



Mental and Physical Health Status of New Jersey National Guard Troops Prior to Deployment to Iraq

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Mental Health Characteristics by Number of Previous Tours in Iraq/Afghanistan

	No tours (n=1907)	One tour (n=552)	Two or more tours (n=76)
	%	%	%
PTSD symptom severity among those with PTSD (mean) *	59.07	60.3	67.4
Mental health visits in the last 12 months (mean) ***	.15	1.13	2.29
Prescriptions received in the last 12 months (%):			
At least one psychotropic medication***	5.5	13.8	13.2
Tranquilizers**	2.6	4.3	8.2
Sedatives or sleeping pills***	3.6	8.9	9.6
Stimulants	2.1	2.0	2.7
Anti-Depressants***	2.8	9.6	11.0
Mood stabilizers	2.0	3.5	4.1
Heavy Drinking (%)	20.3	19.0	23.7
Alcohol Dependent (%)	6.7	8.9	9.2

** P=.01, ***P<=.000

Physical Health Characteristics by Number of Previous Tours in Iraq/Afghanistan

	No tours (n=1907)	One tour (n=552)	Two or more tours (n=76)
Self-Reported Physical Functioning	%	%	%
Reports 3 or more non-specific physical symptoms (PHQ) (%)	5.4	11.4	13.2
Self-Reported Pain, by Location (%)			
Head***	6.8	12.5	11.8
Back***	29.5	40.0	44.7
Knee***	13.2	19.6	30.3
Shoulder**	8.7	13.0	17.1
Other**	23.1	26.1	40.8
Pain Intensity moderate to intense in the past 2 weeks (%) ***	13.4	21.2	27.4
Normed SF-36 Physical Functioning (PF) subscale scores***	55.03	53.11	51.71
Normed SF-36 Role-Physical (RP) subscale scores***	55.18	53.59	53.50
SF-36 PF subscale items: Health limits ability to:			
Engage in vigorous activity* (%)***	20.4	34.2	42.7
Engage in moderate activity (%)***	9.4	15.9	23.7
Does not meet physical conditioning requirements for deployment (%) **	3.7	6.8	9.2
Medical health visits in the last 12 months (mean) ***	1.4	2.7	4.5

** P<=.01, *** P <= .000

Summary

- Guard members with one or more tours were significantly more likely to suffer from depression and PTSD than those with no previous tours.
- Risk of a mental health disorder was as high among those with one previous tour as it was among those with 2 or more tours.
- Alcohol misuse was high among all Guard members and did not increase significantly with previous deployment.
- The presence and intensity of physical pain was high among those previously deployed and increased according to the number of previous deployments.
- Pain prevalence translated into significant disability in performing physical activities, with more than 20% of those with 2 or more deployments reporting limitations in climbing several flights of stairs, bending or kneeling and walking more than a mile.
- The experience of pain and physical disability was especially high among those with PTSD, with 22% believing they did not meet physical conditioning requirements for deployment.
- Respondents reported significant barriers to mental health symptom reporting post-deployment, including the lack of post-deployment screening for mental health problems, a reluctance to report symptoms in order to avoid being placed on "medical hold" and discomfort in acknowledging mental health problems. Only 41% of those with PTSD were treated in the previous 12 months.

Discussion

- These data raise important questions about the military readiness of troops returning to the OIF/OEF conflicts after experiencing previous deployments.
- All returning OIF/OEF troops receive a series of DoD post-deployment assessments and, prior to returning to combat, a pre-deployment medical assessment by both the National Guard and DoD. Troops in the present study had passed their National Guard pre-deployment assessment but had not yet been assessed pre-deployment by DoD.
- While it is possible that many symptomatic troops would be screened out by DoD, DoD reports that between 3/2007 and 2/2008, only 5.5% of all troops receiving pre-deployment assessments were referred for a medical visit, including only 1% referred for mental health reasons. (REF)
- These data suggest that many symptomatic troops continue to be deployed to combat because of a reluctance to report symptoms and seek treatment.

Acknowledgement

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Background

- The mental and physical toll extracted by the OIF/OEF conflicts has raised questions about the military readiness of soldiers being redeployed to combat after one or more previous tours. To date, few studies have examined the military readiness of service members slated for upcoming OIF/OEF deployment. This study will add to our knowledge of troop readiness through a pre-deployment assessment of the mental and physical health status of New Jersey National Guard members called for active duty in Iraq in the summer of 2008.

Methods

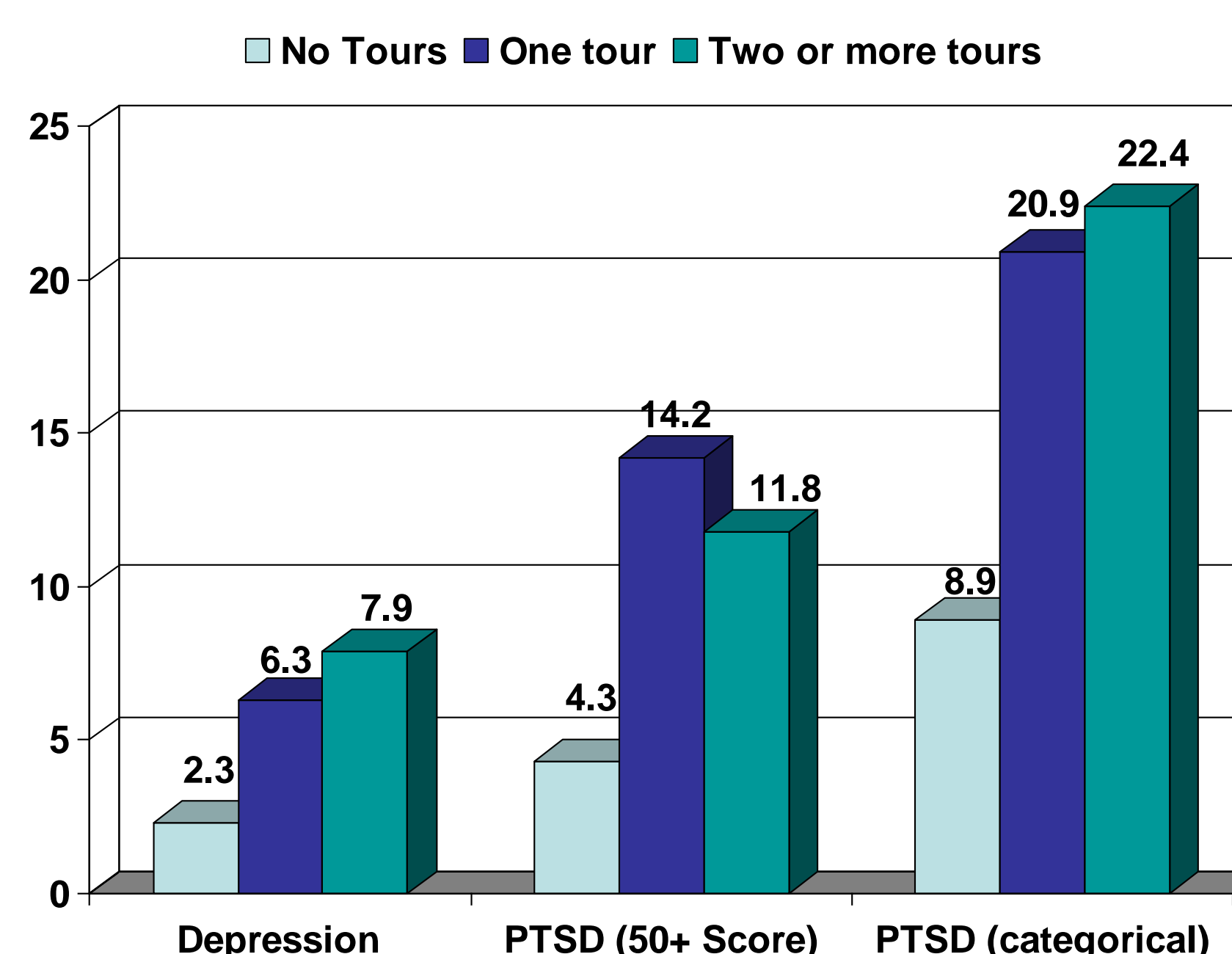
- Data was collected on 2665 National Guard members between 11/07 and 5/08.
- Respondents completed self-administered, anonymous surveys in group settings during pre-deployment medical assessments.
- The survey instrument contained standardized measures of mental and physical health status, including the 17-item National Center for PTSD Checklist (PCL), the Patient Health Questionnaire (PHQ) and DSM-IV measures of substance abuse and dependence from the National Household Survey of Drug Use and Health. Pain was defined using guidelines from the American College of Rheumatology.
- We measured PTSD in 2 ways: 1. A score of 50+ on the PCL; and 2. The presence of at least 1 intrusion symptom, 3 avoidance symptoms and 2 hyperarousal symptoms categorized at the moderate level or above.
- We used Chi-square and ANOVA to examine cohort differences in mental and physical health among National Guard troops according to their number of previous deployments to Iraq or Afghanistan (none, one, two or more).

Demographic and Military Characteristics of Sample

	% or Mean
Mean Age	30.1
Female	11.9
Race/Ethnicity	
Black	17.2
White	47.4
Hispanic	29.3
Other	6.1
Education	
High School or less	31.5
Some College	49.1
College Grad +	19.3
Marital Status	
Married or living as	38.6
Never Married	51.1
Widowed/Separated/Divorced	10.2
Employment	
Full-Time	73.1
Part-Time	11.3
Unemployed	15.6

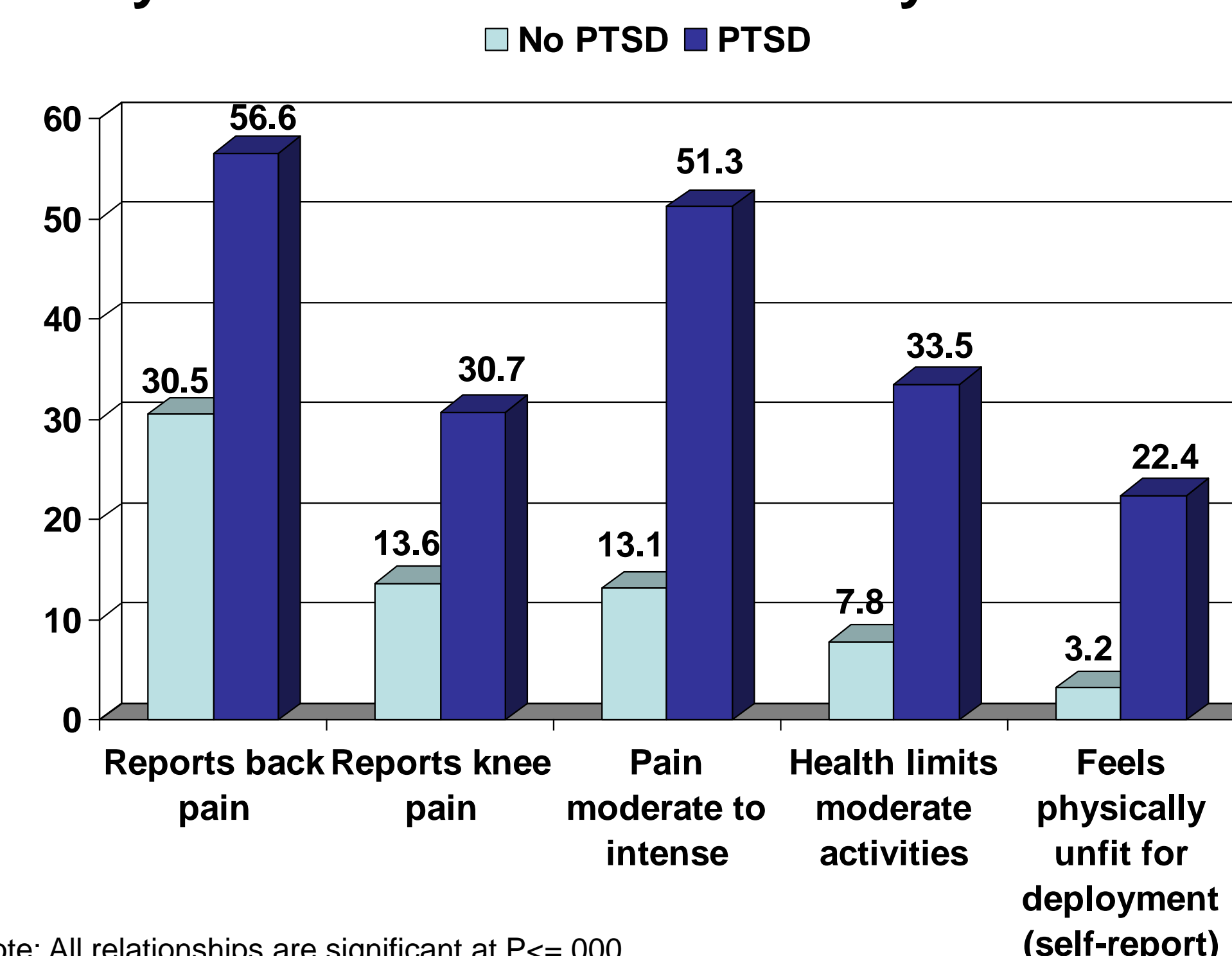
	%
Military Occupation Specialty	
Combat Arms	43.9
Combat Support	34.6
Combat Service Support	21.5
Number of Previous Tours in Iraq or Afghanistan	
None, first tour will be in 2008	75.2
One previous tour	21.8
2 or more previous tours	3.0
Service in Previous Conflicts (Prior to Iraq/Afghanistan)	
Never served in previous conflict	83.6
Served in Gulf War	5.9
Served in Vietnam	.7
Served in other conflict	8.4

Depression and PTSD by Number of Previous Tours



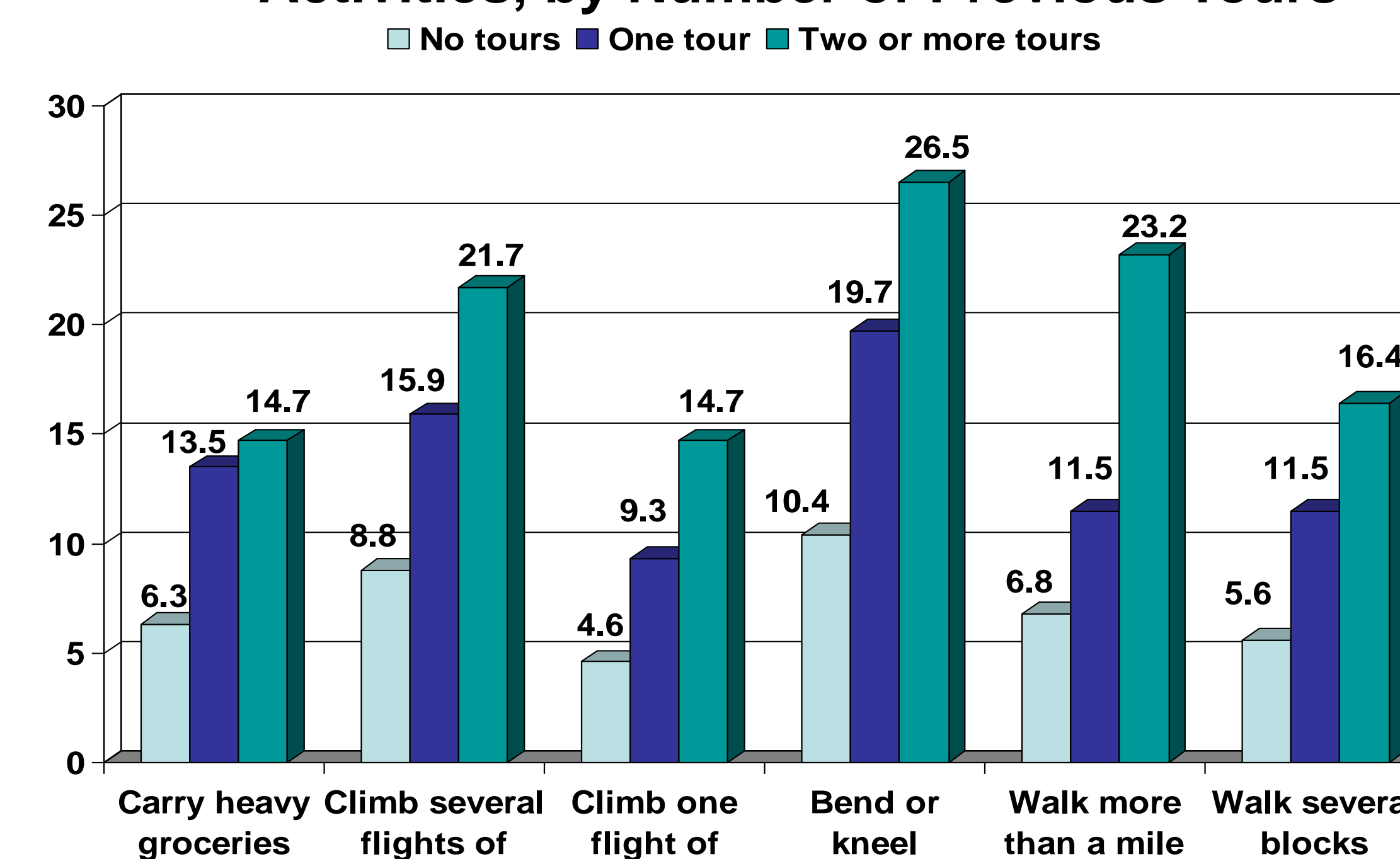
Note: All relationships are significant at P<=.000

Physical Limitation and Pain by PTSD Status



Note: All relationships are significant at P<=.000

Physical Limitations in Performing Daily Activities, by Number of Previous Tours



Note: All relationships are significant at P<=.000

Mental Health Symptom Screening and Reporting Post-Deployment and Past-Year Treatment Among Those with PTSD

