

## **Abstract**

**Public Health Association  
Queensland State Conference  
Kelvin Grove  
23-24<sup>th</sup> July 2009**

### **Defence Deployed Solomon Islands Study –Classical Epidemiological Trends**

Christine McClintock, Michael Waller, Annabel McGuire, Colleen Loos, Lisa Nielsen, Alexander McFarlane, Annette Dobson, Susan Treloar, Cate D'Este.

**Key Words:** Military Health Surveillance, Mortality, Mental Health Surveillance, Health Risk Factors

#### **Introduction**

This is the first study in the Australian Deployment Health Surveillance Program aimed to assess health outcomes for Australian Defence Force members who deploy overseas. Health outcomes included mortality, cancer incidence, mental health, general health and health risk factors.

#### **Methods**

The study involved Solomon Islands veterans who deployed between July 2003 and December 2005, a frequency matched comparison group who were eligible to deploy but did not and comparison to population norms.

Data sources included a self report questionnaire, Defence health assessments and psychological screens (n=1000); and the national death and cancer registries (n=8181). Solomon Islands veterans also completed a questionnaire on factors from the deployment experience that could impact on health.

#### **Results/Conclusions**

Compared to Australian norms the combined veteran and comparison group had lower mortality rates (SMR 42.8 (23.4, 71.8)), similar smoking prevalence but evidence of more frequent alcohol consumption (Weekly or more SR1.22, 9 (1.08, 1.38)). The most commonly reported exposures related to the local environment (loud noises (66%), insect bites (66%) and exposure to pesticide fogging or spraying (60%)) and common stressors were organisational issues (58-70%) and absence from home (58-62%).

No statistically significant differences were detected in outcome measures (mortality, cancer, mental health, general health and health risk factors) of ADF personnel who deployed compared to those who did not. Results provide examples of classical occupational health and epidemiological phenomena. The challenges of public health research and interventions in a young, mobile, largely male population will also be discussed.