

Danish soldiers after deployment

RESEARCH IN BRIEF





About the “Danish soldiers after a war-zone deployment” project

In autumn 2009, the Danish soldiers' foundation *Soldaterlegatet* contacted SFI to discuss the possibilities for examining the implications for individual Danish soldiers of international military deployment.

This subject had not previously been examined, either in Danish or international contexts, to the depth and scope suggested by the foundation, and SFI was pleased to take on the assignment. The result was the establishment of the research project “Danish soldiers after a war-zone deployment”. The project examines a series of conditions of Danish soldiers who were deployed by the Danish state to global conflict zones in

Jørgen Søndergaard,
Managing Director, SFI

the period 1992 to 2009. The project is based on a considerable amount of different types of data about the deployed soldiers, not least from the Danish Defence, which has provided the project access to this data on a continuous basis. SFI would like to thank Danish Defence for their efforts and collaboration in this connection.

Soldaterlegatet and SFI hope that the results of the project will be studied in detail and that they will be applied in future efforts to ensure that Denmark as a society becomes even better at helping soldiers tackle the challenges experienced after war-zone deployment.

Peter Højland
Chairman of the Board of Directors,
Soldaterlegatet

Introduction

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Around 26,000 Danish men and women were deployed as soldiers on international missions between 1992 and 2009. The former Yugoslavia, Iraq and Afghanistan count among the destinations where Danish military forces have been present during this period.

What have been the implications for the Danish soldiers deployed? Who are the people that Denmark chooses to send to war, and how does the deployment experience affect them? Soldaterlegatet commissioned SFI, the Danish National Centre for Social Research, to carry out a study on this issue. The results of the study are now available in the form of six reports, which have been published individually during the period 2010 to 2012. This leaflet presents a brief description of the conclusions of the research project.





Data behind the analysis

While carrying out the analyses, researchers in the project have had access to a considerable amount of data on veterans, their families, a control group (see the box below) and the population in general. The data includes:

- Information from Danish Defence about the 26,028 individuals who were deployed between 1992 and 2009, e.g. about number of deployments, dates of deployment, deployment areas, personnel group and name of operation.
- Danish Defence recruitment information about individuals found fit for duty or fit for restricted duty in the period 1994-2010. This information was used to establish a control group.
- Information from Statistics Denmark about the deployed soldiers and the control group, as well as their parents (including foster parents and step parents), siblings, partners, own children and the children of partners. This information includes data on finances, social relations and education, etc.
- Information from the Danish Health and Medicines Authority about the deployed soldiers and the control group, e.g. about any contact to the health services, pharmaceutical purchases, diagnoses and treatment for substance abuse.
- Teleinterviews with a representative sample of 3,198 veterans about family matters, work, deployment experience, self-perceived after-effects of deployment, etc.
- Questionnaire survey, in two rounds, of 447 soldiers who were deployed to either Lebanon (UNIFIL 4) or Afghanistan (ISAF 11) in spring 2001 about pre- and post-deployment motivation.
- A total of 44 personal, semi-structured interviews with veterans, relatives, representatives from Danish Defence and support services.

The control group

How do you determine whether events in the life of a previously deployed soldier are a result of his or her experiences during deployment, or whether the events would have occurred regardless of the deployment?

This is not a question that can be answered with absolute scientific certainty, but an approximate answer can be found by comparing veterans with a non-deployed control group resembling in as many ways as possible the veterans. In this way, it can be said with the greatest possibly certainty that any differences between the two groups are presumably linked to the deployment.

The project therefore established a control group consisting of individuals who had been found fit for military service during one of Danish Defence's selection processes, but who had not served internationally. Moreover, it was decided the control group should consist of male individuals born between 1975 and 1982 who had participated in Danish Defence Day (a military selection day) between 1994 and 2010; a total of 100,000 individuals. This made it possible to compare the control group with the veterans born within the same period and thus work with two groups that resembled each other on as many points as possible.

Therefore the study only compares male veterans born between 1975 and 1982 (i.e. about one-quarter of all deployed soldiers) with a control group.



Eighteen years of Danish military commitment abroad

Between 1992 and 2009 Denmark participated in 60 military deployments in 35 countries.

Around 26,000 soldiers were deployed during this period. Half of these soldiers were deployed only once; less than one out of ten soldiers were deployed more than five times.

The 26,000 soldiers were deployed a total of almost 54,000 times. The former Yugoslavia was

the destination for the deployment six out of ten times. In 2009, seven out of ten deployments were in Afghanistan. The number of annual deployments has doubled during the period and was at its highest in 2007, when Danish soldiers were sent on approx. 4,500 deployments.

A total of 51 soldiers lost their lives on deployment and 123 soldiers were wounded in the period 1992 and 2009.

Deployments 1992 to 2009

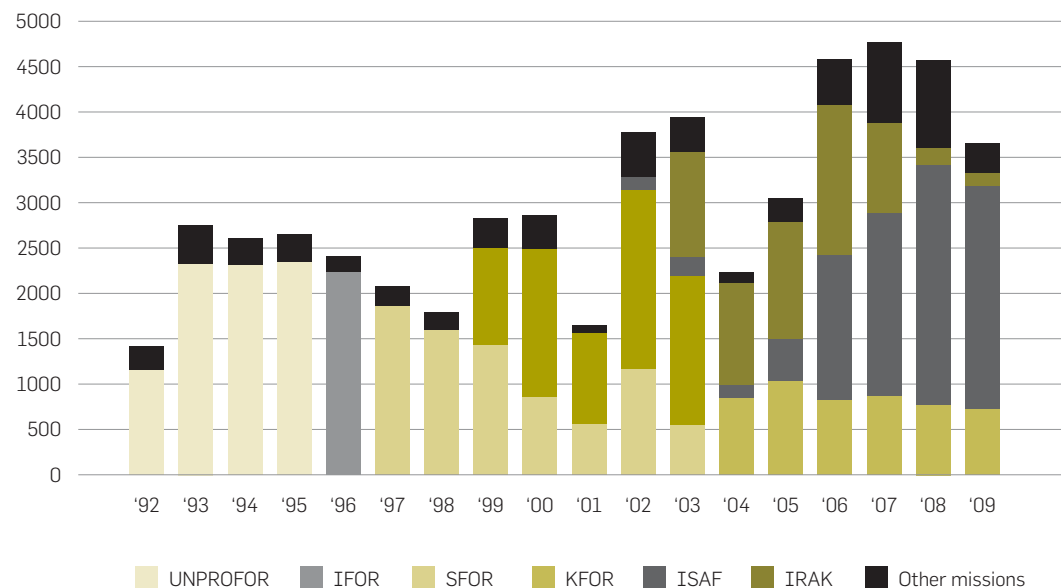
The project also indirectly tells something about a period of Danish history characterised by considerable changes in the world around us and therefore also changes in Danish Defence's assignments and international commitments. Until the breakup of Yugoslavia in the early 1990s, Danish forces had only participated in peace-keeping missions, e.g. in the Republic of Cyprus. Since the end of the 1990s, and in particular in 2003 with the beginning of the war in Iraq, the nature of missions has changed from peace-keeping to peace-making missions, and soldiers are increasingly being deployed to actual war-zones.

Naturally, this trend has influenced the assignments and the requirements facing Danish

Defence employees. Whereas in the 1990s, deployment was an option the individual soldiers could choose, today, more or less all Danish contract soldiers are deployed on international missions at least once. The number of annual deployments has doubled during the period, from around 1,500 deployments in 1992 to around 3,500 deployments in 2009. Danish international commitment peaked at around 4,500 deployments in 2007.

This trend is also evident in the number of soldiers killed. Of the 51 Danish soldiers who lost their lives during international deployments between 1992 and 2009, more than half were killed in Afghanistan within the final two years of the period.

Number of deployments by mission 1992-2009



UNCRO and UNPROFOR are listed collectively under UNPROFOR

UNPROFOR: Bosnia-Herzegovina, Croatia, Serbia, Montenegro and Macedonia, 1992-1995

UNCRO: Croatia, 1995-1996

IFOR: Bosnia-Herzegovina, 1995-1996

SFOR: Bosnia-Herzegovina, 1996-2004

KFOR: Kosovo, 1999-

IRAK: Iraq, 2003-

ISAF: Afghanistan, 2002-

These seven missions make up 88 % of the deployments between 1992 and 2009.

Portrait of deployed soldiers

Who is the typical first-time deployed soldier? Firstly, the first-time deployed soldier is usually male. Of the total number of soldiers deployed for the first time between 1992 and 2009, only five percent were women.

The soldiers are on average 27 years old when they are deployed on their first mission, however half of the soldiers are less than 24 years old. Four out of five are single, and 86 percent have no children.

The 26,000 deployed soldiers constitute a broad group of ratings and officers, soldiers deployed individually or in groups, and soldiers deployed once or on several occasions. Furthermore, the soldiers have participated in hugely different missions, from peace-keeping missions in the

former Yugoslavia to peace-making missions in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Deployed soldiers' background

The soldiers that Denmark sends on military missions are not an average section of the Danish population. Danish Defence places great demands on the physical and mental strength of soldiers, and it requires motivation and self-confidence of the soldiers to say yes to deployment to carry out assignments in often very hostile environments.

Nonetheless, in terms of family relations, financial situation and education, the soldiers do not differ considerably from other Danes. There is nothing to suggest the soldiers come from more socially disadvantaged backgrounds than others.



On the contrary, fewer deployed soldiers were placed in care as children than their contemporaries. Moreover, there are fewer criminals in the group of deployed soldiers, both with regard to violent crime and theft. Compared with their contemporaries, however, a greater number of soldiers grew up in a single-parent home.

Furthermore, for many it seems that the job as a deployed soldier is a family tradition. One in

three veterans reveal they have a family member who served on international missions.

Relatively few of the younger soldiers have a higher education when they are deployed for the first time, whereas the picture is the opposite for those who are deployed for the first time at a later age. In the year before their deployment, a majority of the soldiers have held jobs at an on average higher wage than their contemporaries.

Deployed soldiers then and now

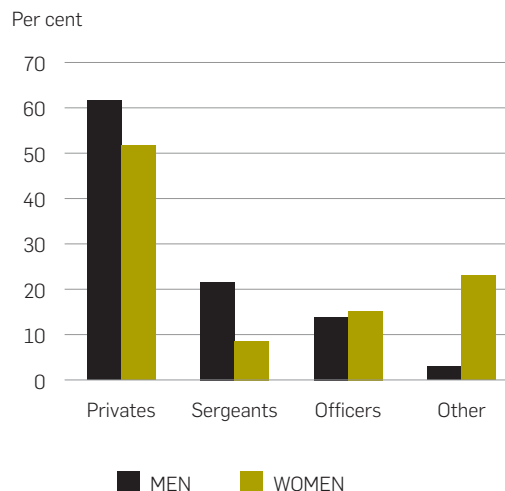
Naturally, the selection procedures and training carried out by Danish Defence have changed in step with developments. Throughout the period studied, the army selection process which since 2004 has been known as Danish Defence Day has been the most common route into the armed forces, followed by compulsory military service. However, the basic training programme in compulsory military service has been shortened, and there is now more emphasis on training programmes tailored for soldiers going on deployment.

Greater number of women

In 1992, 1.9 percent of the deployed soldiers were women. In 2009, this figure had risen to 11.4 percent. Women are therefore participating increasingly in deployments. However, there are significant differences in the roles performed by men and women in the field. Female soldiers are often older and better educated than their male counterparts, when they are deployed for

the first time. A relatively smaller number of women are privates, whereas more are officers. A large proportion of the women moreover work as health-care personnel during deployment, e.g. as nurses.

First-time deployed male and female soldiers by personnel group, 1997-2009



This trend also reflects the general trend of more women in the armed forces. Since the introduction of Danish Defence Day in 2004, women have been invited, and today 10% of those in military service are women who have volunteered and join the service on an equal footing with their male counterparts.

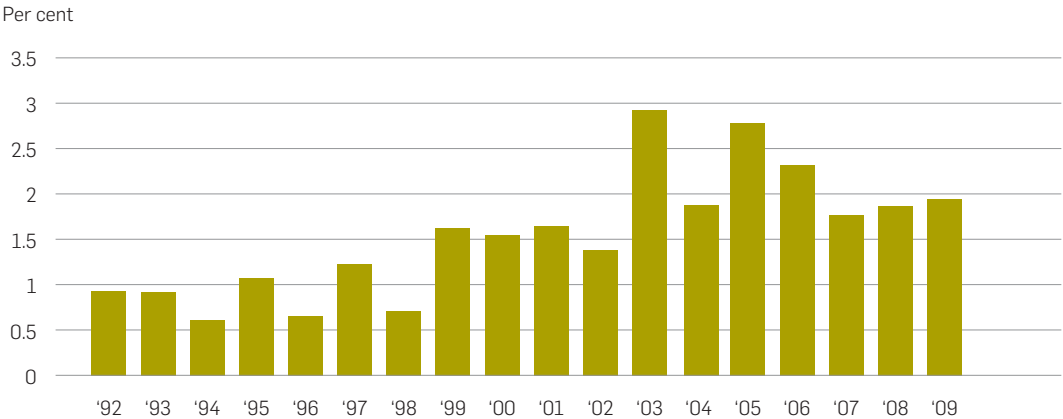
Greater number of immigrants and descendants of immigrants

In 1992, almost 1% of the deployed soldiers were immigrants and descendants of immi-

grants. In 2009, this figure had risen to almost 2%.

Among the 26,000 soldiers in this study, a total of 391 are immigrants or descendants of immigrants. A little more than half of these come from European countries, the majority from other Nordic countries, but some also come from countries in the former Yugoslavia. The next-largest group, 29 percent, comes from countries in the Near and Middle East.

Immigrants and descendants of immigrants among deployed soldiers per year of deployment



Motivation for deployment

In interviews, soldiers state many different reasons for wanting to be deployed on international missions.

Most of them highlight the opportunity for physical and mental challenges not offered by life back in Denmark. Some soldiers describe the deployment as a form of self-realisation, which allows them to test themselves and show their strength and their worth.

Equally important for many is the opportunity to make a difference in the area to which they are deployed. The deployed soldiers see themselves as committed individuals who act rather than just talk. Some of the soldiers stress that their work during the deployment also indirectly helps raise security in Denmark.

Many of the soldiers mention the camaraderie as an important factor. The special nature of the assignments creates a special solidarity, which is different from what you experience at an ordinary workplace.

Finally, some of the soldiers mention their military skills; having trained for an assignment they want to test their abilities in practice. A few of the soldiers also talk about their fascination with the military equipment they will be handling during the deployment.

“If it doesn't break you, it can give you some real unique experiences that you wouldn't be able to get elsewhere.”



“If I didn't feel that I am making a difference in the countries I go to, I wouldn't go, because the price is too high if I don't make it back home to my wife and kids.”

Experience during deployment

With 18 years of deployments to 35 countries, it is not surprising that the field experience of deployed soldiers varies significantly. However, certain themes are repeated in the interviews with the soldiers.

Mission and leadership

The types of mission greatly influence how the soldiers experience their deployment and the possibilities they have for completing their

assignment. Many of the soldiers deployed on peace-keeping missions to the Balkans in the 1990s felt powerless when witnessing violence and abuse and not being able to intervene.

Deployed soldiers on the peace-making missions to Iraq and Afghanistan, on the other hand, participated directly in combat and therefore experienced the risks associated with this. About half of the veterans explain that they took part in combat during their deployment.

“I feel I've learned more during these months than I've learned in the last four years; about myself, about people, the way they react, and so on.”



Furthermore, according to the soldiers, leadership and management are extremely important. The good leader is understanding and attentive to the conditions and experiences of the deployed soldiers. However, the soldiers find it stressful when the management is invisible, uninvolved and fails to follow up when soldiers point at problems with e.g. equipment or training.

The military family – and the family back home

Many of the soldiers experience that they are linked together in a sort of “military family” during their deployment. Experiencing dramatic and sometimes life-threatening situations together and having to depend completely on each other in the field, creates strong bonds between the soldiers. You “see each other naked,” as one deployed soldier explains, and you build relationships that sometimes last for life.

Sometimes the soldiers confide more in their military family than in their real family back home. Contact to relatives and loved ones back home means a lot to the soldiers during their deployment, however, according to many of them, this contact is sometimes very difficult, because the worry and anxiety of the family can be an huge emotional strain on the deployed soldiers. Many soldiers find that their families are unable to understand the conditions they are

working under and insist on discussing domestic problems, which the soldiers find trivial. Some soldiers also experience that they have to account for their choice to become deployed during conversions with their families. On the other hand, it means a lot to the deployed soldiers, when their families encourage them in their choice and do not voice their natural concern too much.

“When you've first tried to lie on the ground next to your mate with the air whizzing with bullets, you build a bond to each other that can probably never be broken and that you won't likely get with anyone else.”

“It was one of the greatest moments of my life; the opening of that school in Afghanistan.”

Repatriated, wounded and killed soldiers

Soldiers wounded

From 1992 to 2009, a total of 123 soldiers were wounded during deployment. Half of this figure, i.e. 70 soldiers, were wounded during deployment to Afghanistan.

Around half of these soldiers were on their first deployment when they were wounded. The average age of the wounded soldiers was 25 years, and by far the majority were young single males.





Privates were overrepresented among the wounded soldiers, also when taking account of the fact that they constitute the largest personnel group among the deployed soldiers. A total of 77 percent of the wounded soldiers were privates and privates accounted for 58 percent of the soldiers deployed during the period.

Combat action and mines were the cause of 98 percent of the injuries suffered. In a few cases, the injury was from a road accident or a normal work-related accident.

Soldiers killed

In the period 1992 to 2009, a total of 51 Danish soldiers died on missions. More than half of these were killed in Afghanistan between 2007 and 2009.

One-third of the soldiers killed were on their first mission. More than four in ten soldiers killed were aged between 21 and 24. The average age for all soldiers killed was just under 29 years.

Around four in five of the soldiers were killed in combat or due to mines or accidents involving

tanks and explosions. The remaining soldiers died from other accidents or illness.

Repatriation – soldiers sent home before time

The project only had access to information about repatriations during the period 2005-2009.

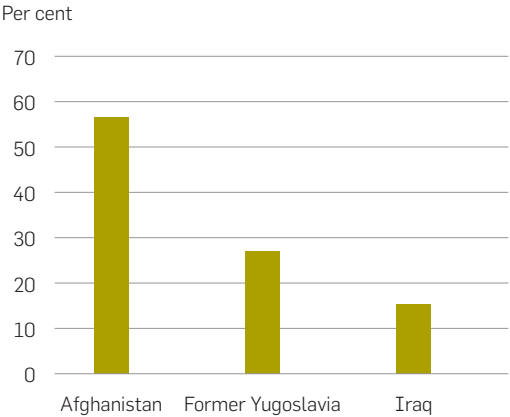
During this period, 399 soldiers were sent home from a mission before time, the majority from Afghanistan.

The most common grounds for repatriation before time are personal or family-related conditions, or the fact that the soldier is physically ill or has been wounded in battle. Psychological causes are stated as the reason for 9% of repatriations.

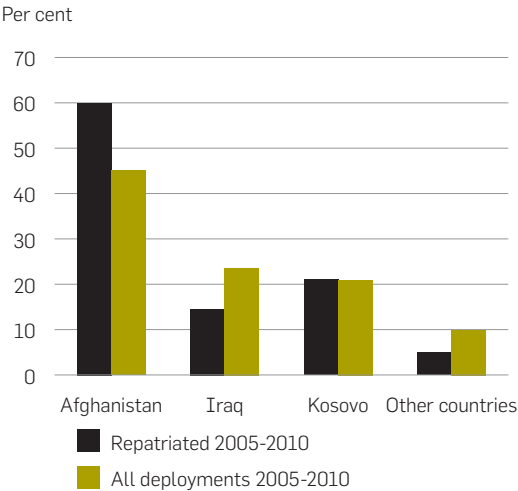
Almost one-third of the repatriated soldiers were on their first deployment when they were sent home. Almost one in four repatriated soldiers were on their fourth or later deployment.

Privates are also in the majority among the repatriated soldiers. Privates accounted for 56 percent of all the soldiers deployed during the period, and three out of four repatriated soldiers were privates.

Number of wounded by country of deployment 1992-2009



Deployed and repatriated soldiers by country of deployment 2005-2010



When a soldier comes home

Coming home to everyday life in Denmark after a period in the field can be a great upheaval. Many soldiers bring home with them violent experiences, and they feel they have changed during their deployment.

Enriching and stressful

Most veterans feel that deployment has been more enriching than stressful. This applies in particular to those who have only been deployed once. They have experienced strong friend-



“You're in debt. You really are. When she says that you have to be the one to take a day off for the next six months if one of the children is ill, that's just the way it is. And I just do it.”

“Suddenly you're down there and you have to load your machine gun and get ready to drive out into enemy territory, and then suddenly you're at home and you have to decide what you want from the supermarket.”

ships and feel that experiences in the field have made them better at tackling difficult situations. Furthermore they are proud of their international service.

At the same time, every fifth veteran states that they have suffered serious or less serious permanent injury; either physical or psychological. Four percent feel that they have suffered serious permanent psychological injury, 2% state that they have suffered serious permanent physical

injury, and 3% have serious permanent physical and psychological injury.

In their own opinion, most soldiers returning home after war-zone deployment are restless and find it hard to settle down during their first months at home.

Reunited with the family

The transition from military life in the field to civilian life with the family at home can be hard;



“It's something that affects us very deeply. The recognition for the sacrifices we have made. People don't shake their finger at us anymore.”

in particular for those who leave the military and return to a civilian job. If a person stays with Danish Defence, it is easier to keep in contact with comrades from the mission and talk with them about the experience.

Returning soldiers can find it difficult to find their place in the family again. Their partner has been used to dealing with day-to-day life without them, and feelings of abandonment and anxiety may have to be addressed. Confidence in each other has to be re-established and the experiences from the field have to find their place in the mind and in the home. Many previously deployed soldiers say that they choose not to tell their families details about their deployment because they do not believe they will be understood.

Being appreciated

It is not just in the family that soldiers can feel they are being held to account. The welcome offered by society in general is crucial for the transition to home life. In this context, many veterans mention the importance of receiving the widespread public appreciation of recent years, for example the annual flag day on 5 September. Many also experience that people now have a more subtle attitude to Danish international intervention. There is space for respect for the efforts by the individual soldier, irrespective of opinions about the mission itself.

Public appreciation means less to other veterans; what does matter is their own feeling of having made a difference.

One or several deployments

Almost half of the 26,000 soldiers deployed between 1992 and 2009 were only deployed once. One-quarter of the soldiers were on two deployments, while one-quarter had three or more tours.

Four out of ten leave the armed forces after a single deployment.

Mission addicts

During the interviews, armed forces representatives used the term "mission addicts" for people who repeatedly go on deployments such that it becomes a lifestyle. They are described as individuals who "are only alive when they are on deployment" and who, in some cases, "use a new deployment to keep things on the boil". The final factor is somewhat worrying because a new

deployment on this basis could provoke psychological post-deployment reactions in the soldier. However, the figures show that only a small group of soldiers can be described as mission addicts. A total of 1,866 of the soldiers examined, corresponding to 7.2% of all deployed soldiers, have been on five or more missions.

Motivation changes

The project shows that the motivation of soldiers to accept deployment changes from pre to post-deployment.

About 450 soldiers deployed to Lebanon or Afghanistan in spring 2011 were asked to describe their motives before and after deployment by choosing between 12 statements in a questionnaire. The results are that idealistic

Deployments per person 1992–2009

1 deployments	12,391 persons	47.6 %
2 deployments	6,705 persons	25.8 %
3 deployments	3,387 persons	13.0 %
4 deployments	1,679 persons	6.5 %
5 deployments	908 persons	3.5 %
More than 5 deployments	958 persons	3.7 %
Total	26,028 persons	100 %

reasons such as “to promote democracy in the deployment area” and “to do something for my country” are most prominent pre-deployment.

Post-deployment the soldiers emphasise “having a challenging job” or “earning good money”.

The 12 statements and assessments of them pre-deployment and post-deployment on a scale from 1 to 10

	Men		Women	
	Before	After	Before	After
To have a challenging job	8.0	7.2	8.7	7.7
To earn good money	5.7	6.1	6.0	5.9
To try out my military training in practice	7.9	7.2	7.5	7.1
To have a job with responsibility	7.9	7.3	8.2	8.2
To work with people I respect	8.4	7.8	8.9	8.2
To have a once-in-a lifetime experience	7.9	7.1	8.3	7.6
To be part of an elite team	6.5	5.7	5.6	5.1
To make a positive difference for people who need help in the deployment area	7.2	5.8	8.1	7.0
To promote democracy in the deployment area	5.4	4.1	6.1	5.0
To do something for my country	6.7	5.8	6.9	5.8
To prevent a terrorist attack on Denmark	6.7	4.9	7.2	5.0
To experience comradeship during deployment	8.2	7.7	8.8	8.2

Everyday life for veterans

By far the majority of veterans consider themselves as having a normal, well functioning everyday life. Furthermore, and not surprisingly, veterans' everyday life is consistently somewhat different than it was before they were deployed for the first time.

Where 78% were unmarried on the date of deployment, the majority of the veterans say that they are now in a relationship and about one-third have children. Three out of four veterans own their own home.

In or out of the armed forces

According to their own statements, 35% of veterans are still employed by the armed forces, while 65% have left. Of those no longer in the armed forces, only 6% state the reason as retirement.

Four out of ten veterans have left the armed forces after a single deployment, while more than one in four have been deployed several times before hanging up their uniforms. Amongst those still employed, by far the majority expect to be deployed again.

Education and finances

Also in terms of education, many veterans do well. Compared with Danish men in general, more veterans have a higher education qualification and fewer only have primary and lower secondary education. There are significantly more veterans with higher education qualifications than there were when they entered the armed forces and were deployed for the first time.



There are no indications that veterans have a poorer financial situation than others; on the contrary. Compared with the control group, the deployed soldiers had less net debt and higher disposable income. Furthermore, looking at the financial situation of the soldiers two and five years after they return from their first deployment, there is still no trace of serious financial problems.

Loneliness and social contact

About 2.5% of veterans answered that they often felt involuntarily alone. This is less than the population in general. Among those veterans who are no longer employed in the armed forces, there are many more who feel lonely and who lack social contact than among those who are still employed.

Mental health

More than one in seven veterans consider themselves as having serious or mild psychological injuries following deployment. However, by far the majority live a normal, well functioning life without contact to the psychiatric health system. On the other hand, there is a small group of soldiers who become psychologically injured or actually psychologically ill in post-deployment.

Four percent have a psychiatric diagnosis

More than 4% of veterans, more accurately 1,108 individuals, have become psychologically ill following their return from their first mission. That is, that in the period between 1995 and 2010 they have been registered in the psychiatric central register as having at least one psychiatric diagnosis. About one-third of the psychologically

ill veterans were diagnosed six or more years after their most recent deployment.

It is not possible in all cases to say whether the illness is linked to the deployment. However, the project shows that there is a significant increase in the incidence of psychological problems in soldiers in the post-deployment years compared with the control group.

Before deployment, the soldiers' mental health was better than the control group. They had fewer psychiatric diagnoses and they bought less medication for mental disorders. However, during the first three years post-deployment, the two groups close in on each other.

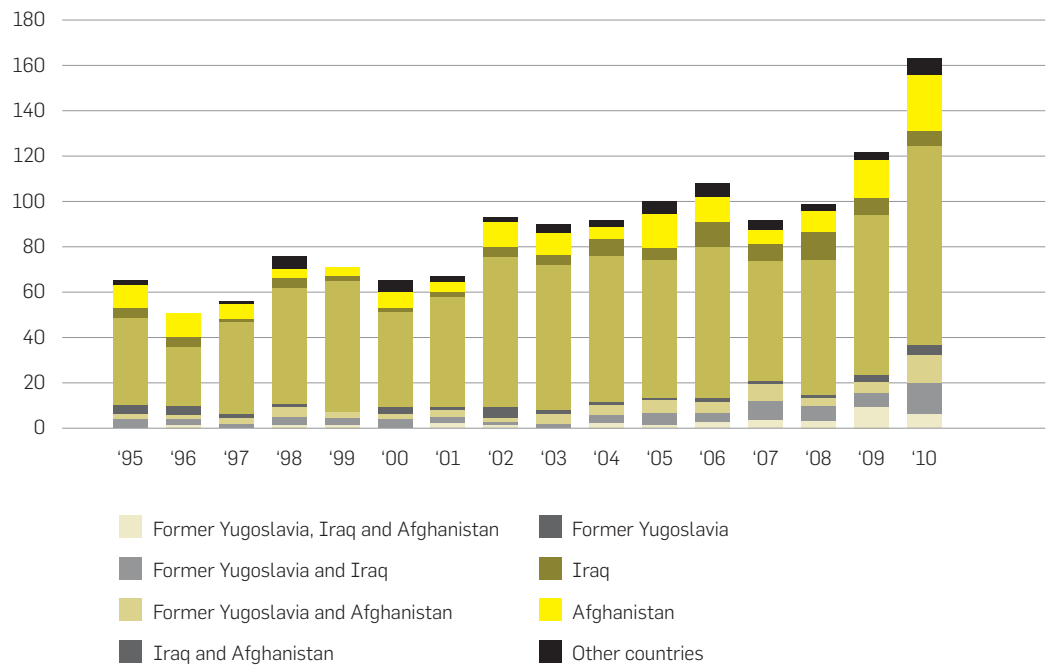


“Then I reported sick from around December because of all the (New Year) fireworks, and suddenly I saw flashbacks to 1992 ... and (I) was afraid to go outdoors. ... and I lost my job.”

The public registers show that almost 17% of the veterans have either received a psychiatric diagnosis, have bought medication for mental illnesses, or have been in treatment for substance

abuse after deployment. Common for them all is that they have not been registered for any of these elements before they went on their first deployment.

Deployed soldiers with at least one psychiatric diagnosis between 1995 and 2010, analysed by deployment experience. Broken down by the year in which the diagnosis was registered.



What diagnoses?

Among the mentally ill veterans, PTSD, or Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, was the most common diagnosis. A total of 624 soldiers, or 2.4% of all soldiers deployed between 1992 and 2009,

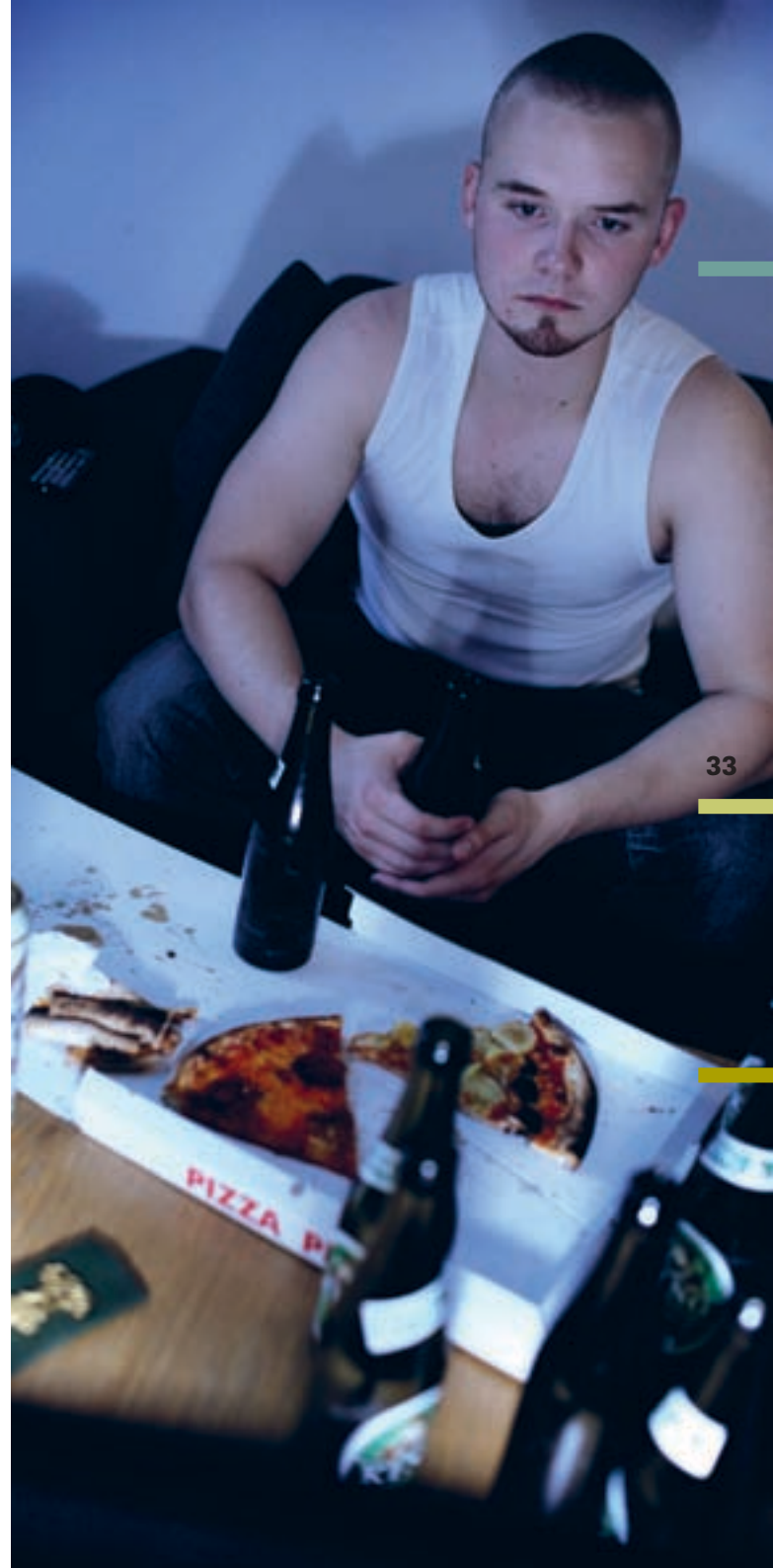
were diagnosed with PTSD between 1995 and 2010. Common for them all is that the illness was registered after they had returned home after international service.

Other diagnoses are nervous or stress-related conditions, as well as depression.

In particular, those deployed in the former Yugoslavia were registered as having psychological injuries, but those deployed in Iraq and Afghanistan and sent home early also weigh heavily in the statistics.

Psychological industrial injuries

The researchers have examined the number of reports of industrial injuries from veterans – both injuries linked to work in the armed forces and injuries linked to civilian jobs. The figures show that more than one in six of the reports of occupational diseases by soldiers involve mental disorders, while only one in 20 of the reports in the control group have this background.



Physical health

Seven percent of veterans consider themselves as having serious or mild physical injuries from deployment.

Industrial injuries

The number of work-related accidents and occupational diseases among veterans indicates that many have a hard working life, irrespective of whether the injury happened in connection with work in the armed forces or in civilian life.

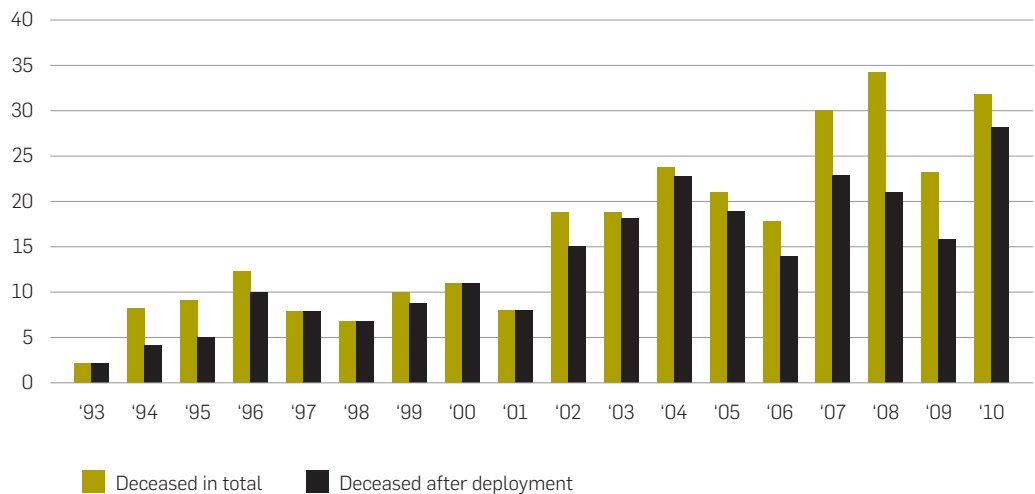
Among the group of soldiers compared with the control group, i.e. those born between 1975 and 1982, 19% have reported a work-related accident or an occupational disease, while the corresponding figure for the control group is 9%.

Mortality

Researchers have investigated whether the male veterans have a higher mortality compared with their contemporaries. It is clear that deployment in itself entails a risk of death, but does deployment mean that there is also an increased risk of subsequent early death?

The answer is generally that it is too early to say. As things stand, proportionately fewer from the group of veterans than from the control group have died. However, it is important to remember that this is a group of people who are still relatively young.

Mortality among previously deployed male soldiers, 1992-2009



Throughout the period, 303 of the more than 26,000 soldiers died. By far the majority, 295, are men. The figures include both those who died during deployment and those who died post-deployment of other causes.

There are very different personal and medical causes behind the deaths. The most common

cause of death is "natural causes". Among the deceased men, 13% committed suicide, and this group includes relatively many veterans from the former Yugoslavia. In general there were more among the group with a psychiatric diagnosis who died than there were among the group of veterans as a whole.

Alcoholism, substance abuse and crime

According to their own statements, veterans drink less alcohol than the population in general. On the other hand, they more often drink heavily when they do drink. Almost half of the veterans, mainly the younger, state that they drink more than five units in a single evening at least once a month.

More than one in four veterans smoke every day and there are more smokers among the younger veterans than among their contemporaries in the population.

The male veterans smoke less hash than Danish men in general, but they have more experience with other illegal substances than hash than other Danish men. More than one in five veterans under 45 years state that they have experience

with other substances than hash, but only 2.5% state that they have taken substances within the past year.

For alcohol, smoking and drugs, some groups of veterans tend towards higher use. This applies for those who themselves feel they have psychological injuries from deployment and those who state that they often feel lonely.

Crime

Before their first deployment, the soldiers as a group are less criminal than the control group. This picture does not change significantly post deployment. The project finds no sign that the soldiers are particularly susceptible to crime or that deployment increases the risk of coming into conflict with the law after deployment.



This does not mean that there is absolutely no criminals among the veterans, indeed there is. Of the soldiers on deployment for the first time between 1992 and 2004, 8% committed at least one criminal act in the period from two years pre-deployment to five years post-deployment. Moreover, 1.7% of the soldiers committed violent crime in the period. However, these figures are lower than for the population in general.

The analysis also shows that the probability of committing crime post-deployment is greatest for the soldiers who had already been in conflict with the law before they left.

Perspectives

The SFI research project provides an overall picture of the more than 26,000 soldiers who were deployed between 1992 and 2009. Naturally there is a great difference between the various periods, missions and personnel groups, and therefore there are many possibilities for further work on the material in new, narrower research projects.

Balkan veterans and those not employed

The overall conclusion of the project is that by far the majority of previously deployed soldiers do well after deployment and manage to transfer their experience from the field constructively to the labour market, to family life and to the other networks in which they take part. For a minority, the time after deployment can be difficult, however.

With regard to loneliness and social isolation, the figures indicate that the most vulnerable group is veterans who are no longer employed in the armed forces. More than the employed group, this group says that they are involuntarily alone and they lack social contact.

The group who suffer psychological problems post-deployment are proportionately mostly veterans from deployment to the former Yugoslavia in the early 1990s. However, the researchers behind the project stress that this may be because the individuals in this group have lived longest with their experiences from the field and that possible psychological injuries can appear many years after deployment.



Too early to draw long-term conclusions

The group of deployed soldiers analysed by the project includes both veterans whose last deployment was more than 15 years ago, and soldiers whose first deployment was just a year ago and who are possibly still out in the field. Another factor is that the nature of deployment has changed over the 18 years covered by the project and it increasingly involves direct combat action.

Therefore the researchers behind the project emphasise that in many ways it is too early to draw long-term conclusions about the implications of deployment, especially with regard to the most recent, and hardest, missions in Iraq and Afghanistan.



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Published reports in the “Danish soldiers after a war-zone deployment” project:

“Danish soldiers after a war-zone deployment. An interview study” (10:21) SFI, 2010

“Soldiers – before, during and after deployment. A literature study” (10:27) SFI, 2010

“Soldiers before and during deployment. A survey” (11:25) SFI, 2011

“Soldiers after war-zone deployment. A questionnaire survey” (12:01) SFI, 2012

“Soldiers – before and after deployment. An analysis of motivation, financial situation and crime rates”
(12:09) SFI, 2012

“Danish soldiers after a war-zone deployment. The health profile of soldiers – before and after
deployment” (12:24) SFI, 2012

English reports abstracts are available for download at sfi.dk

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