



Measuring Occupational Exposures to Osteoarthritis in the Lower Limb in Australian Defence Force Job Categories

Measuring Occupational Exposures to Osteoarthritis in the Lower Limb in Australian Defence Force Job Categories Study

- Aim: To examine the effects of Australian Defence Force (ADF) training on the causation of Osteoarthritis of the Lower Limb (OLL).
- ADF Services involved:
 - Royal Australian Air Force (RAAF)
 - Royal Australian Navy (RAN)
 - Australian Regular Army (ARA)
- Cost: \$0.53 million.

Research contributors

- Bond University
- Charles Sturt University

Research oversight

A Scientific Advisory Committee involving experts from occupational exposure, physiotherapy and sports science disciplines together with ADF medical specialists provided DVA with independent advice on scientific matters related to the conduct of the study, including the study's methodology and research reports for accuracy and validity.

Key findings

The study identifies that ADF personnel, based on their training and service type, have differing timeframes for reaching exposure thresholds for the likely development of OLL.

The Study of Measuring Occupational Exposures to Osteoarthritis in the Lower Limb (OLL) in Australian Defence Force (ADF) Job Categories examined risk factors for OLL in the ADF community.

Osteoarthritis is a common disorder that affects the joints in the body. In occupations where heavy physical workloads are a typical occurrence, there is an increase in the risk for developing OLL, which can effect the knees and hips.

As ADF training is physically demanding and involves heavy physical workloads, DVA sponsored a research project with Bond University to better understand the relationship between OLL and ADF service.

The study's scope was guided by the exposure threshold levels set out in the Statements of Principles (SOP) for OLL issued by the Repatriation Medical Authority. These SOPs are legislative instruments, used for decision making, which define OLL and sets out the factors known to cause the condition.

The OLL SOPs outline exposure thresholds for how certain activities, such as lifting weight, kneeling or squatting, completed over a specific timeframe can lead to the development of OLL.

This study collected various sources of data to investigate how long it might take, in an ADF training environment, to reach the exposure thresholds outlined in the OLL SOP.

This involved undertaking an analysis of current and historical ADF training courses, and relevant claims data. Additionally, the study involved direct

observations of ADF training and surveys of ADF trainees and staff to understand how training takes place in real life circumstances.

The study found that service members have differing risk for OLL based on service training programs. As a result, ADF employment categories who have more strenuous training programs can potentially reach the exposure thresholds for OLL in a faster timeframe than others.

Implications

This study's findings provide a greater understanding of the relationship between OLL in veterans and types of ADF job category. With this information, DVA has lessened the need for some veterans to explain how their service has caused OLL when submitting claims to DVA. Lengthy claim investigations and administrative burdens can now be avoided where relevant SOP factors are known to be met on the basis of certain types and duration of employment.

The findings build on and further enhance the research and work already being undertaken by DVA to improve access to services, streamline the compensation claims process, and fast track access to treatment.

Support

If you have any concerns about how your ADF service may have affected your health, you can submit a claim online at www.dva.gov.au/my-service or call 1800 VETERAN (1800 838 372) to speak to someone about how DVA can help.