

DEPLOYMENT EXPERIENCES FOLLOW-UP STUDY FACT SHEET

What is this project about?

The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) is responsible for providing high quality medical and other services to returning Veterans. To achieve this mission, it is critical that the VA understand Veterans' workplace and family experiences and how they relate to their use of VA services. The information obtained from this study could be used to further prepare future military personnel for the challenges of being deployed overseas and help us better understand how to assist Veterans after their deployment. This research study, which involves two survey administrations about a year apart, is funded by the VA Health Services Research & Development Service and is being conducted by the VA Boston Healthcare System, with assistance from [Data Collection Survey Firm].

Why do you want to survey me? How did you get my name?

We are interested in surveying Veterans who served in support of OEF and/or OIF. You participated in a prior study conducted by the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) which focused on Operation Enduring Freedom and Operation Iraqi Freedom Veterans' experiences before, during, and after deployment. At the end of the study, you agreed to be contacted about follow-up study opportunities, which is why we are contacting you now. You were identified for the initial study through a random list of service members who served in OEF/OIF provided to us by the Department of Defense's Defense Manpower Data Center. We would like to hear from both men and women with different military experiences throughout the country, so that we get information about the many different experiences, opinions, and concerns of OEF/OIF Veterans.

What kinds of questions does the survey ask?

You will be asked to respond to a series of questions about your opinions and experiences. The surveys include questions about your workplace and family experiences, as well as your use of health services. Each survey may take you up to 45 minutes to complete and you can choose to answer or skip any question.

Do I have to participate? Will participating or not affect the services or benefits I get from the VA?

No. Participation is completely up to you. If you decide not to participate, it will not affect your VA benefits or access to services in any way. By filling out the surveys and returning them to us, you are agreeing to participate in this study. If you choose not to participate now, please return the provided Opt-Out Form which indicates that you prefer not to participate in this study and we will know not to contact you again.

Will what I say be kept private?

Yes. All information from the survey will be kept private to the extent permitted by law. In order to help us keep your information private, we ask that you do not write your name or other identifying information (e.g. address) on the survey. Your answers will be combined with those of approximately 1,000 other OEF/OIF Veterans who receive the same surveys and released only as summaries in which no individual can be identified. Your personally identifiable information will not be used in any reports from this project.

What steps are taken to ensure my privacy?

Each participant gets a unique project identification number. This number—not your name or address—is on the survey. The number lets us know if we have received a survey from you, so we know not to send you any additional mailings for this study. The number also gives us a way of knowing whether you would like to participate in future studies, as indicated by your response to the final item on the survey asking if you give us permission to contact you about participating in future studies. Your name and address will be kept separate from your survey responses and you will mail your survey directly to the VA Boston Healthcare System. Since your name and address will be kept separate from your survey, the VA will not receive any identifying information with your survey. The only link between you and your responses will be your unique project identification number and this information will be kept separately from your responses to the survey. All identifying information about you will be kept in password-protected computer files on a secure computer system, and paper copies of the survey will be stored in locked filing cabinets in a locked storage area. These electronic and paper files will only be accessed by research team personnel. Your records will be destroyed in accordance with the VA Record retention schedule (www1.va.gov/VHAPUBLICATIONS/RCS10/rcs10-1.pdf). Records will be destroyed in the following manner:

paper records will be shredded and electronic data will be destroyed in a manner in which it cannot be retrieved. This project has been approved by the Institutional Review Board at the VA Boston Healthcare System.

Who has access to my information?

Your first and last name, last known mailing address, telephone number, date of birth and social security number were given to research team members at VA's Environmental Epidemiology Service for the sole purpose of updating your current address. Your name and mailing address were then given to [Data Collection Survey Firm], so that they could mail you this survey packet. Our study team at the VA, EES, and [Data Collection Survey Firm] have taken extensive measures to protect your privacy and enhance your confidentiality. Please be assured that this information will not be shared with anyone else for any reason, as permitted by law.

What are the benefits and risks of participating in the survey?

Participation in this survey will not benefit you directly. However, what we learn from you and others will be used to improve services for Veterans like you. There are minimal risks associated with completing the survey. There are two main risks. First, you may experience feelings of distress thinking about your experiences before, during, and after deployment. If some questions feel too personal or distressing, it is okay to skip questions you don't want to answer. If you would like to talk with someone about how this survey makes you feel, please see the list of helpful phone numbers below. The other risk is a loss of privacy. However, as we have explained above, we have taken a number of steps to protect your privacy.

Will I be compensated for participating in the survey?

We have sent a \$25 Visa Prepaid Gift Card to all potential participants who have been contacted to request their participation in this study as a token of our appreciation. You may keep and use this gift card regardless of whether you choose to participate in the survey or not. You can use your Visa Prepaid Gift Card anywhere Debit Visa cards are accepted, and you can make purchases on your prepaid gift card until the value of the card has been depleted, or until the expiration date shown on the card.

Who can I talk to if I still have questions?

If you have any questions about this project or your participation, please call the Principal Investigator of this study, Dr. Dawne Vogt, at 857-364-5976. If you call in the evening or on weekends, feel free to leave a message. We will get back to you as soon as possible.

Other Helpful Phone Numbers *(which you can call even if you don't take part in the study)*

- If you want to talk to someone about your general rights as a study participant, please call the VA Boston HealthCare System Patient Representatives at 857-364-5295.
- If the survey made you distressed or you want to talk to someone about how the survey made you feel, please call Dr. Karen Mitchell, who is a psychologist and a member of our research staff, at 857-364-2149. If you have a therapist, you might also want to discuss this survey with him or her.
- If you need emergency care because you took part in this study, the VA will provide care to you. Be sure to tell the VA that you are in a research study. Please call 911 if you have a medical emergency.
- If you aren't sure you are having an emergency and don't want to wait until regular business hours, you may also call the VA Boston HealthCare System at 617-232-9500 and ask the operator to page the psychiatrist on call. Tell the operator that you are a research participant.
- If you are thinking about hurting yourself, please call the **National Suicide Hotline** at **1-800-273-8255**.
- If you would like information on resources for OEF/OIF Veterans or a summary of results from the prior study, please feel free to call the Principal Investigator, Dr. Dawne Vogt, at 857-364-5976, or Co-Principal Investigator, Dr. Brian Smith, at 857-364-6196.