

# Study: Caregivers for war veterans face own hurdles

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USA TODAY

An estimated 1.1 million Americans provide care for ailing or disabled veterans of the Iraq and Afghanistan Wars, including parents and spouses whose cumulative efforts save taxpayers \$3 billion each year, according to a RAND study released Monday.

Most of these people labor in obscurity without a support network, unaware of government assistance available to help them, untrained in best practices for providing care and at increased risk for emotional problems of their own, researchers found.

"For every hour you spend caregiving, your risk of depression increases," says Terri Tanielian, co-author of the largest study of military caregivers.

Sixty-three percent of those caring for a post-9/11 veteran have jobs. On average, they miss about a day of work each week caring for their loved one, an annual productivity loss of \$5.9 billion, researchers found. Twenty-eight percent quit work to care for their veteran; 11% took early retirement.

The result is that more than 60% say they are constantly under financial strain, twice the ra-

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tio of caregivers for veterans who served before 9/11.

Challenges ahead include middle-aged parents who face decades of looking after sons or daughters, only to require their own support system as they grow old; or young spouses who are caregivers in a strained marriage, the study found.

Tanielian says aging parents or troubled spouses pose challenges for the care of veterans. "What does that suggest to society?" Tanielian says. "Do we have a need where in 10 years, 15 years, 20 years we have a cohort of veterans who have significant caregiving requirements that don't have caregivers? Are they going to need to be institutionalized? Is society going to have to pay to hire home health workers?"

Former senator Elizabeth Dole's group, Caring for Military Families: The Elizabeth Dole Foundation, paid for the study.