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## News Release

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### **USU Researcher Releases Study That Makes Association Between Combatant Status, Sexual Violence, Psychological Trauma**

**BETHESDA, Md.** — Lynn Lawry, MD, MSPH, MSc, director of research and education with the Uniformed Services University of the Health Sciences' (USU) Center for Disaster and Humanitarian Assistance Medicine (CDHAM), is the senior author of a manuscript titled, "Association Between Combatant Status and Sexual Violence and Health and Mental Health in Post-Conflict Liberia." The article will be published in the Aug. 13 issue of the *Journal of the American Medical Association (JAMA)*.

The article identifies the link between combatant status and sexual violence, psychological trauma, and general health in post-conflict Liberia.

"This study is important because it brings attention to certain vulnerable groups who are currently underserved, specifically ex-combatants who make up 30 percent of 3.2 million people," said Dr. Lawry. "We hope these findings will be used to help the Liberian Ministry of Health in writing their mental health policy."

Dr. Lawry and a team of researchers surveyed a population of 1,666 adults aged 18 or older over a three week period in May 2008. The researchers used a cross-sectional, population based, multistage survey to study mental health predictors including Major Depressive Disorder (MDD), Post-traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), social functioning, exposure to sexual violence, and health and mental health needs in the Liberian combatant population.

According to the findings, over 40% of the Liberian household population showed symptom criteria for MDD and 44% showed symptoms of PTSD. Out of the third of the surveyed population that served time as a combatant, one third of the adult males experienced sexual violence compared to 7.4% of men who did not serve in the fighting forces.

As a general category, 57% of combatants overall demonstrated characteristics of PTSD as compared with 37% of non-combatants. The study also showed that male former combatants who did not experience sexual violence (46%) were almost half as likely to demonstrate symptoms of PTSD as though that did not experience sexual violence (81%).

The study also considered the role of gender, concluding that male combatants who reported sexual violence had worse mental health outcomes than females with reported sexual violence.

*Learning to Care for Those in Harm's Way*

Located on the grounds of Bethesda's National Naval Medical Center and across from the National Institutes of Health, USU is the nation's federal school of medicine and graduate school of nursing. The university educates health care professionals dedicated to career service in the Department of Defense and the U.S. Public Health Service. Students are active-duty uniformed officers in the Army, Navy, Air Force and Public Health Service, who are being educated to deal with wartime casualties, national disasters, emerging infectious diseases, and other public health emergencies. Of the university's more than 4,000 physician alumni, the vast majority serve on active duty and are supporting operations in Iraq, Afghanistan, and elsewhere, offering their leadership and expertise.

For more information, contact the Office of External Affairs at 301-295-1219.

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