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News Release

USU Psychiatrist Offers Editorial Insight to Child Soldiers

BETHESDA, Md. — Robert J. Ursano, M.D., professor and chair, Uniformed Services University of the Health Sciences' (USU) Department of Psychiatry, and one of the nation's leading experts on Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), is co-author of an editorial titled "Children of War and Opportunities for Peace." The article appears in the Aug. 1, 2007 issue of the *Journal of the American Medical Association (JAMA)*.

The editorial addresses global armed conflicts and children recruited or kidnapped to serve as soldiers in those conflicts. Vulnerable children are recruited into militias due to their emotional and physical immaturity. Many become refugees after being displaced and separated from family members. Once recruited, these children carry out various roles within the militias such as cooks, spies, human shields, and war fighters.

One study of 169 former child soldiers reported a high prevalence of PTSD at nearly 35%. Children who experienced more PTSD symptoms were less likely to be willing to reconcile and had a tendency to harbor more feelings of revenge toward those who harmed them.

Another study examined different types of trauma exposure and its association with violent and nonviolent means to achieve peace. Those with symptoms of PTSD were more likely to see violence as a means to achieve peace.

Dr. Ursano was invited by *JAMA* to write the editorial because of the groundbreaking work he and his team have done at the Center for the Study of Traumatic Stress (CSTS) which he directs. Dr. Ursano co-wrote the article with Jon A. Shaw, M.D., University of Miami's Miller School of Medicine, Division of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry, former chair of psychiatry at Walter Reed Army Medical Center. Dr. Shaw is a child psychiatrist and worked with child soldiers in Mozambique during a humanitarian deployment while serving in the Army.

As head of CSTS, Dr. Ursano educates the public on emerging traumatic stress caused by combat injuries and other traumatic events and applies innovative approaches to care not only for troops, but also their family members. For more information about the Center for the Study of Traumatic Stress visit: <http://www.centerforthestudyoftraumaticstress.org/>.

The American Medical Association is the largest physician's group and advocates on issues that are vital to the nation's health. Its mission is to promote the art and science of medicine and the betterment of public health. To read Dr. Ursano's complete editorial visit the JAMA Web site at: <http://jama.ama-assn.org/>

USU is the nation's federal school of medicine and graduate school of nursing. The students are active-duty uniformed officers in the Army, Navy, Air Force and U.S. Public Health Service who are being educated to deal with wartime casualties, national disasters, emerging infectious diseases and other public health emergencies. For more information about USU, visit www.usuhs.mil or call the Office of External Affairs at (301) 295-1219.

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