

Title:

Rates of smoking and alcohol consumption in a sample of Defence personnel compared with Australian norms.

Author(s):

Dr Desley Kassulke
Dr Christine McClintock
Mr Michael Waller
Prof Annette Dobson

Presenter(s):

Dr Desley Kassulke

Abstract

The health risks, social and economic costs of smoking have been well documented^{1,2,3} and although there may be safe levels of alcohol consumption, excessive or inappropriate consumption can also lead to short term and long term health risks⁴. Both risk factors contribute to increased morbidity and mortality and are potentially amenable to health promotion interventions.

The Defence Deployed Solomon Islands Health Study was conducted in 2007 to assess the health and well being of Australian Defence Force veterans who had deployed to the Solomon Islands. The health of these veterans was examined together with a comparison group of Defence force personnel who were not deployed. Data on rates of smoking and alcohol consumption were collected as part of this study.

Since defence personnel may have increased access (including reduced costs) to cigarettes and a sub culture that may support smoking and hazardous alcohol consumption, we set out to compare the prevalence of smoking and level of alcohol consumption in Defence Force personnel with Australian norms.

The study revealed no significant differences in smoking behaviour and alcohol consumption between Solomon Islands veterans and the comparison group. Overall 19% of participants in the Solomon Islands study currently smoked and similar to Australian norms⁵, the highest proportion of smokers was found in the 20-29 years age group. While there were no significant differences between Defence personnel and the Australian population in relation to smoking behaviour, some significant differences in alcohol consumption were observed. Comparisons of short term and long term alcohol-related risk were limited by differences in questions used by the Solomon Islands study and those used in assessing Australian norms.

These findings support the extension of programmes and strategies that are aimed at the reduction of health behaviour risk in Defence personnel.

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Authors Affiliations: *Centre for Military and Veterans' Health, University of Queensland*

Corresponding author's email:
d.kassulke@uq.edu.au