

Newspaper 'hierarchy' of injury glamorises war

January 29 2020



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British newspapers are routinely glamorising combat by creating a moral separation between combat and non-combat injuries, according to new research published in the journal *Media, War and Conflict*.

Academics from Anglia Ruskin University's Veterans and Families Institute for Military Social Research (VFI) examined the reporting of injuries sustained by British military [personnel](#) during the height of the UK's war in Afghanistan in 2009, and a comparison period in 2014, in all daily and Sunday UK national newspapers.

They found that representation of injured personnel differed substantially between articles reporting on combat and non-combat injuries, with wounds suffered in battle being framed as more 'heroic' than those sustained in other situations, such as during training or in road traffic accidents.

Newspapers tended to provide factual descriptions of non-combat injuries, but in reports of wounds suffered in battle, there was a tendency to add emotive terms, such as "horrific" or "harrowing," and provide more details and context.

Figures from the Ministry of Defence show that 2,201 personnel were admitted to the Field Hospital at Camp Bastion between 2009 and 2014 with combat injuries. During the same period, 2,019 were admitted as a result of non-battle injuries, including crushing accidents, accidental small arms fire, slips, trips and falls, demonstrating the wide variety of injuries sustained by military personnel during times of conflict.

Lead author Dr. Nick Caddick, Senior Research Fellow at Anglia Ruskin University (ARU), said: "The media plays a key role in how the public understands war and it generates and amplifies the heroic rhetoric that sticks to soldiers and veterans during times of conflict.

"The consequences of media framing are rarely benign and can skew the perception of combat. Media constructs and reinforces powerful meanings about particular topics or social groups, such as injured soldiers and veterans.

"We found that reporting describing combat injuries was highly charged, sensational and emotive. At the same time, bland, factual descriptions were used when reporting on [military personnel](#) serving in Afghanistan whose injuries were not sustained on the battlefield. Glamourising combat injuries as a more worthy form of heroic sacrifice obscures the reality that there is nothing glamorous about the often hideous day-to-day realities of war and its aftermath.

"It is worth emphasising that deployment to a warzone is not the only military activity that carries a risk of death and [injury](#). Using language in this way may create risks to the mental health of soldiers and veterans who have received non-combat injuries, as they may feel that they are somehow less worthy or valued by the population than those who have been wounded in battle."

More information: Nick Caddick et al, Hierarchies of wounding: Media framings of 'combat' and 'non-combat' injury, *Media, War & Conflict* (2020). [DOI: 10.1177/1750635219899110](https://doi.org/10.1177/1750635219899110)

Provided by Anglia Ruskin University

Citation: Newspaper 'hierarchy' of injury glamorises war (2020, January 29) retrieved 3 July 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2020-01-newspaper-hierarchy-injury-glamorises-war.html>

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