

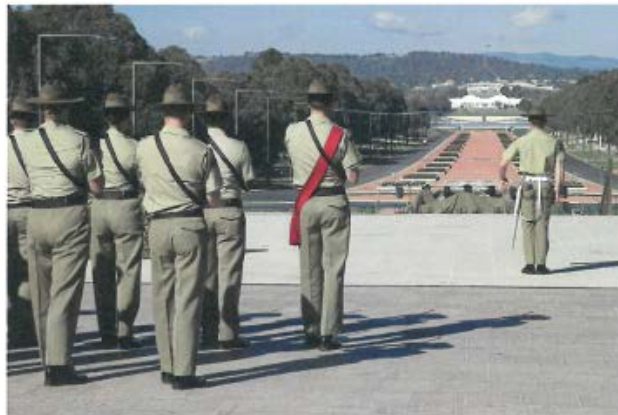
2015 Australian Parliamentary Fellowship

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Parliamentary Library

Changing attitudes to mental illness in the Australian Defence Force: a long way to go...



Scope

- **Australian Parliamentary Fellowship**
- **Research Project**
- **Defining the Problem**
- **Stigma**
- **Prevention**
- **The Future**

Australian Parliamentary Fellowship

- The purpose of the Fellowship is to:
 - contribute to scholarship on the Parliament and its work
 - promote knowledge and understanding of the Parliament
 - raise awareness of the role of the Library's Research service
 - provide a researcher with work experience in the parliamentary environment and
 - support 'early career' scholars.

Kokoda Influence



Helpful Advice



Research Questions

- what are the unique features of mental health and the ADF?
- what are the prevailing attitudes and issues around mental health and Defence identified by key stakeholders?
- what are the obstacles and opportunities in raising the tenor of debate on this issue?
- what roles do the ADF, Defence, DVA and the federal parliament play in furthering these debates?
- what are some areas for further consideration that require solutions?

Terminology

- **The terms ‘mental illness’ and ‘post-traumatic stress disorder’ (PTSD) are highly stigmatising as they reinforce the ‘illness state’ - preferred terms include ‘mental fitness’**

Major General Jeffrey Sengelman

Defining the problem

- ADF males report higher rates of PTSD (8.1 per cent) than males in the general community (4.6 per cent).
- Trauma histories differ between ADF males and females with ADF males more likely to report accidents and other unexpected traumas, while ADF females were more likely to report interpersonal traumas.
- In addition to exposure to traumas from civilian life, ADF personnel are additionally exposed to job-specific trauma.
- 90 per cent of ADF personnel have experienced at least one traumatic event in their lives, compared with 73 per cent of an age and employment matched Australian community sample.

The Parliament of Australia

- On the floor of both houses of parliament (including statements from the minister, questions with/without notice, second reading speeches/debate)
- Committee examination of legislation, referred inquiries, annual reports, budgets and white papers [Defence and Veterans' Affairs] (including by the Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade, and the Senate Standing Committees on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade)
- The introduction of new Legislation (although in the Veterans' Affairs portfolio the introduction of new legislation is rare)
- Parliamentary Friendship Groups (Parliamentary Friends of Defence, and Parliamentary Friends of Mental Illness)
- The Prime Ministerial Advisory Council on Veterans' Mental Health and dialogue between MPs and the media.

Roles of the 2nd Commando Regiment

The 2nd Commando Regiment (2 Cdo Regt) is a joint enabled expeditionary Special Operations force capable of operating across the land, sea or air domains. The Regiment is a force in readiness for the conduct of Advance Force Operations and Direct Action missions. These tasks are conducted both overseas and domestically where the Regiment is optimised to conduct responsive, scalable and tailored special operations, teamed with other Special Operations Command (SOCOMD) Force Elements, Services and Interagency partners in joint and combined operations.

Human Performance Handbook

- The Human Performance Wing (HPW) was established in 2013 as a soldier led, academically informed and command supported initiative to provide culturally appropriate support to seriously wounded, injured and ill commandos.
- HPW is an intermediate space where soldiers are supported during times of significant change, as they work to establish and achieve their goals and update their identity.
- The aim of 2nd Commando Regiment's HPW is to provide culturally relevant, nonclinical holistic care to members who are undergoing rehabilitation.
- HPW also facilitates personal development using human performance optimisation principals to enhance individual wellbeing and collective capability as well as providing the opportunity for those transitioning from the regiment to do so with a strong personal foundation and dignity.

Stigma

- The phenomenon whereby an individual with an attribute which is deeply discredited by his/her society is rejected as a result of the attribute. Stigma is a process by which the reaction of others spoils normal identity;
- Stigma is an attribute, behaviour, or reputation which is socially discrediting in a particular way: it causes an individual to be mentally classified by others in an undesirable, rejected stereotype rather than in an accepted, normal one (Erving Goffman)

Prevention

This preventative approach might be underpinned by an increased focus on such things as:

- raising mental health literacy/awareness;
- mental health first aid; and
- increasing the evidence base for best-practice preventative models.

Conclusion

- The multitude of divergent groups with contradictory views creates a set of political, social and administrative challenges for government
- Forum with a professionally-set agenda that prioritises high-quality research and audit arrangements
- Existing programs not yet fully effective and significant work required

DIAGNOSTIC AND STATISTICAL
MANUAL OF
MENTAL DISORDERS

FIFTH EDITION

DSM-5



AMERICAN PSYCHIATRIC ASSOCIATION

Thank you!

Questions