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OP-ED COLUMNIST

## A Fearful Price

By [BOB HERBERT](#)  
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I spoke recently with a student at Columbia who was enthusiastic about the escalation of U.S. forces in Afghanistan. He argued that a full-blown counterinsurgency effort, which would likely take many years and cost many lives, was the only way to truly win the war.



Bob Herbert

He was a very bright young man: thoughtful and eager and polite. I asked him if he had any plans to join the military and help make this grand mission a success. He said no.

There was [an article in The Times on Monday](#) about a new study showing that the eight years of warfare in Iraq and Afghanistan were taking an emotional toll on the children of service members and that the difficulties increased the longer parents were deployed.

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There is no way that the findings of this study should be a surprise to anyone. It just confirms that the children of those being sent into combat are among that tiny percentage of the population that is unfairly shouldering the entire burden of these wars.

The idea that fewer than 1 percent of Americans are being called on to fight in Afghanistan and Iraq and that we're sending them into combat again and again and again — for three tours, four tours, five tours, six tours — is obscene. All decent people should object.

We already knew that in addition to the many thousands who have been killed or physically wounded, hundreds of thousands have returned with very serious psychological wounds: deep depression, post-traumatic stress disorder, and so on. Other problems are also widespread: alcohol and drug abuse, family strife, homelessness.

The new study, by the RAND Corporation, was published in the journal *Pediatrics*. The children surveyed were found to have higher levels of emotional difficulties than their peers in the general population.

According to the study:

“Older youth and girls of all ages reported significantly more school, family and peer-related difficulties with parental deployment. Length of parental deployment and poorer non-deployed caregiver mental health were significantly associated with a greater number of challenges for children, both during deployment and deployed parent reintegration.”

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