

Public Awareness Poll: Needs and Support for our OIF/OEF Military and Veteran Community

*Are Americans engaged in measurable support for those who served in Iraq and Afghanistan?
Are Americans aware of the breadth of issues facing our warriors and their families?*



Background: In the eight years since the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan have waged, those dedicated to supporting our military and veteran community have struggled to make the general public understand their unique issues returning to civilian life. The Coalition for Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans commissioned a poll to measure public awareness of impact of the wars and how civilians are engaged in measurable support for warriors and their families. Our assumption has long been that less than 1 percent of the U.S. population serve in the Armed Forces, 99 percent are untouched by war. We learned that while less than 1 percent serve, many more are touched through direct relationships with service members who have deployed. However, there is a very real and disturbing disconnect among the majority of Americans in understanding how deployment contributes to economic, social, and familial stress through a dearth of services and support; all factors which drive veterans and their families to poverty and homelessness. We must turn to the question of what this means to our military families and how we, the DoD, VA, veteran and military charities, media and policy makers must do more to nurture understanding and support for our warriors.

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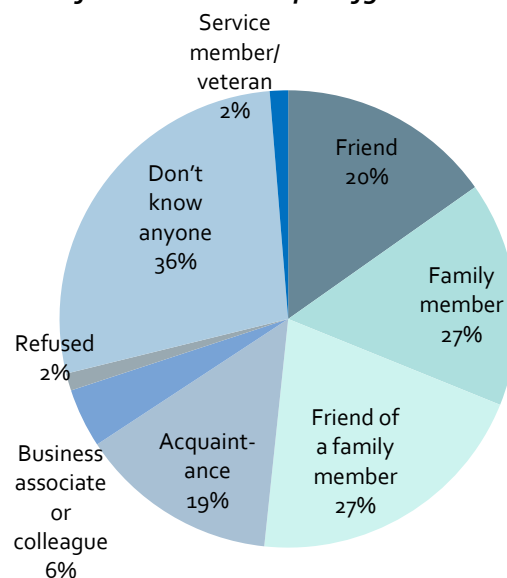
Methodology: This survey was conducted April 2-6, 2010 by Cohen Research Group with 1,000 adults 18 years of age or older who currently live in the U.S. The margin of error for a survey of this type is ± 3.1 percent in 95 out of 100 cases. It was completed by Internet by a panel representative of the larger population. Respondents were invited to participate in the study via email and did not receive compensation. The results presented here are in line

with key demographics reflecting the overall population of the U.S. including age, income, gender, and region. This research was originally conducted by telephone March 26-30 using the same criteria except that the respondents were invited to participate by random digit dialing. The results suggested a high degree of social desirability bias, which showed an unreasonable inflation of knowledge of issues and active support for the troops and veterans of both wars. Based on these results, Cohen Research Group funded the Internet study which yielded the results presented here. While we cannot claim to have eliminated all social desirability bias, repeating the study without a live interviewer mitigated what was seen in the telephone survey.

Are Americans touched by the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan?

Results showed 2 out of 3 Americans know someone who has served, whether it is a family member, friend, colleague, or acquaintance. As predicted, knowing someone who has served in the wars is highly related to awareness of issues that affect returning warriors and their families and whether or not they have provided meaningful support. Americans are twice as likely to send a letter or gift to deployed troops, donate money to a supportive charity, send a letter to Congress or the administration, or help a veteran find a job if they know someone who has served. However, although Americans who know

Q. Did you or someone you know serve for the wars in Iraq or Afghanistan?



WHAT AMERICANS DON'T KNOW:

Although the prevalence of **Post Traumatic Stress Disorder** among Iraq and Afghanistan troops and veterans is widely known (among 58% of Americans):

Fewer than 3 out of 10 Americans know there are around **200,000 homeless veterans in the U.S.**

Fewer than 3 out of 10 Americans know that **20% of male veterans aged 18 - 24 were unemployed last year.**

Only **35%** are aware that **not all veterans are eligible for VA healthcare for life**, and only **31%** know that **veterans can wait up to a year for disability benefits.**

THE FACTS:

Over **2 million** men and women have **deployed** to the **Global War on Terror**

Over **half** of the military is **married** and over **40%** of service members have **children**

In 2008 **VA** estimated approximately **131,000** veterans were **homeless**

In 2009 **male** veterans aged **18-24** had an **unemployment rate** of **21.6%**

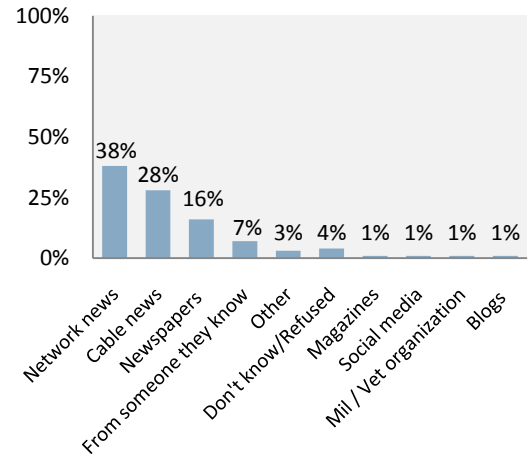
VA has confirmed **18 suicides per day** among all veterans

someone who served are more aware of the impact of the wars and more active in support, there is a major concern that Americans aren't aware of the important issues. Interestingly, urbanicity is inversely related to knowing someone who has served and active support of the troops and veterans.

Are Americans aware of the issues facing warriors and their families?

The majority of Americans do not understand the true cost of war. In fact, less than 50 percent are even aware that our country has sent 2 million troops to Iraq, Afghanistan, and areas in support of the Global War on Terror. Interestingly, while the psychological effects of the wars are widely known, a majority of Americans are not aware of the unique economic struggles that returning veterans face; including high rates of unemployment, access to healthcare issues, and risk factors for homelessness, poverty, and suicide. Further, while a majority of Americans believe the Department of Defense and the Department of Veterans Affairs have a great deal of responsibility to support service members and veterans, they are less likely to believe that community based non-governmental charities should bear the responsibility for providing support. Generally, people in the Western region of the country report being most aware of the issues followed by the South, Midwest, and Northeast. On matters of health, women are more likely than men to be aware of issues like Post Traumatic Stress Disorder while men were slightly more aware of issues related to VA services. Urbanicity is inversely related to awareness of the impact of the wars.

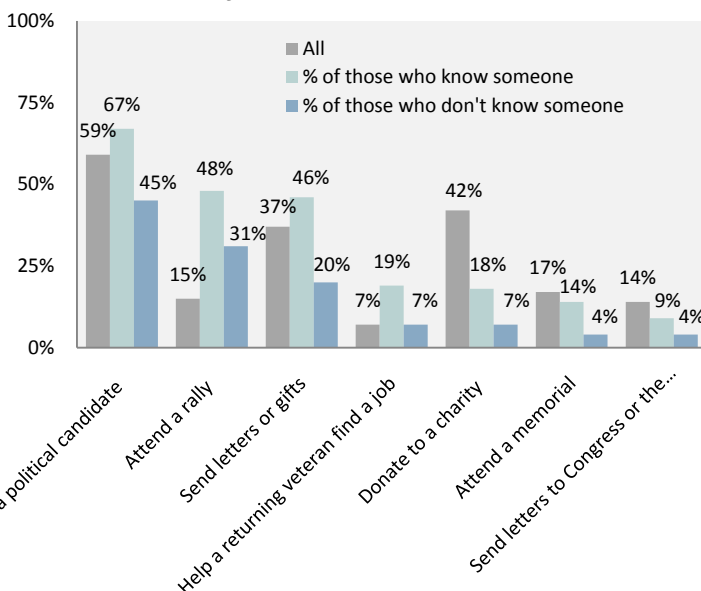
Q. Where do you get most of your news on the wars & veteran issues?



Where are they getting their news?

Interestingly, while social media has catapulted our ability to get timely news, most Americans still get their information on the wars and veteran issues from traditional media sources which have done a relatively good job of educating the public regarding mental health issues. When accounting for age, about 1 in 7 Americans age 18-34 relies on information given to them by friends, relatives, or colleagues; among those ages 35 and older it's less than 1 in 20.

Ways Americans Provide Support



Are Americans engaged in measurable support for those who served in Iraq and Afghanistan?

While 83 percent of Americans are aware that they can donate money to a charity that supports troops and veterans, 42 percent of Americans have actually donated. Americans 45 and older are significantly more likely to donate. Voting for a political candidate who campaigns to support troops and veterans is associated with increasing age. As predicted, awareness of the issues is generally higher if the person has actively supported veterans with letters, gifts, donations, and attending events. Again, urbanicity is inversely related to active support of troops and veterans.

The Public Awareness Poll was conducted in partnership with Cohen Research Group. All questions and inquiries regarding the poll should be directed to CIAV at info@coalitionforveterans.org.