

# Military veterans turn to adventure as an escape from depression

November 10 2017

---

Walking the challenging Kokoda Track, climbing Mt Kosciuszko, and undertaking other adventurous pursuits may help treat depression in military veterans, new research shows.

This preliminary finding is from a University of South Australia study of 45 current and ex-serving Australian military personnel who signed up for adventure-based tours in the past 12 months.

These adventure experiences were run as part of a rehabilitation adventure challenge program provided by Mates 4 Mates, a not-for-profit, ex-service organisation that helps support wounded, injured or ill Australian Defence Force (ADF) personnel and their families.

UniSA PhD candidate Daniel Padovan, who led the study, found strong evidence that psychologist-supervised adventure tourism not only reignited a sense of camaraderie among veterans but also improved their social interaction in the months afterwards.

Separate groups of up to 10 ADF veterans bonded over life-changing experiences in the jungles of Papua New Guinea as well as the NSW Snowy Mountains, tackling the Aussie 10 Peaks Challenge.

"Veterans who took part in such challenges reported increased self-esteem as well as less reliance on alcohol and other negative coping behaviours afterwards," Padovan says.

"Crucially, their levels of depression significantly decreased, which is an outstanding outcome."

The findings come in the light of a 2016 study by the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) revealing that 325 ADF veterans took their own life between 2001 and 2015 as a result of depression.

Another News Corp special investigation also found that between January and July 2016 alone, 41 ADF personnel and veterans committed suicide. These seven months in 2016 equalled the total number of ADF personnel killed in Afghanistan during 13 years of war at the time.

"This year marks the 70th anniversary of the ADF's involvement in United Nations (UN) peacekeeping activities and the 103rd anniversary of its involvement in global conflicts since the beginning of the First World War. It is important that we recognise and value the significant contributions that our military personnel have made – and continue to make," Padovan says.

"With these global deployments in mind, we need to look at the impact of war on mental health and how we can address the psychological fallout on members of our defence forces."

The UniSA study could also have positive spinoffs for people working in other dangerous and stressful professions, including police, firefighters and emergency services personnel who often experience job-related depression, Padovan says.

"It is sobering to note that suicide due to depression or post-traumatic stress disorder is the number one killer of men and women in dangerous professions year on year. In Australia, more [military personnel](#) and first responders die from these causes than are killed in the line of duty."

The group of 45 veterans who undertook the adventure challenges served in Afghanistan, Iraq and Vietnam as well as peace-keeping operations in East Timor.

Daniel Padovan is a PhD candidate in the School of Management at the University of South Australia. His thesis, "Examining the effects of adventure tours as a treatment approach for depression: a focus on [military veterans](#)," is supervised by Dr Michael Gross, Dr Duncan Murray and Adjunct Professor Sam Huang.

Provided by University of South Australia

Citation: Military veterans turn to adventure as an escape from depression (2017, November 10) retrieved 5 May 2024 from

<https://medicalxpress.com/news/2017-11-military-veterans-adventure-depression.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.