

WORLD PHYSIOTHERAPISTS & PHYSICIANS SUMMIT

July 24-26, 2017 Melbourne, Australia

Investigation of the impact of sports, exercise and recreation (SER) participation on psychosocial outcomes in a population of veterans with disabilities

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Background: The number of individuals living with some type of disability is increasing at an accelerating rate. The World Health Organization (WHO) estimates that approximately 1 billion people or 15% of the world's population have a disability. According to the Bureau of the Census, nearly one in five individuals in the United States has a disability, making this population the third largest minority in the country. Unfortunately, this number is on the rise due to issues such as an aging population, natural disasters and the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Objective: The aim of this study was to investigate the effects of participation in sports, exercise and recreation (SER) on self-esteem, depression, posttraumatic growth and quality of life (QOL) in veterans with disabilities longitudinally at four time points.

Design: A convenience sample of 163 individuals (91 sports-participants and 72 non-participants) matched on disability type with a variety of disabilities took part in this longitudinal study. Variables of interest were: SER participation vs. non-participation, years of SER participation since onset of disability (less than one year, one to five years, five to ten years, and more than ten years), the type of activity they engaged in (individual activities or a combination of team and individual activities) and time (pre-event, immediately post-event, one month post-event, and three months post-event). Main outcome measures were self-esteem, depression, posttraumatic growth and QOL.

Results: SER participants had significantly higher self-esteem, posttraumatic growth and QOL and significantly lower depression scores than non-participants. There were also significant differences found between the independent variables of: Time, number of years participating in SER since onset of disability and type of activity engaged in and various outcome measures studied.

Conclusions: The results of this study support that participation in SER has positive effects on self-esteem, depression, posttraumatic growth and QOL.

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