

# Therapy on military veterans with ptsd psychology essay



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The modern world is characterized with undesirable events and process such as wars, earthquakes, floods and other natural disasters. This paper focuses on the deadly warfare such as Vietnam War and their impacts on the soldiers who participated in them, as well as their families and acquaintances. Apart from deadly injuries sustained by the victims of these tragedies, long lasting psychological problems such as post traumatic stress disorders are also exhibited by the actual casualties, friends and their families. In realization of the detrimental repercussions of this phenomenon several years after their occurrences, scholars have come up with ways to deal with victims of the tragedies. This paper focuses on the various articles which illustrates history, and effects of PTSD. Various approaches of dealing with the disorders have been discussed in details. The approaches include, use of equine therapy, dog service and cognitive behavioral therapy. Also included in the paper are the procedures of dealing with PTSD, expected results and a conclusive discussion of the whole process. Ample references to reinforce the arguments in the paper are also provided.

## **History of PTSD**

Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), is isolation and an anxiety predicament that develop in individuals sometimes after experiencing extremely traumatic occurrences such as crime, combat, a natural disaster or an accident. Traumatic event is a painful catastrophic stressor that is outside the range of the typical human experience. The peril of exposure to distress has been part and parcel of the man's life since mankind evolved as a species. Academicians believe that (PTSD) has a long history that encompasses different fields of study. Psychiatry is one of the core fields

associated with the phenomenon. Research shows that PTSD dates back to pre-Christ times, and also proves that today's experience and effects of the disorder were also experienced in the distance past. The implication is that, since time immemorial human beings have always succumbed to fears. For instance, history has it that individuals who lived during the stone-age were mainly hunters and gatherers. The same history indicates that the individuals used to experience nightmares after a terrified day of hunting. As a matter of fact very little about PTSD has changed over the years except that human beings have emerged as more complex creatures with more complicated abilities. This complication is as a result of brain advancement which actually improves the manner in which people deal with stress and traumatic events. For the longest time ever, international psychological organs have invested a lot of time trying to come into terms with PTSD and ways to deal with it. For instance, in early 1980s American Psychiatrist Association recognized the disorder as a mental case which needs urgent attention. Though controversial in understanding of the disorder, PTSD knowledge has filled a crucial gap in psychiatric hypothesis and practices. Furthermore, PTSD is still an important phenomenon that calls for attention from psychologists and other academicians (Brian, Stanley, Sue, Katherine & Jill, 2011).

Individuals with PTSD may relive the occurrence through invasive memories, nightmares and flashbacks. Such individuals avoid anything that take them back to the trauma; and portrays restless feelings that they did not show long before the event/ occurrence. The feelings are so deep that their lives are extremely disrupted. In case of military veterans, their work experience

involves a lot of traumatic events, which are inevitable throughout their work life. Some of these events involve military wars where at times they do execute criminals as part of their job. In other instances, they go through tough moments trying to save people from disastrous areas such as in an event of bomb blast. These experiences end up challenging them psychologically long after these events take place. Hence, they do develop psychological illness such as the PTSD. Equine therapy is one of the treatments that can be applied in dealing with PTSD. Equine therapy is a psychotherapy applied on horses, but research has shown that the same treatment can help military veterans recover from the traumatic events that they experience in their career. Consequently, various institutions have been set up in different parts of the world so as to provide these services. The effects of Equine Therapy depend on how it is applied. The analysis in the succeeding section focuses on some of the institutions that provide treatment and the effect of those services.

## **EAGALA Military Services**

In an attempt to streamline many of equine-assisted schemes across the board, and assist active military, veterans, their families and the families of the diseased obtain the much needed therapy services, Equine Assisted Growth And Learning Organization has established EAGALA military services. The nonprofit making association was founded by Lynn Thomas, who became the executive director of the organization. The military task of the association focused on five key sections: community education, research, government relations, program development and member training. This population has been working with Equine professions and EAGALA Certified

Mental Health unit, since 1999 to date. The services have always revolved around the provision of emotional treatments, behavioral and mental challenges ranging from TBI, depression, addiction to combat grief, misery and family trauma, reintegration to PTSD. Occurrence of PTSD might be as sky-scraping as 20% in military veterans of the famous Operations Iraqi as well as for the Enduring Freedom veterans. This is according to National Centre for PTSD. The centre also indicates that, PTSD among the Vietnam veterans might be as high as 30%. Despite these alarming rates of PTSD, a recent RAND report indicates that only few soldiers have sought the necessary treatment (Korinek, 2012). Consequently, more than 1000 soldiers have committed suicide.

In response to the high level of deaths out of PTSD, EAGALA has called upon all the interested stakeholders to exhibit the replica of Equine Assisted Psychotherapy (EAP). The model makes use of ground-based practices where the natural horses act as metaphors. These involve representing associations with unit members or family, fears, aspect of self or strengths. Academicians and scholars believe that horse therapy can be essentially more effective than conventional talk therapy. They also claim that horse therapy can be applied as either a short-term move for those already facing re-deployment, or as a long term approach treatment helping several in reintegration into family life and civilian (Santaquin & Utah, 2011).

According to survey program carried out by Asylum Services, an EAGALA military veteran Services plan located in Texas State, past only six programs, military veterans and their partners reported around 60% progress in harshness of marital challenges comprising, financial disputes, physical  
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abuse, verbal abuse, parenting choices and forgiveness. Couples also reported around 50% perfection in emotional closeness, conflict resolution, sex, trust, anger and respect. An officer in the study stated that the forum provide a safe environment for him to open up because without it then it could be tricky to face reality. He also said that occasionally, the horses talked for him and assisted him to cope with his family challenges (Santaquin & Utah, 2011).

Jimmy Walters, a USA veteran, indicates that EAGALA Model makes use of the horse to achieve insight into perceptions and behaviors. According to Jimmy the reaction of the horse provide real time and unbiased feedback, breaking via the barriers that a lot of military people experience in discussions with others, who might not acknowledge what the veterans who made it back feels. Jimmy also notes that EAP provides a plan for coping with trauma in a manner that shows some sense to military veteran members. Another 23 years old active duty affiliate of Special Forces also proved that Equine Therapy works even for the active military people. He said that horses could understand his feelings and accept him; a phenomenon which he found very strange. As a result, the officer claims that the therapy has not only made it possible for him to re-connect with his family and himself, but has also made him a crucial tool in the military (Santaquin & Utah, 2011).

Ladies also have something to say concerning equine therapy. Julie Giove Sardonia, a Californian therapist, claims that since many veterans dislike talk therapy, then horses as therapists are the best in serving these military veterans. She also concluded that healing occurs naturally, particularly for the military veterans. Hence, a relationship of a soldier with a horse can offer <https://assignbuster.com/therapy-on-military-veterans-with-ptsd-psychology-essay/>

self-understanding and emotional insights. Susan T. Lisi, a Chief Steward in VA Medical Center located in New York, affirmed that they conducted several EAGALA EAP programs with their veterans emphasizing on dealing with resilience, resources and anger management. She adds that comprehensively, veteran partakers have claimed that never ever have they found an individual session or a group so life-changing and useful. She also adds that after these sessions, several of them reflect recurrently on the skills and experience learned and then applies them in their lives. Another female soldier who was identified with PTSD after serving in the military for seven years also gave her side of the story. She claimed that she had been to numerous therapists and nothing seemed to come out of it. However, when she tried horses, it worked for her. These are some of the real life stories which portray the effectiveness of equine therapy on military veterans with PTSD (Santaquin & Utah, 2011).

## **High Hopes Therapeutic Riding**

High Hopes Therapeutic Riding is an institution that provides equine therapy services to female veterans suffering from PTSD. In this discussion, a life story of a lady by the name Katie Zwiefka and her friends provides an overview of how Equine Therapy works for the veterans. Zwiefka had served as a marine corps for years before she joined High Hopes Therapeutic Riding. After Zwiefka had ridden a horse for the first time, she cried out of joy. She compared the good feeling to the pleasure she felt as a youngster on an early Christmas morning. Katie affirms that that it had been a long ever since she had that feeling; just that thrill and that excitement, that happiness that is uncontaminated by the humanity (McDermott & Jennifer, 2012).

Zwiefka who had been struggling with PTSD for years turned to the center hopeful that she would find psychological support that she needed. She was not alone in the centre but she was accompanied by another veteran, Khaylan Widener. Khaylan also said that linking with the horse has assisted them deal with the isolation and anxiety and isolation they have experienced while serving in the military (McDermott & Jennifer, 2012).

Zwiefka, describe the military life as that of total isolation where it is completely difficult to connect with people. She says that even at the age of 30, she still find it hard to feel comfortable and at peace with the surrounding. Her life is made even worse by the nightmares that accompany her dreams. She says that the nightmares makes her extremely uncomfortable, and hence, hard to go back to sleep. It is this desperation that pushes her into seeking professional assistance. However, with the horse riding, Zwiefka feel relaxed and forget all the stress that characterizes her daily life. She says that by thinking about riding then everything falls into its place. In fact, the thought of the smell of her horse makes her feel at peace with herself and with the surrounding (McDermott & Jennifer, 2012).

Widener has the same story as her colleague Zwiefka. The two met at Norwich vet centre where they had gone for counseling. The centre is run by the United States of America Department of Veterans Affairs and is meant to assist veterans such as Widener. She too was struggling with PTSD some few years after she was involved in the Iraq issues of 2007 and 2008. In the mission, widener lost eight of her closest friends, who succumbed to attacks from their enemies. The incidence demoralized widener more so because she lacked the support that she needed at the moment. As if that was not  
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enough, widener also experienced another scenario that left her in a delicate health condition. This happened when she fell off a truck in Iraq during an attack by a rocket-propelled grenade. The tragedy made her suffer a traumatic brain injury which really affected her health. In general, her five years service in the army was not a good experience because it was full of tragedies and inhuman experiences (McDermott & Jennifer, 2012).

It is in the year 2009 that widener officially quitted from the military work. She is now 28 years and lives in Norwich. At this age it would be expected that she would be happily married and taking care of her own family.

However, widener's life is different from that of a typical woman because she still cannot find happiness; even though she is a mother of one and a wife.

Widener feels that this abnormality has a lot to do with her military life.

Nevertheless, she seems to have found a solution to her challenges the moment she enrolled for the Equine Therapy. She looks at the exercise as an opportunity to work through her issues without being criticized or judged.

During her initial days in the center she made it a point of interacting with the members of the institution. These are especially children with disabilities such as cerebral palsy, autism and attention deficient disorders. By interacting with these children, Widener developed her skills of socializing with people (McDermott & Jennifer, 2012).

Apart from improving on her socialization skills, widener has been able to appreciate herself. At one point she says that riding helped her to be herself.

She describes riding as a practice that has the ability to reveal a positive part of her that she had even forgotten that she possessed. In fact she

claims that she was a social butterfly long before she joined militarily.

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Conversely, everything changed drastically because when she came back from the military she was extremely withdrawn. All in all, she is now able to appreciate her ability to lead a normal free from trauma (McDermott & Jennifer, 2012).

Zwiefka and Widener act as examples of many women who have benefited from the equine therapy. All of them have been able to recover or are in the process of recovering from post traumatic stress disorder. It should be noted that psychologically, horse riding is more effective in dealing with PTSD than talks. In fact, many of the military veterans are not sociable and that could be the reason as to why horse riding works with them and not the therapy talk.

### Horses for Veterans

A Pentagon Channel documentary focuses on how veterans with PTSD are finding assistance via the supremacy of horse therapy at the Flag is Up Farms. A Horse Whisper by the name Monty Robert explores the effect of Equine Therapy on military veterans with PTSD. The study involves veterans of all ages. Robert thinks that the number one thing is to work with military veterans who have already lost hope in life. Robert demonstrates this by using abused and extremely mistreated horses; a technique he refers to Joining Up method. He adapts it specifically for the self-isolating military veterans experiencing post traumatic stress. His agenda is on learning to trust humans not by force but rather by choosing to trust them. Through the use of horse's language or the trauma of the military veteran to converse, he supplemented, his plan engenders trust. He says that when horses trust you

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they will move towards you rather than keeping a distance from you. Roberts refer to horses as flight animals which are afraid of anything which does not earn their trust. That behavior matches perfectly well with the behavior of a military veteran. These individuals are never comfortable with anything they do not trust or understand. He also dislikes the traditional way of handling horses and advocates for the nonviolent approach. He thinks that veterans too need this approach to deal with their trust issues (Department Of Defense, 2012).

Alejandra Sanchez, a veteran, is a regular visitor to Flag is Up Farms, but recalls her foremost occasion as if it was in the recent past. She affirms that she has never been so frightened in her life; not even as it was in her Iraq experience. She recalls that her anxiety and isolation was via the roof, since she had to face the fact that she had PTSD. Since then nightmares challenged her throughout the night. In one instance, she remembers a nightmare that reminded her of how she had reached a point of desperation while in Iraq. Sanchez describes how life of a veteran is hard because of being forced to work with individuals you do not understand. This is on top of the fact that there is lack of trustworthiness between a veteran and those around them. Coming from such a difficult life, Sanchez looks at horse riding as the trickiest thing. She could not find it easy to calm herself down in order for the horses to trust her. However, she knew very well that while she was angry, anxious or violent; the horses could not cooperate. That was the beginning point of her recovery from PTSD. She is now the humble character that any horse can trust. As a matter of fact, equine therapy has positively changed the life of Sanchez (Department Of Defense, 2012).

Alicia Watkins is another veteran who experienced the worst of the military life. She joined military as an outgoing and a fun loving woman but came out of it as totally different character. She says that her experiences in Afghanistan and Iraq were not the best because they left her traumatized than ever. After the noble military service, Alicia became an isolated character who was homeless and spent a year in her car because she had lost her dignity. Life was so difficult for her that she had reached a point where she felt like committing suicide. These near death experiences were averted drastically when she made it a point to attend to Roberts's program.

Initially, it was not easy for her to deal with the horses. However, she was positive about riding and eventually she made it possible to bridge the psychological gap between her and the outer world. She can now talk to people freely without fear or distrust. She can also be able to deal with her challenges without complication. These are some of the numerous positive things that Equine Therapy brought to her life. Robert indicates that Equine Therapy does not help the veterans to forget the past but rather it help them to mask the trauma with positive behaviors. He illustrates this by use of the horses' experiences. Roberts indicates that horses that were previously mistreated do not just forget the mistreatments, but the nonviolent treatment makes them to trust people again. That is the same way that equine therapy works for the veterans (Department Of Defense, 2012).

## **Therapist Using Horses in Treating PTSD**

According to Bough, the author of this article, one may look hale and hearty physically, but it's probable that, yet without either physical stress

manifestations; traumatic experiences and stress can exhibit themselves in <https://assignbuster.com/therapy-on-military-veterans-with-ptsd-psychology-essay/>

humans and horses. However, Bough looks at Equine Therapy as the only solution for the PTSD. The treatment makes it possible for the horses and human beings to interact and solve any trauma or stress (Baugh & Ben, 2009)

Suze Maze, a psychotherapist and horseman possesses a wide knowledge; essential in dealing with trauma. Veterans have Suze to trust with their disorders. For instance, she is able to assist soldiers from Fort Gordon after returning from Iraq military service. Maze learned about Equine Assisted Psychotherapist while living in Kentucky via the EAGALA model, and afterward became certified. The name of her dealing is Horse Empowerment. According to Maze, the impacts of long-term and recurring deployments can be exhibited in the workplace, however, the phenomenon also affect families of the soldiers. Maze learned these facts at a time while she was living with individuals who were struggling with alcoholism and drug addiction. As such Maze finds it extremely important to form a platform where people who had lost hope in life could find necessary help. She looks at the military occupation as one of the noble career, where individuals put their lives on danger for the sake of the society at large. She also found it crucial to devise ways to deal with challenges faced by families of the veterans (Baugh & Ben, 2009)

Maze uses her long experience to prove the fact that Equine Therapy is the best treatment for veterans and their families. She looks at the positive aspects of the horses that make them key in dealing with post traumatic stress disorders. For one, Maze notes that trust is one thing that veterans need to develop. Maze indicates that soldiers in the service are taught not to <https://assignbuster.com/therapy-on-military-veterans-with-ptsd-psychology-essay/>

trust anybody not even their closest friend. The notion grows slowly by slowly while in the military. This notion is very healthy for them while at the military, but it turns out to be a challenge when they get out of the army. Conversely, horses need to trust people or else they flee from those they do not trust. Thus, horse riding helps soldiers to start trusting people again. Maze notes that horse riding involves doing a task, where all the five senses are involved. She also advocates for a classical therapeutic office model to be taken out of the framework and positioned in the ring with horses, permitting the patient to interrelate with the horses as well as a professional squad with at least a licensed psychological health expert and at least a horseman specialist. Maze notes that the objective of all these is to serve military people and even those civilians undertaking treatment, with a defensive safety measure. The wish is that the modality and treatment will assist service people make an easier changeover from warfare to garrison life. Eventually, Equine Therapy is able to achieve all these aspirations in the most efficient way possible. As a result, it provides the best option for military veterans experiencing post traumatic stress disorders (Baugh & Ben, 2009)

## **War Veterans get help from Rick Iannucci's 'therapeutic riding' program**

The article is authored by Reese, and emphasizes on the effectiveness of equine therapy on dealing with post traumatic stress disorder. The author makes use of a life story of Rick Iannucci, who is the current director of Cowboy Up, which is a horse equine therapy program for warfare military veterans. Rick describes horse therapy as the excellent means that help

PTSD to recover within a very short period of time. He uses the words of Winston Churchill (a military man in the Boer war), who stated that there is great about the outer surface of a horse that is excellent for the in part of a man (Reese & April, 2011).

For two and a half years, a flow of Afghanistan and Iraq war-veterans have found their means to Rick. A lot of them get there carrying both psychological and physical scars of warfare. First, they learn to walk and groom the expressly skilled quarter horses, and then the veterans work out their means up to riding and mounting them around the ring. As the military veterans link with the horses, on top of learning how to understand them, they start to heal and feel related with the civilian world once more (Reese & April, 2011).

Rick affirms that Horses will only cooperate with you; if you are not uptight. This is because they wheedle a certain degree of contemplation from individuals. In other words, horses demand to see veterans come into terms with the reality. As a rule, when the military veterans begin riding and associating with the horses, they instantly begin calming down. Despite the fact that the majority of the veterans arrive at cowboy up with physical disabilities; they all recover through the use of Equine Therapy. In his study, Rick rebrands PTSD as post-traumatic spiritual disorder (PTSD). This because he tend to believe that what happens to soldiers during the warfare is a spirit's wounding. Therefore, he thinks that their main goal is to find that wound and heal it. Iannucci and his team integrate psychological, physical and spiritual healing. Ricks describe it as having faith again in others, themselves and faith in almighty God. He advocates for horse riding as the <https://assignbuster.com/therapy-on-military-veterans-with-ptsd-psychology-essay/>

only mechanism that can enable veterans to achieve this wonderful life requirements. The ability of Equine Therapy to deliver veterans from PTSD is emphasized by victims of the disorder such as Sterling Bucholz. He was assisted by Rick to recover from military trauma through the horse riding technique. Many other examples prove that Equine Therapy is effective in assisting veterans suffering from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (Reese & April, 2011).

### **Military Service, Post-Trauma Symptoms and Health in Older Adulthood: An Analysis of Northern Vietnamese Survivors of the Vietnam War**

Vietnam war-induced anxiety influences mortality, morbidity, psychological state of affairs and value of life in the long run is understood roughly entirely as a product of psychoanalysis of the lives and healthiness of American military veterans of 20th century wars. Studies reveal that, over thirty years past hostilities, Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) proves to be a noteworthy predictor of every cause, cancer, cardiovascular and external root mortality amongst United States veterans involved in Vietnam War. These facts prove that the repercussions of Vietnam War were detrimental and needed attention. This papers focus on the most viable solution for the military veterans of the war (Korinek, 2012)

Procedures: The pilot study consisted of 2 phases. First, conducting structured interviews with 310 people, age 55 and above. 215 respondents of the 310 were successfully interviewed. Out of the 95 charged with attrition cases, 81 people had died by the time of this study while the remainder had moved outside the commune. Surprisingly, 75% of the decedents were not

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military veterans. In an attempt to meet a target sample range of 400 respondents, 196 individuals aged 55 and above were randomly chosen from existing household registration mechanism. 91 of them were successfully interviewed making up a total of 405 respondents. Included in this total is 19 proxy interviews conducted with next of kin. This was in cases where a respondent was too mentally or physically unfit to be interviewed however, Questions concerning perceptions and feelings were not responded to by the proxies. In examining the connection between military service, distress exposure and health conditions, military service was characterized using 4 categories militia nonveterans, non-militia, combat veterans and noncombat veterans. To determine exposure to war-time stress events, the study relied upon a modified report of PTSD module of the World Health Organization findings recorded by Composite International Diagnostic Interview (Korinek, 2012).

Results: Focusing on relationship between military service and trauma risk, the sample splits along gender lines. From the study, more than half of the males are armed military veterans, and virtually one third worked in combatant sections. On the other hand, less than half of the sample consisted of women, either as armed officers or in other military roles. The difference explains why 87 percent suffered from trauma while only 13% of women were dealing with PTSD and related disorders. In general, this populace of older generation had extremely prevalent exposure to stressful events throughout their life course (Korinek, 2012).

Statistically, a considerable association of war traumas with undesirable

health among men is evident. The study also proves that long lasting effects  
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of warfare on health and chronic illness several decades past the war are more perceptible amongst men who experienced combat exposure than in women. In addition, the war had disruptive effects on certain groups of people that are not may not be well expressed in a population-based sample. Such groups include: those orphaned at a tender age and those who sustained serious injuries in bombing campaigns or in other combat events (Korinek, 2012).

Conclusion: As a matter of facts, Post Traumatic Stress Disorders diagnosis and label is not easily transported linguistically and culturally. The cultural lens via which sadness, dreams and other mental and psychological conditions are interpreted will influence stress experienced and the tendencies to remember and disclose them. It can also be concluded that lasting physical and psychological pains of war can have culturally discrete roots. Therefore, it is important to perceive physical and psychological aspects linked to war from a Vietnamese spiritual lens and cultural perspective. Lastly, it is no doubt that this research has implications that extend clear of the Vietnamese context hence, it can address more challenges than just the few outlined therein (Korinek, 2012).

## **The Effects of Animal-Assisted Therapy on Anxiety Ratings of Hospitalized Psychiatric Patients**

According to the authors of this article Barker and Dawson, Animal-assisted therapy comprise association between a trained animal and patients, along with the animal's human handler or owner, with an objective of enhancing patients' progress on the road to therapeutic objectives. This study

scrutinized whether a program of animal-assisted therapy lowered the

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anxiety or nervous intensity of hospitalized psychiatric patients, as well as whether any disparities in declines in anxiety were correlating with patients' diagnoses.

**Procedures:** The study subjects used were two hundred and thirty patients referred for therapeutic exercise sessions. A pre-treatment and post-treatment intersect study design was applied to compare the results of a particular animal-assisted therapy program with those of a solitary frequently scheduled therapeutic exercise program. Before and after partaking in the 2 types of programs, subjects completed the condition degree of the State-Trait Anxiety Inventory, which is a self-report examination of anxiety presently felt. Blended-models repeated-measures psychoanalysis was applied to test discrepancies in scores from prior to and past the two categories of sessions.

**Results:** Statistically considerable declines in anxiety scores were established subsequent to the animal-assisted therapy program for patients with mood disorders, psychotic disorders and other forms of disorders, and following the therapeutic recreation program for patients suffering from mood disorders. On the other hand, no statistically significant discrepancies in decline of anxiety were established between the 2 types of sessions.

**Conclusions:** Animal-assisted therapy was linked to reduced condition anxiety intensities for hospitalized patients suffering from a range of psychiatric diagnoses, whereas a routine therapeutic exercise session was related to reduced intensity, only for patients suffering from mood disorders (Barker, Dawson, 2011).

## **Comparing Mindfulness and Psycho-education Treatments for Combat-Related PTSD Using a Tele-health Approach**

This study scrutinized 2 Tele-health interventions to deal with symptoms of combat-associated posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) in military veterans. Thirty-three men combat veterans were at random allocated to one of two Tele-health treatment situations: mindfulness or psycho-education. In the two conditions, partakers completed eight weeks of Tele-health treatment, which is, two sessions individually followed by six programs over the telephone. The eight weeks treatment was followed by three evaluations, which include pretreatment, post-treatment