# Program of the NORDEFCO Veteran Conference Helsinki 2018

## Tuesday 25 September

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<td>10.15 - 10.45</td>
<td>Mental Suffering and Coping among Finnish War Veterans after World War II, Ph.D. Ville Kivimäki, Finland</td>
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<td>10.45 - 11.00</td>
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<td>11.30 - 11.50</td>
<td>Denmark: Suicide attempts, combat exposure &amp; social support, Ph.D. Mia Sadowa Vedtofte</td>
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<td>11.50 - 12.10</td>
<td>Norway: Conflict exposure &amp; death from external causes (UNIFIL), Dr. Einar K Borud</td>
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<td>12.10 - 12.30</td>
<td>Sweden: Healthy soldier effect &amp; health + social outcomes (Afgh), Prof. Martin Neovius</td>
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<td>12.30 - 13.45</td>
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<td>Questions to presenters of the previous session (Q&amp;A)</td>
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<td>14.00 - 14.30</td>
<td>Post-traumatic stress symptoms and other mental health problems up to 6.5 years post deployment, Ph.D. Søren Andersen, Denmark</td>
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<td>14.30 - 15.00</td>
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<td>15.00 - 15.30</td>
<td>Individual journey of the international operation, Lieutenant colonel Eero Kinnunen, Estonia</td>
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<td>15.30 - 16.15</td>
<td>Transcental Meditation as a treatment for anxiety and PSTD in soldiers and veterans (incl. practical exercise in conference room), Major/Clinical Psychologist Bård Greve, NAFJMS/IMPS, Norway</td>
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<td>18.00 - 21.00</td>
<td>Conference dinner, hosted by Ministry of Defence Finland, Event Venue BYSA 1&amp;2, 3rd floor</td>
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<td>09.00 - 09.45</td>
<td>Impact of Military Life on Children from Military Families, Chair of NATO HFM-258 WG, Ph.D. Alla Skomorovsky, Canada</td>
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<td>09.45 - 10.05</td>
<td>Gladness and concerns of mission families: Estonia experiences, Personal Support Services Centre, Estonian Defence Forces, psychologist Anneli Liivamägi-Hitrov, Estonia</td>
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<td>10.05 - 10.20</td>
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<td>10.20 - 10.45</td>
<td>Estonians veterans on the labor market, Advisor on social affairs Andres Siplane MOD, Estonia</td>
<td>Research track 1, Event Venue, BYSA 1&amp;2, 3rd floor</td>
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<td>10.50 - 11.15</td>
<td>Labour market affiliation after military deployment: Research from the Danish registers, Ph.D. student Andreas Elrond, Denmark</td>
<td>Research track 2, Sandis, 2nd floor</td>
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<td>11.20 - 11.45</td>
<td>Protective and risk factors of veterans’ suicidality: preliminary results, Estonian-Swedish Mental Health and Suicidology Institute, Professor Merike Sisask, Estonia</td>
<td>Research track 2, Sandis, 2nd floor</td>
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<td>11.50 - 12.15</td>
<td>Proud, respected and valuable. Ph.D. Lotta Tillberg, Sweden</td>
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<td>12.30 - 13.45</td>
<td>Lunch, Kitchen &amp; Table, ground floor</td>
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<td>13.45 - 14.15</td>
<td>Tool to assess follow-up needs after operation, Head of Section Max Björkstedt, Sweden</td>
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<td>14.35 - 15.15</td>
<td>The importance of daily hassles and uplifts in veteran recovery, Ph.D. Sofia Nilsson, Swedish National Defence University, Sweden</td>
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<td>15.15 - 15.25</td>
<td>Finland hands over the flag and the chairmanship to Norway</td>
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<td>15.25 - 15.30</td>
<td>Closing Remarks, Moderator of Conference, Col/Ph.D. Vesa Nissinen, Finland</td>
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Speakers

Tuesday 25 September

Ville Kivimäki

Postdoctoral Researcher and Research Team Leader
Academy of Finland Centre of Excellence in the History of Experiences
University of Tampere, Finland
ville.j.kivimaki@uta.fi

Born 1976
Title of Docent in Finnish history, University of Tampere, Finland, 2017
Doctor of Philosophy in Nordic history, Åbo Akademi University, Finland, 2013
Master of Arts in Finnish history, University of Joensuu (University of Eastern Finland), 2002

Doctoral studies abroad:
2015, Center for the History of Emotions, Max Planck Institute, Berlin
2007–08, Fulbright Grantee: Department of History, Yale University, USA
2005, DAAD-Stipendiat: SFB 437 Kriegserfahrungen, Universität Tübingen, Germany

Mental Suffering and Coping among Finnish War Veterans after World War II

Today, the frequency of constant, heavy nightmares among the Finnish population is much lower than in the 1970s, when the researchers started to study the issue systematically. The decrease in nightmares seems to be a direct result of the decrease in the proportional share of those Finns who had experienced the wars of 1939–45 either as adults or as children. During the war and in its long aftermath, people’s dreams were occupied by the horrors they had witnessed. The Finnish war generation was a “nightmare generation”. In my presentation, I will examine the transition of traumatic war experiences to the postwar period in Finland and how people tried to cope with their symptoms and experiences long before the introduction of modern trauma psychology.

Martin Neovius

Founder of Aux Military http://www.auxmilitary.se/, an independent consultancy performing register-based follow-up of mental, physical and social consequences of foreign military deployment

Professor of clinical epidemiology, Karolinska Institute, Stockholm, Sweden
https://ki.se/en/people/marneo

Mental, physical & social outcomes among Swedish military veterans after deployment to Afghanistan

This register-based study investigated post-deployment outcomes among approximately 7000 Swedish veterans who served in over 10,000 deployments in Afghanistan within ISAF. Five controls from the general population, who had performed conscription tests but not been deployed, were
Matched to each veteran. Matching variables were among others sex, age, IQ and pre-deployment mental health. Veterans were found to have similar or better physical and mental health after deployment compared to controls, and similar frequency of violent crime convictions. The divorce rate, however, was statistically significantly higher among veterans.

**All-cause and cause-specific mortality among Nordic military veterans following international deployment: a meta-analysis**

The purpose of this study was to investigate post-deployment all-cause and cause-specific mortality risks among Nordic military veterans. Data from Denmark, Finland, Norway and Sweden were combined to analyse death from any cause, external causes, cardiovascular causes, death by suicide, death from traffic transport accidents, and from neoplasms. A pooled risk compared to the general population was estimated for each outcome using a random effect model. Analyses were performed for the whole period, as well as separately for <5 years and ≥5 years after deployment.

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**Mia Sadowa Vedtofte**

**Education**

2008 - 2013  Ph.D. Nutritional Epidemiology, University of Copenhagen  
2005 - 2007  Master of Science in Human Nutrition, University of Copenhagen  
2001 - 2003  Bachelor of Science in Biology, University of Copenhagen  

**Employment**

2014-  PhD, Researcher at the Knowledge and Research Center, The Danish Defence  
2013 - 2014  Post Doc, Institute of Preventive Medicine, Unit of dietary research  
2008 - 2013  PhD student, Institute of Preventive Medicine, Unit of dietary research  
2007 - 2008  National Institute of Public Health, University of Southern Denmark  

**Combat exposure and risk of Suicide attempt among Danish veterans**

Mia Sadowa Vedtofte1*, Annette Erlangsen2, Anni BS Nielsen1, Christian Stoltenberg1, Lars R Nissen1, Trine Madsen2  

1Research and Knowledge Centre, Danish Veteran Centre, Ringsted, Denmark  
2Psychiatric Center Copenhagen, Copenhagen University Hospital, Denmark  

*Corresponding author: Mia Sadowa Vedtofte, Research and Knowledge Centre, Danish Veteran Centre, Garnisonen 1, 4100 Ringsted, Denmark. Email: vetc-vic02@mil.dk. Phone: +45 72163322  

**Objective.** To investigate if Danish veterans who have experienced high level of war-zone stress during deployment are at increased risk of suicide attempt.  

**Design.** This study was an observational cohort study of Danish veterans who has been deployed in international missions from 1997-2015 and who had fulfilled the “Psychological Reactions following International Missions” (PRIM). Data on suicide attempt was retrieved from national coverage registers. All data has been merged and hosted by Statistic Denmark.
Findings. In this unique observational cohort study of 13,645 Danish Veterans, 116 (1%) had a registered suicide attempt after their first deployment. Having a high perceived war-zone stress score was not associated with later suicide attempt whereas low social support during deployment and at homecoming was associated with risk of suicide attempt.

Einar Kristian Borud

MD, PhD, MPH
Norwegian Armed Forces Joint Medical Services, Oslo and UiT the Arctic University of Norway, Tromsø

Specialist in general medicine and public health.

2012- Chief physician, Institute of Military Epidemiology, Norwegian Armed Forces Joint Medical Services, Oslo, Norway.
2015- Associate Professor UiT – The Arctic University of Norway, Institute of Community Medicine, Tromsø, Norway.

Conflict exposure & death from external causes (UNIFIL)

Objective. We investigated external cause mortality among 21,609 Norwegian male military peacekeepers deployed to Lebanon during 1978 – 1998.

Methods. We followed the cohort from the first day of deployment through 2013, and assessed mortality by calculating standardized mortality-ratios (SMRs) from national rates in Norway. We used Poisson regression analyzes to evaluate the effect of high-conflict versus low-conflict exposure.

Results. In the low-conflict exposure group, we found a lower mortality from all external causes (SMR=0.77), transport accidents (SMR=0.55) and accidental poisoning (SMR=0.53). The high-conflict exposure group showed an elevated mortality from all external causes (SMR=1.20), transport accidents (SMR=1.51) and suicide (SMR=1.30), but these risks were elevated only during the first five years after discharge. The high-conflict exposure group also showed elevated mortality from all external causes (rate ratio, RR=1.49), and for transport accidents (RR=3.30) when compared with the low-conflict exposure group.

Conclusion. High-conflict exposure was associated with elevated mortality from all external causes, transport accidents and suicide during the first five years after discharge from service.

Søren Bo Andersen

Born 28th June 1973, Søren has a PhD in psychophysiology from the University of Portsmouth specializing in the biological basis of behavior, emotions and personality. He has previously worked as a lecturer in psychology at Swansea University and has for a number of years conducted applied research into new ways of treating psychiatric problems through neural self-regulation methods. He is currently head of the Research and Knowledge Centre in the Danish Veteran Centre where he coordinates research initiatives ranging from studies on genetic and neurophysiological correlates of PTSD in Danish Veterans to anthropological approaches to understanding coping in families living with a veteran with PTSD.
Present position: Head of the Research and Knowledge Centre, The Danish Veteran Centre

Previous position:
Experimental officer (Psychology); 2003-2004; University of Portsmouth
Lecturer, Department of Psychology; 2004-2006; Swansea University
Chief Psychologist; 2006-2009; BrainValue A/S, Denmark
Chief Science Officer; 2009-2011; Mindmetric Research Aps, Denmark
Researcher at the Danish Veteran Centre; 2011-2013
Head of the Research and Knowledge Centre, The Danish Veteran Centre, 2013-

Qualifications:
BSc (Psychology); 1999; First Class; University of Portsmouth, UK
PhD (Psychophysiology); 2004; University of Portsmouth, UK
PRINCE2-Foundation certified; 2011; Metier Academy, Denmark
Diploma of Leadership, PL 1 & 2, LM 1 & 2, LO1 (ongoing)

Post-traumatic stress symptoms and other mental health problems up to 6.5 years post deployment

The toll and psychological impact of international deployments varies across missions and the manner in which psychological health is assessed, either through national registries or via questionnaires/surveys, affect the conclusions. There is also considerable variation in post-traumatic stress response patterns following home-coming which complicates the identification of risk indicators of vulnerabilities.

In this study we contrast national registry data with survey data with respect to post-traumatic stress and we review current Danish research on psychological risk factors for post-deployment PTSD. We tentatively suggest new methods of analysis and predictive modelling by application of machine learning algorithms – a method which may aid in the identification of individuals veterans at risk.

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**Eero Kinnunen**

Lieutenant Colonel
EDL Harju District Commander
Non-profit Organization Estonian Defense Forces veterans, member of board

**Education**

1985  High school
1994  Officer Basic course
2009  Academy Nord, Social sciences, psychology, BA
2011  US Army Command and General Staff College, Intermediate Level Education Course

**Service**

I also have served in Land Forces Headquarters and Estonian Defense League Headquarters.
1985 - 1987    Soviet Army, conscript service.

Missions

2001    Bosnia and Herzegovina
2003    Iraq
2007    Afghanistan

Individual journey of the international operations

In my lecture, I cover my experience and progress throughout three missions, including preparation period and aftermath. How these missions have changed my values and judgement, which positive and negative manifestations have appeared before, during and after missions. What are the greatest lessons learned, looking back now and from what I can benefit every day?

Bård Greve

Greve Initially has a background as a trained army officer but with a subsequent cand.psychol degree from the Norwegian University of Science and Technology. He has extensive experience from following various units in the Norwegian army before, during and after combat deployments as part of their operational support as a clinical psychologist. He is currently employed as a clinician at the Institute of Military Psychiatry, Norwegian Armed Forces Joint Medical Services and has during the past years, amongst other things, been responsible for developing mindfulness training for the military.

Transcendental meditation (TM) as a treatment for anxiety and PTSD in soldiers and veterans

Both anxiety and PTSD is associated with symptoms of increased arousal and exaggerated sympathetic response. Meditation is characterized by deep relaxation by activation of the parasympathetic nervous system. It is proposed that meditation might be effective in alleviating or counteracting the response. This program is to determine applicability and effect in the treatment for Norwegian Veterans with traumatic combat exposure from international operations.
Wednesday 26 September

Alla Skomorowsky

Alla Skomorowsky has a PhD in social psychology from Carleton University, Ottawa, Canada. She is a defence scientist at Director General Military Personnel Research and Analysis, Department of National Defence in Canada, and is a section head of the Military Families Research section. Her research interests include quantitative and qualitative research in the areas of health, coping, personality, and well-being of military families. She is also an adjunct professor at Carleton University, Ottawa.

Impact of Military Life on Children From Military Families

Children in military families experience various stressors, such as parental deployments, which may negatively affect every stage of their lives. Given that very little research has been conducted in this area, a NATO working group “The Impact of Military Life on Children from Military Families”, with 19 NATO representatives, was created in 2015. The key objectives of this group were to: identify the key issues related to the impact of military life on children from military families, develop a universal framework for well-being of children, and identify the best practices. This presentation discusses the key results of this working group.

Anneli Liivamägi-Hitrov

Anneli Liivamägi-Hitrov has been working for Estonian Defence Forces as psychologist for more than 7 years. She works with veterans who have served in military operations and their families. Mostly she does psychological counselling. She is also providing some lectures for example how to cope with stress, how to recognise mental illness, how to deal with psychological problems etc. With her colleagues she conducts a variety of questionnaires to discover psychological problems or for assessing ones. As psychologist she is also qualified as a family therapist and a family mediator. Therefore she also meet the clients in her private practices.

Concerns and joy of mission families in Estonia

Estonia gained full NATO membership at 2004. Our troops have participated at international peace implementation operations and international military operations since 1995. We have served at Bosnia, Kosovo, Lebanon, Mali, Iraq, Central African Republic, Afghanistan. Military operations last usually for 6 months – this is a long time especially for the family members of the deployed soldier. They have different concerns regarding the safety of their close ones, coping with homework alone and relationship issues. But, at the same time, a long period of separation has also given for some soldiers and their families the opportunity to assess the value of their relationship and have converged the couples.

The department of social and psychological support in Estonian Defence Forces gives a full support for the soldier’s family when soldier serves abroad, to help families to make the “waiting period” as smooth as possible. There are different possibilities to support the family members - website, hotline, Facebook group, “Family days” for sharing the information about the possible psychological difficulties of the mission dynamics and practical issues etc. After deployment Estonian Defence Forces offers for the veterans and their family members three-day long
SPA-treatment in some hotels in Estonia. This is a good opportunity for soldiers and their families to re-establish their relationship’s proximity.

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**Andres Siplane**

Andres Siplane was born in 1974 in a small Estonian town Pärnu. After high school he served as a conscript in the Border Guard. He has graduated as a social worker both on the BA and MA levels from Tallinn University.

His career started with a child welfare work in Pärnu, later on he worked in the Ministry of Justice in the field of crime prevention. After that he holds the position of an adviser in Estonian Parliament where his main area of expertise was social policy. Since 2011 he joined the Estonian Defence Forces where he was responsible for medical, social and psychological services for the soldiers in deployment. After the end of ISAF he moved on to the Ministry of Defence where he is currently employed as an adviser of social issues.

Andres Siplane is married and has two children. In his free time he loves to read. His primary sports is figure skating but he also likes to run and play basketball.

Andres Siplane has written several articles and books about social policy, social welfare and civil society.

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**Out of Service & on the Labor Market**

There is a certain worry among the servicepeople about their future civilian career and it is very often a topic of conversation among them. One could claim that military skills are valued in the labor market. But you could postulate the opposite and it sounds plausible as well. In my register-based quantitative study I will present the situation and trends for the Estonian service-leavers on the labor market starting from 2010.”

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**Karen-Inge Karstoft**

**Education and research experience**

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<tr>
<td>2014</td>
<td>PhD in Psychology, University of Southern Denmark. Dissertation title: Traumatic Stress Reactions Following Military Deployment: Data driven approaches for identification of heterogeneous outcomes</td>
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<td>2013</td>
<td>Visiting predoctoral scholar: Psychiatry Department, New York University School of Medicine, New York, USA (10 months)</td>
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<td>2010</td>
<td>MSc in Psychology, majoring in neuropsychology and clinical psychology, University of Copenhagen</td>
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<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>Visiting scholar at Macquarie Centre for Cognitive Science, Macquaire University, Sydney, Australia (6 months)</td>
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<td>2007</td>
<td>BSc in Psychology, University of Copenhagen</td>
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Andreas Friis Elrond

Education

2015 - 2018  Ph.D. Student, Research and Knowledge Centre, Danish Veteran Centre and Department of Psychology, University of Copenhagen
Project title: The relation between psychosocial work environment during deployment and mental health for Danish soldiers.

2010 - 2013  Master in Psychology, Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Copenhagen

Professional and teaching experience

2016-   Adjunct lecturer at the Department of Psychology, University of Copenhagen

2014-   Researcher at the Veterans Research Center in the Danish Defense

2014 - 2015  Adjunct lecturer at the Department of Psychology, University of Southern Denmark

2011  Research Assistant, Department of Psychology, University of Southern Denmark

2009  Assistant teacher in Cognitive Psychology, University of Copenhagen

2007  Research assistant at Center for Visual Cognition, Department of Psychology, University of Copenhagen

Genetic studies of risk and resilience in Danish soldiers following military deployment

Background: Studies have shown PTSD following traumatic events to be heritable with heritability rates between 30 and 40%. More precisely, specific genes are thought to convey risk or resilience of PTSD after exposure to traumatic events such as military combat. Hence, an important avenue of research within the field of PTSD is the identification of risk-specific alleles that can aid the early prediction of PTSD following combat exposure.

Methods: In a Genome-Wide Association Study (GWAS) of 2481 Danish soldiers deployed to the Balkans, Iraq or Afghanistan, we aim to identify single nucleotide polymorphisms (SNPs) that are associated with high levels of PTSD-symptomatology 6 months after deployment, and to replicate potential hits in two independent data sets.

Conclusions and future research: We tentatively identify one SNP, rs34465541, located on chromosome 4, that is associated with high PTSD symptom level 6 months after home coming. This is partly replicated in one independent data set and not replicated in another data set. This finding should be further studied in future data sets. Further, we plan to conduct target gene analyses investigating the interaction between childhood trauma, specific genes and the risk of subsequent PTSD.
Group based short term intensive exposure therapy as a treatment for anxiety and PTSD in soldiers and veterans

The last years has seen a series of emergence of various short term intensive exposure therapy treatment programs with optimistic results both within OCD and Phobias. These protocols have been designed based on well-established principles from Cognitive Behavioral Therapy.

The Institute of Military Psychiatry has recently been looking at the applicability of Group based short-term intensive exposure therapy as a technique for treating primarily anxiety related symptoms in a diversified military population with differentiated backgrounds and services. The ultimate goal being to evaluate this for effect in treatment of PTSD and trauma related symptoms in Norwegian Veterans of international operations.

Labour market affiliation after military deployment – Research from the Danish registers

Soldiers returning from international deployments may carry with them experiences that may alter their ability to transition at the labour marked. Such prerequisite experiences may both enhance and diminish a positive labour market affiliation. Previous studies, however, do not paint a clear picture as to how homecoming soldiers are affiliated with the labour market. This may, in part, be due to restrictions in available data or to differences in social benefits between homecoming soldiers and other comparable groups.

This session will present and discuss previous findings from the field, and highlight the common problems of studying labour market attachment of homecoming soldiers. Second, new avenues of studying labour market attachment, and tentative results, based on Danish register data, will be discussed.

Erik Salvador

Initially trained as a Navy officer in 1994, Salvador has served in a variation of capacities in the Norwegian Army since acquiring a cand.med degree at the University of Oslo Medical Faculty with a specialization in Psychiatry. He has experience both as a senior medical officer deployed to Afghanistan, and later on as a Military Psychiatrist attached to the Institute of Military Psychiatry under the Norwegian Armed Forces Joint medical services. Today he mainly works with developing clinical treatment systems and projects, operational support and Veteran treatment programs.

Group based short term intensive exposure therapy as a treatment for anxiety and PTSD in soldiers and veterans

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Merike Sisask

Merike Sisask is Professor in Public Health at the Tallinn University, School of Governance, Law and Society (SOGOLAS) and Management Board Member and Senior Researcher at the Estonian-Swedish Mental Health and Suicidology Institute (ERSI). She has educational background in law (1991, University of Tartu), psychological counselling (2003, the Private School of Psychology), public health (MSc in 2005, University of Tartu, Institute of Public Health) and sociology (PhD in 2011, Tallinn University, Institute of International and Social Studies). In 2011–2015 she was the Member of the Technical Team on Military Suicide HFM-RTG-218 (HRM panel, NATO RTO), designated by the Estonian Ministry of Defence.

Protective and risk factors of veterans’ suicidality in Estonia

Presenter: Merike Sisask\textsuperscript{1,2}
Co-authors: Airi Värnik\textsuperscript{1,2} & Peeter Värnik\textsuperscript{1}

\textsuperscript{1}Estonian-Swedish Mental Health and Suicidology Institute (ERSI)
\textsuperscript{2}Tallinn University

Reaching to suicide is a process that is during shorter or longer period of time influenced by complex co- and counter-interactions of different protective and risk factors. Some of these factors are relatively easily modifiable, while the others are more difficult to affect. However, knowing these factors enables to target preventive work more specifically. In May 2018 an online survey was conducted among Estonian veterans and control-group from general population. Overall suicidality (thoughts, plans, and attempts) among veterans was lower than among control group. Socio-demographic, psychological, health-related and military-specific protective and risk factors will be introduced during the conference presentation.

Toni Virtanen

Toni Virtanen has been working at the Finnish Defense Research Agency (FDRA) since 2016 as a research psychologist. Prior to coming to FDRA he worked as a researcher and manager at the University of Helsinki where he participated in various R&D projects in collaboration with Microsoft and Nokia. In the past years he’s been working with the following topics among others: Human factors, user-centered design, human resource development, virtual reality ergonomics, personnel, aptitude testing, security behavior, service design, crisis management, psycho-physiological measurements and psycho-social wellbeing. During his free time Toni is also working towards his Ph.D. He plans to defend his thesis in 2019. He is a writer in 9 peer-reviewed publications and 11 conference presentations.

Study of psychosocial support of Finnish crisis management personnel

I will present the core results from the study of psychosocial support of Finnish crisis management personnel. What motivates mostly reservist on taking a leave from their civilian jobs and participating in crisis management operations, and how they will adjust back to civil life after their mission. I will also discuss how Service Design approach could improve operation time psychosocial support. Understanding the concerns and everyday life of the personnel during operations can focus the limited resources by anticipating the critical points during the mission when psychosocial support are most needed that can even have preventive impact on stress.
**Lotta Victor Tillberg**

A Doctor of Philosophy in Skill and Technology and an Associate Professor in the theory of Practical Knowledge. She has worked on issues of military professionalism since 1996. Since 2011 she is working in the project Modern Military Professionalism and the Use of Force at the Swedish Centre for Studies of Armed Forces and Society. Lotta has been involved in the publication of the anthology "Mission Abroad: Military Experience from International Operations” (2008). In 2011, she published the book "By All Necessary Means – Brigadier General Jan-Gunnar Isberg’s experiences from service in the Congo 2003–05", coauthored with Jan-Gunnar Isberg. A book of interviews with Swedish internationally experienced commanders "Mission Commander – Swedish Experiences of Command in the Expeditionary Era", was published in 2013 coauthored with Peter Tillberg. In 2017; "Mission Afghanistan – Swedish Military Experiences from a 21st-Century War". Her research is focused on what impact experience based knowledge, or practical knowledge, has in developing skills, results and quality. In addition to military practice she has also worked with health care workers, social workers, police officers and teachers. Since 2010 she is a senior lecturer teaching Leadership, Communication and Practical knowledge at the School of Culture and Education, Centre for Practical Knowledge at Södertörn university, Stockholm. She is currently doing research on the Swedish war veteran as a competent resource in society.

**The Swedish Veteran – a Competent Resource in Society**

“Many get amazed – Are you a veteran?! They imagine something else.”

Every two Swedes claim they don’t know what a war veteran is and many Swedes associate ‘veteran’ with “someone who may be in need of support”. This general perception corresponds badly with reality; in the Swedish context (most of) the war veterans are healthy and a competent resource. The ambition of the Swedish Armed Forces is that a veteran should be perceived as someone with “a proven high physical and mental capability” and someone “well trained in leading and co-operating with others”. The aim of this project is to provide a broader knowledge-base focusing on the veterans as a competent resource within the civil society as well as within the armed forces. What experiences do the veterans themselves have? By means of qualitative methods, we examine questions like: When have you felt respected because of being a veteran? In what way has, in your opinion, your knowledge and experiences as a veteran been requested?

**Christer Gjerstad**

Gjerstad has a cand.psychol degree from the University of Bergen and has been attached to the Institute of Military Psychiatry, Norwegian Armed Forces Joint Medical Services, since 2013 as a Clinical Psychologist. His main field of work has been in developing clinical treatment systems, but he has also had a significant role in several large National register surveys conducted by the Armed Forces in Norway. Currently he is also writing a PhD on the mental health of peacekeepers in cooperation with the University of Oslo.

**Virtual reality as a tool for treating anxiety and increased activation in combat veterans**

Virtual reality (VR) is in short the application of Computer technology that allows the user to be exposed to a computer generated environment that can emulate or recreate specific traumatic memories or situations. This can be used as a tool for treating anxiety and increased activation in combat veterans through traditional exposure therapy techniques.
The Norwegian Joint Medical Services is in the process of testing this technology to evaluate effect, applicability and potential benefit in the treatment of Norwegian Veterans with traumatic combat exposure in international operations.

Max Björkstedt

Worked seven years within the Swedish armed forces, four of those at the department of veteran affairs. Completed two international missions, the most recent in Mali 2017. A degree in Human resource management from Uppsala University in Sweden and a short working history as HR in the private sector.

Today Max Björkstedt is head of a section at the Swedish Armed Forces department of Veteran Affairs. The sections primarily focus is on developing and upholding The Swedish Armed Forces concept of mental and physical health before, during and after international deployment.

Work experience

2018 - present  Head of Section, Swedish Armed Forces, Veteran Affairs
Head of Section at the Swedish armed forces veterans’ affairs department.

2016 - 2017  HR-generalist, Swedish Armed Forces / UN
Administrative responsibility of Swedish military personnel in Mali.

2014 - 2016  HR-specialist, Swedish Armed Forces, Veteran Affairs
HR-specialist at the Swedish armed forces veterans’ affairs department.

2013 - 2014  HR-generalist, Swedish Armed Forces
HR-generalist at the Swedish Armed Forces HR-helpdesk.

2013  Recruiter, HCM Partner
Recruitment within the IT-sector.

2012  Recruitment assiständig, PerformIQ Work AB
Part time Job (during my university Studies).

2010  HR Support, Roche AB
Internship at Roche Pharmaceuticals HR department.

2008  Squad leader, Swedish Armed Forces / NATO
Infantry squad leader in Sweden’s international armed forces in Kosovo.

2007  Squad leader/Conscript, Swedish Armed Forces
APC squad leader.

Education

Uppsala University
- Bachelor’s degree, Human Resource Management - Development Studies
- Markets and Organizations
Assessment of deployed units in international military operations

According to Swedish law on The Swedish Armed Forces (SWAF) personnel in international military operations, the SWAF has the responsibility to actively assess it’s personnel after international military operations. Depending on the circumstances during deployment, the post deployment activities will differ.

An assessment of the deployed units (in theatre) is therefore conducted before the end of deployment. The in theatre assessment gives the SWAF a possibility allocate relevant resources and to adapt post mission activities according to mission environment and mission events.

Sofia Nilsson

Sofia Nilsson has a Ph.D. in Education. She has worked at the Leadership Center at the Swedish Defence University for thirteen years, where she is engaged in leadership research and education in relation to the military and the civil crisis management system. She has published many international journal articles on leadership and stress in general and moral stress in particular.

The importance of daily hassles and uplifts in veteran recovery

Sofia Nilsson, Sofia Svensén, Emil Lundell and Gerry Larsson
Leadership Centre, the Swedish Defence University

Stress research tends to put an emphasis on worst-case scenarios. However, accumulated hassles have shown to have a stronger relationship with physical and psychological symptoms in comparison to highly stressful events. It may be that a minor hassle, as misplacing things, is symptomatic for an individual dwelling on major life questions, that the effects of major life events are mediated through hassles and uplifts. This presentation gives a slightly different approach to stress that may be favorable to veteran recovery. While major life events are practically impossible to affect, it is easier to change appraisal of and coping with daily life patterns.