

Title: Are there differences in mental health, as measured by K-10 and PCL-C, depending upon where, when and who asks the questions?

Author(s): Annabel McGuire¹, Michael Waller¹ Cate D'Este² Alexander McFarlane³

Presenter(s): Dr Annabel McGuire

Abstract

Introduction: The Solomon Islands Health Study is the first study in a program of research on deployment health conducted by the Centre for Military and Veterans Health (CMVH). The program aims to evaluate the consequences of deployment on both physical and mental health. Initial analysis demonstrates that mental health, as measured by K-10 and PCL-C, differs for some participants depending upon whether the data was collected as part of routine Return to Australia Psychological Screens (RtAPS) conducted by Defence or collected by CMVH.

Methods: Data from participants who consented to linkage between their Defence RtAPS data and their self-reported data (collected by CMVH) and who had complete data from both sources (N = 96) were compared using the Kappa statistic of agreement.

Results: Thirty-one percent of participants had a higher and 7.5 percent had a lower K-10 category score on the self-report data collected by CMVH compared to their RtAPS data (Kappa statistic of agreement = 0.25). Similarly, 22 percent of participants scored in a higher PCL-C category on the self-report questionnaire compared with RtAPS (Kappa statistic of agreement = 0.28).

Conclusions: Multiple plausible reasons for these differences include:

1. Variations in the timing of the data collections and the possibility that time (e.g. opportunity for impact to develop) or events since the collection of the Defence owned data, have exacerbated, or mitigated, the outcomes.
2. Differences in the environment in which the data are collected. For example, participants may have felt inclined to be more open in their responses to the self-report questionnaire because they were able to complete it in a more private environment. Further, the fact that the survey was being conducted by an organisation external to the military, may also have contributed to greater openness and 'admissions' of distress.
3. Data collected as part of the RtAPS process were, by the location and circumstance of data collection, explicitly linked to the particular deployment. In responding to the self-report questionnaire, this link was more tenuous and participants may have considered issues that caused them distress that occurred outside a military environment.
4. The Defence environment may have changed in recent times, for example, an increase in operational tempo may have had an impact on these measures.
5. Personnel may have deployed to other locations on operations and, either factors on the other deployments, or multiple deployments, may have had an effect.

Authors Affiliations:

1. University of Queensland (Dr Annabel McGuire and Mr Michael Waller)
2. University of Newcastle (Prof. Cate D'Este)
3. University of Adelaide (Prof. Alexander McFarlane)

Corresponding author's email: Dr Annabel McGuire – a.mcguire@uq.edu.au