michael Downing, a double amputee and a veteran of the war in Afghanistan, said in an interview.

But at Walter Reed, "they help you with PTSD, brain traumatic injuries.... Here, I am talking to a lot of soldiers, people who have been through what you've been through and it kind of helps," he added.

According to Bradley, 10 to 15 percent of wounded veterans treated at Walter Reed suffer from PTSD. But he admitted the proportion is likely higher among all Iraq and Afghanistan veterans, who do not all benefit from preventive care and treatment at a medical facility.

More US soldiers committed suicide in January than were killed in combat in both wars combined that month. According to official figures a record 128 soldiers took their lives last year, up from 115 in 2007, as tours of duty in the past seven years come ever

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