



DEPLOYMENT HEALTH SURVEILLANCE PROGRAM

East Timor Health Study Results

You recently participated in the East Timor Health Study and, as promised, this newsletter will tell you how we used the information from the questionnaire you filled in and what we have found so far.

Because of your time and effort, a lot more is known about the short to medium-term physical and mental health effects of this deployment. So, a big THANK YOU from the team.

Why did we do the study?

In 1999, the Minister for Veterans' Affairs and Minister Assisting the Minister for Defence announced the Government's commitment to conduct health reviews on future overseas deployments. This led to the development of the **Deployment Health Surveillance Program** as part of the **Centre for Military and Veterans' Health**. The East Timor Health Study was the latest study in this program.

What did we do?

We invited a random sample of 6500 serving and ex-serving Australian Defence Force members to participate in our study: 3999 who had deployed to East Timor as part of Operations FABER, SPITFIRE, WARDEN, TANAGER, CITADEL and SPIRE between June 1999 and May 2005, and 2501 who were eligible to deploy to Bougainville but did not.

Fifty-five percent of the people we contacted agreed to participate in the study. Unfortunately, we were unable to contact 23% of the sample. Most of these people were ex-serving ADF members.

Participants were asked to complete a general health questionnaire which asked about: current health, smoking, drinking, background and military career.

People in the study who had deployed to East Timor were also asked to complete a questionnaire about their deployment.

Defence-held health and psychological screening records were obtained for the people in the study and the information provided in the questionnaires was linked to the other data when we had permission from the individuals to do this.

Data was collected in 2008. A report on the outcomes of the study has been provided to the Departments of Defence and Veterans' Affairs, and is available on our website.

What did we find out?

Mental Health Outcomes

- Only 6% of peoples' scores on a PTSD psychological scale were predictive of PTSD. There were no differences between East Timor veterans or the comparison group in predictions of PTSD.
- However, on the same PTSD scale, veterans scored on average slightly higher than the comparison group, although average scores were well below those predictive of PTSD.
- The average measures of general psychological distress were relatively low for both East Timor veterans and the comparison group.
- However, the veterans scored higher than the comparison group on the psychological distress scale, and were more likely to score in the highest category of this scale.

General Health

- The majority of East Timor veterans (61%) reported that their health was the same as one year ago, with 16% reporting improved health and 23% reporting worse health. These

percentages were equivalent to those in the comparison group.

- From a list of 63 symptoms East Timor veterans reported more current symptoms than the comparison group (an average of 15.1 compared with 12.6).
- The most common symptoms reported were fatigue, sleeping difficulties, and feeling unrefreshed after sleep, with 60% of respondents recording these events.

Tobacco Smoking and Alcohol Consumption

- The majority of all respondents (65%) were in the lowest risk category of drinking behaviour.
- Slightly fewer members of the comparison group scored in the highest risk category for drinking behaviour compared with East Timor veterans (3% vs 5%).
- There were no statistically significant differences in smoking behaviour between the groups, with less than 19% recording that they were current smokers.

Deployment Issues and Hazards

- Most East Timor veterans felt that they had made a useful contribution to the

local population (82%) and the military mission as a whole (95%).

- However, many veterans found the risk of vehicle accident (71%) and being away from family and friends (70%) stressful.
- Most veterans took antimalarial medications (94%) but fewer participated in malaria prevention programs on their return to Australia (67%).

What next?

A study into the Middle East Area of Operations is due to begin soon. This study will look at personnel both before and after deployment.

We hope to contact you again in the future to ask about your health in the longer term. Please consider participating again if asked, as information from everybody is important, even if you are quite well.

Please keep us updated with any change in your contact details, by emailing dhsp@cmvh.uq.edu.au or calling free call **1800 886 567**.

If you are interested in finding out more about these studies, or to look at the full study reports, please go to our website: www.cmvh.org.au/dhsp.

Once again, many thanks for taking part in the study! We hope that you have found this newsletter interesting and useful, and hope you will continue to support our research.



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