

RESEARCH COMPASS – ISSUE 3 (SEPTEMBER 2024)



Welcome to the third issue of *Research Compass*, the Atlas Institute's newsletter showcasing the latest information about our Veteran and Family well-being and mental health research. This issue has current updates on studies in which you can participate, recent research we have presented, how to get involved in our research as an advisor, and our latest publications.

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Some current topics:



Adult children of Veterans



Aging Veterans' mental health



Intimate partner violence (IPV)



Moral injury



Neural correlates of mental health



Novel treatment interventions



Peer support



Traumatic brain injury

Research spotlight

Research training course for Veterans and Families

This year, we've launched a new initiative to create, pilot and evaluate a research training program designed specifically for Veterans and Family members. Our goal is to support Veterans and Family members in becoming more confident and capable when engaging in research — whether as advisors, co-researchers or as participants.

The program centres on a new research course tailored to Veterans and Family members that will equip them with practical and essential knowledge and skills about research. This past summer, we hosted consultations with Veterans and Family members to gather their insights on course design, including content, scheduling, format and timing. Work is currently underway to develop the training based on community input. This course is expected to be offered in early 2025.

Registration will be available on our website later this fall. If you're interested in being notified when registration opens, please email us at researchtraining.atlas@theroyal.ca to be added to our notification list.



Qualitative lived experiences of minority stress exposure

The Clinical Research team presented their study on minority stress in August with Rainbow Veterans at a Veterans Affairs Canada (VAC) 2SLGBTQIA+ event in Fredericton, NB. The objectives of this research are to:

1. Better understand the qualitative lived experiences of minority stress exposure from an intersectional perspective (in a variety of contexts including of military members and of Veterans who are LGBT Purge survivors), and
2. Examine the neurobiological correlates of minority stress exposure.



Research spotlight

Atlas at CIMVHR

Attending CIMVHR Forum 2024 in Winnipeg, MB? You can find our team on the agenda! We will be participating in three symposia:

Understanding the well-being and experience of aging Veterans and care partners from aging in place to long-term care

Our presentation as part of this symposium will focus on whether and how social support influences health outcomes differently in Veterans compared to non-Veterans, and in younger Veterans compared to older Veterans. Social support is known to promote positive health outcomes for Veterans. However, little is understood about whether social support has a similar – or different – impact for Veterans compared to non-Veterans, as well as about how social support impacts Veterans' symptoms of depression and other mental health concerns. If you are interested in aging Veterans' mental health, make sure to join this exciting discussion!

Veteran and Veteran Family engagement: From research to knowledge mobilization

We also invite you to participate in an Atlas-led symposium that will describe why and how we embed Veteran and Family voices into our work at Atlas, including how [our framework for Veteran and Family engagement](#) guides our approach. We will describe how engagement principles and practices are enacted in our research and knowledge mobilization efforts and beyond. The presentations will highlight the challenges we've experienced and the progress we've made, highlighting opportunities for sector-wide growth. Presenters will showcase a range of engagement activities, from participation to partnership to shared leadership.

We will showcase a project in which we use a community-engaged research lens to bring together a group of women Veterans to design an applied research project. We will also highlight two research projects in which an Atlas Lived Experience team member and an external researcher are collaborating as co-Principal Investigators, and share how this partnership influenced research question development, study design and participant recruitment. Finally, we will share key principles and strategies used in two co-creation projects to effectively, and by using technology, engage community members on potentially sensitive topics.

Emerging novel treatments for PTSD

In this symposium, Dr. Andrew Nicholson will be presenting with the aim of not only presenting groundbreaking treatments for PTSD but also fostering an enriching discussion among participants to compare and contrast these approaches. This symposium will consist of an interactive dialogue that delves deep into emerging novel treatments for PTSD, including deep brain reorienting, neurofeedback, 3MDR (multi-modal motion-assisted memory desensitization and reconsolidation) and MDMA-assisted therapy. We will explore common themes and differences between the treatments, such as their underlying mechanisms, response rates, potential side effects and personalized medicine approaches. By drawing parallels and distinctions, we can gain a comprehensive understanding of the landscape of emerging PTSD therapies. Through collaborative inquiry and shared expertise, we aim to not only expand our knowledge of innovative PTSD treatments but also to inspire future research directions and clinical applications. We hope to embark on a journey of exploration, discovery and collaboration as we seek to advance the field of PTSD treatment and support those affected by this debilitating condition.

Research spotlight

New publication: Experiences of Afghan-Canadian language and cultural advisors

Check out our latest publication, [Experiences of Afghan-Canadian language and cultural advisors who served with Canadian forces abroad: an interpretive phenomenological analysis](#)

Led by the Atlas Institute, this study conducted six in-depth interviews with former language and cultural advisors (LCAs) who immigrated to Canada before 2002, highlighting their journey from pre-service motivations to post-service challenges. Participants began their work with the CAF between 2006 and 2009, averaging 6.2 deployments over approximately 3.8 years, with self-rated mental health varying from fair to poor. The following is a summary of the results of these interviews:

- **Motivations for becoming LCAs:** Participants were driven by dual loyalties to Canada and Afghanistan, viewing their role as an opportunity to contribute positively to both nations. Factors such as cultural and linguistic expertise, financial motivations and a desire to give back to Canada were pivotal in their decisions to become LCAs.
- **Challenges faced in the field:** LCAs encountered significant challenges, including inadequate preparation for the realities of their roles, exposure to combat situations in conflict-zones and navigating their identities as civilian contractors in a military environment. Despite these challenges, many felt a sense of purpose and fulfilment in their contributions.
- **Post-service transition and challenges:** Upon returning to Canada, participants felt abandoned and neglected by the lack of support and resources available to them compared to their military counterparts. They experienced significant psychological and social repercussions, including posttraumatic PTSD, depression, strained relationships and difficulty reintegrating into their communities. The findings underscore the significant impacts of deployment on Afghan-Canadian LCAs, revealing a range of traumatic experiences related to combat stressors and challenging working conditions. Despite facing these hardships, participants reported limited post-service support, exacerbating feelings of abandonment and contributing to long-term mental health issues.



In case you missed it

New directory of well-being measurement tools

In April, the Atlas Institute, in collaboration with the Chronic Pain Centre of Excellence for Canadian Veterans, launched the [Well-Being Measurement Tools Directory](#), an online resource containing more than 200 instruments, scales and questionnaires for measuring outcomes related to the domains of well-being developed by VAC.

This directory aims to serve as a resource for researchers, policy makers and others who need to identify the most appropriate tools for measuring the well-being of Canadian Veterans. The instruments included cover each of the domains outlined by VAC in the [2017 Veterans' Well-Being Surveillance Framework](#), an initiative that set out to better understand the indicators that are important to Veteran well-being. While many of these instruments show great potential for use with Veterans, only a small number have been validated specifically for this population.

As such, there is a critical need for further work to validate or adapt existing tools, or to develop new ones to accurately measure outcomes among Veteran populations. The Well-Being Measurement Tools Directory supports these efforts by offering detailed information about existing tools, providing a foundation for validation, adaptation or the development of new instruments tailored to Veterans.

[Access the Well-Being Measurement Tools Directory here »](#)

Atlas presents during Pride Week grand rounds for the Royal's Institute of Mental Health Research

The Atlas Clinical Research team (Dr. Andrew Nicholson, Sandhya Narikuzhy) presented “Unravelling the insidious web of minority stress in sexual and gender minorities: Qualitative, quantitative and clinical perspectives” at the grand rounds for the Royal's Institute of Mental Health Research during Pride Week.

The presentation aimed to enable participants to:

- Identify and describe the unique stressors that sexual (lesbian, gay, bisexual and other individuals who do not identify as heterosexual) and gender (transgender, gender non-binary, gender queer, gender fluid, Two-spirit) minorities face
- Describe the relation between minority stress, trauma symptoms and moral injury
- Describe the importance of understanding gender identity development
- Identify and describe the unique qualitative themes and narratives from sexual and gender minorities in relation to i) moral injury and ii) gender identity development and its impact on social support and mental health



Getting involved in research at Atlas

Interested in participating in research? Research participation helps expand our understanding of Veteran and Family mental health and well-being and can support the improvement of treatments, programs and services. The Atlas Institute leads and supports research projects – new opportunities to participate open up regularly. Check out a few of the studies currently looking for participants.

Led by Atlas

- Examining the association between unmet health and well-being needs and mental health for women Veterans of the CAF and RCMP

To find out if you're eligible to participate, please contact:

✉ athenaproject.atlas@theroyal.ca

- Couples and secondary traumatic stress (CaSTS) study
- Self-regulation of posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) neurocircuitry using multiple sessions of real-time functional magnetic resonance imaging (rt-fMRI)
- The neural correlates of minority stress: Uncovering systemic oppression related to the intersectionality of identity with neuroimaging and machine learning
- Gender identity narratives among transgender and gender diverse military members, Veterans and civilians: A pilot study

To find out if you're eligible to participate, please contact:

✉ jill.horning@theroyal.ca

Supported by Atlas

- [Studying the effectiveness and implementation of Sudarshan Kriya Yoga for Canadian Veterans with PTSD](#)
- [Brain measures linked to hyperarousal in PTSD using MRI imaging](#)

Other ways to get involved

To expand our connections with the Veteran and Family community, the Atlas Institute has developed a volunteer Cadre to help us engage and work with a larger and more diverse group, including Francophone Veterans and Families. We also are seeking to improve our ability to connect with individuals with lived expertise who are available to participate in projects, including research projects, by taking in surveys, panels, webinars and town hall events.

APPLY TO THE CADRE

[Learn more about recruiting research projects »](#)

Latest publications

Note: Bolded names indicate Atlas Institute researchers and staff.

transition to post-military life

mental health

Veterans

Veteran Families

A rapid review of the barriers and facilitators of mental health service access among Veterans and their families

2024-07-21

Ein N, Gervasio J, St. Cyr K, Liu JJW, Baker C, Nazarov A,

Richardson JD

Frontiers in Health Services

[Read the paper](#)

qualitative research

language and cultural advisors

Experiences of Afghan-Canadian language and cultural advisors who served with Canadian forces abroad: an interpretive phenomenological analysis

2024-06-30

Mercier JM, Carmichael V, Dupuis G, Ahmad S, Mazhari Z, Fatimi Y, Laidler T, **Hosseiny F**

Frontiers in Communication

[Read the paper](#)

COVID-19

health care workers

Reimagining effective workplace support for health workers

2024-06-01

Liu JJW, Nazarov A, Smith P, Phelps A, Forbes D, Sadler N, **Hosseiny F**, Dougherty S, Peto R, Cooper M, Bilodeau M, Bailey S, Younger J, Dukelow A, Jansen S, Davidson A, Vaccarino C, Monaghan K, Northcott S, Mohri L, Hoffer P,

Richardson JD

Bulletin of the World Health Organization

[Read the paper](#)

COVID-19

burnout

health care workers

Determinants of burnout in Canadian health care workers during the COVID-19 pandemic

2024-05-22

Liu N, Plouffe RA, Liu JJW, Nouri MS, Saha P, Gargala D, Davis BD, Nazarov A, **Richardson JD**

European Journal of Psychotraumatology

[Read the paper](#)

suicide prevention

Veteran Families

Military suicide prevention: Do families matter?

2024-05-08

DuBois D, Leroux J, George S, Khokhar F, Cramm H

Journal of Military, Veteran and Family Health

[Read the paper](#)

Veteran Families

'... and families': No longer an afterthought

2024-05-08

Lamrock L

Journal of Military, Veteran and Family Health

[Read the paper](#)

clinical assessment

Heart rate variability and pulse rate variability: Do anatomical location and sampling rate matter?

2024-03-23

Burma JS, Griffiths JK, **Lapointe AP**, Oni IK, Soroush A, Carere J, Smirl JD, Dunn JF

Sensors

[Read the paper](#)

intimate partner violence

Improving health professional recognition and response to child maltreatment and intimate partner violence:

Protocol for two mixed methods pilot randomized controlled trials

2024-03-21

Kimber M, Baker-Sullivan E, Stewart DE, Vanstone M

JMIR Research Protocols

[Read the paper](#)

[List of all published research »](#)

Research Compass is published twice yearly by the Atlas Institute for Veterans and Families.

Questions, comments or suggestions? Contact us:

✉ atlasresearch@theroyal.ca

CONTACT US



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