

Plain Language Summary

Resilience in ADF members

Findings from the Longitudinal ADF Study Evaluating Resilience (LASER-Resilience)

Who is this for?

This summary will enable stakeholders to better inform products in relation to policy, programs, health promotion, and training materials.

Why was this research conducted?

The LASER-Resilience study helped Defence to develop a better understanding of psychological resilience and mental health changes over the first few years of ADF members' military careers.

What did the research find?

80% of ADF members report good mental health in the first three to four years of their career. Two additional groups with different patterns of mental health were found:

- 10% experienced an improvement in their mental health after initially reporting elevated levels of distress
- 8% reported good mental health early in their career but this deteriorated over time

ADF members who reported good mental health during their early career were more likely to report having adequate sleep, good social support and good morale within their unit or team. In addition, they were more likely to use adaptive coping skills, such as reappraisal and acceptance.

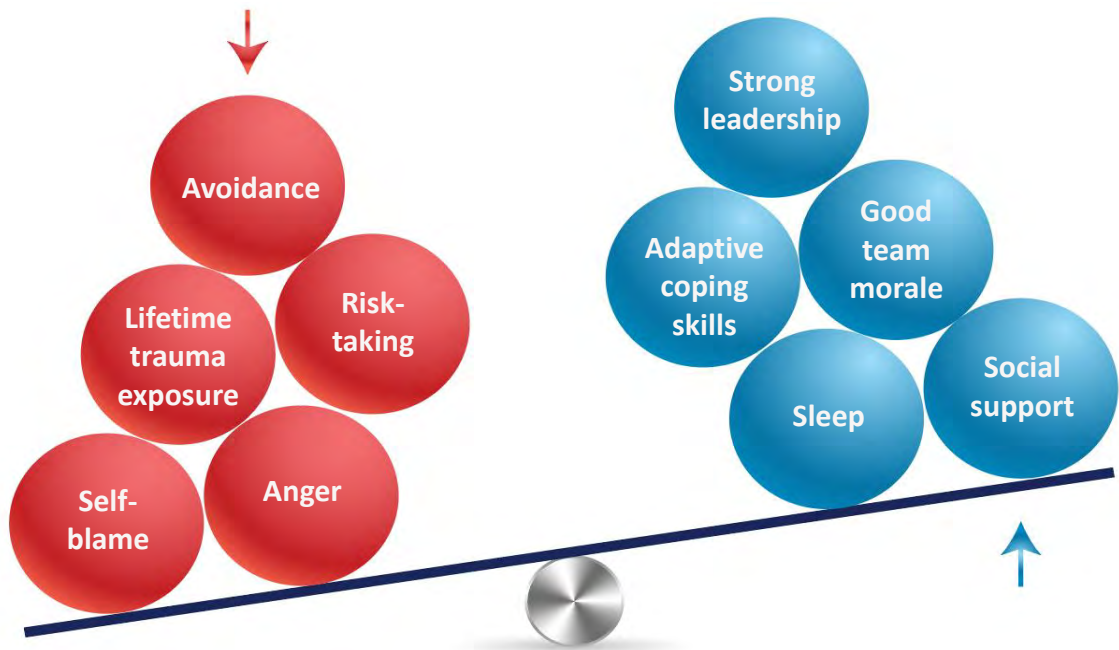
In contrast, ADF members with poorer mental health tended to have higher lifetime trauma exposure and anger. They also used less effective coping strategies, such as self-blame, avoidance and risk-taking. Negative peer interactions such as criticism, arguments and excessive demands were also associated with poorer outcomes.

For some people, levels of psychological distress appeared to change at key ADF career points, particularly when moving from initial training to first posting to a new unit/ship or base. These changes in mental health are likely to be a result of the demands placed on ADF members during these transition points, including adjusting to a new role and team quickly and posting to a new location.

Social support networks are also known to change during major life transitions, such as starting and progressing in a military career. Although family support remained essential for maintaining wellbeing over time, interactions with colleagues became increasingly important as members progressed in their career.

Findings indicated that leadership is very important in fostering positive interactions between colleagues, and strong leadership and morale can buffer some of the stressors that might be encountered in the initial years of military service.





Above: Factors negatively and positively associated with good mental health outcomes.

Implications

Major life transitions during early career have implications for the mental health of ADF members. This can be seen in members as early as the first posting following initial training.

The results from this study indicate that resilience can be promoted through:

- Recognising those who may be struggling with early career transitions,
- Practising good sleep hygiene,
- Encouraging positive adaptive coping skills such as acceptance and positive appraisal, and
- Fostering good social support networks and decreasing negative peer interactions.

For more information

Please [click here](#) or scan the QR code below.

