ABSTRACT

THESIS: Gaining Insight on Physical Activity Behaviors from Individuals Returning from Deployment

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The present qualitative study explored the beliefs that military service members hold in regards to their physical activity participation. Additionally, service members (N=9) were asked about their perceptions of a potential physical activity based therapy program that incorporates psychological skill training. This study took a phenomenological approach and utilized a semi-structured interview guide. The interviews were initially recorded and then transcribed by the researcher. Qualitative analysis revealed nine domains throughout the interviews: 1) deployment and military influence, 2) methods of stress relief, 3) perceived barriers to physical activity, 4) physical activity participation and preferences, 5) motivation to be physically active, 6) impact of physical activity, 7) psychological skills, 8) program expectations, and 9) program preferences. These domains were used to code the interviews. Of these domains, 5 themes emerged: 1) participants indicated positive benefits resulting from physical activity participation and negative consequences resulting from inactivity, 2) serving in the military and being on deployment significantly influenced physical activity
participation, 3) participants expressed interest in a potential physical activity program, 4) participants anticipated some initial resistance from service members in regards to participating in a potential physical activity program, and 5) most participants indicated a preference for a mixed model program that would allow them to choose between individual or group activities. Overall, results from this study indicate that service members positively view their physical activity participation and recognize the potentials of a physical activity program that incorporates psychological skills training. Designing physical activity programs to meet the unique needs of service members remains relatively unexplored. Important implications and evidence-based recommendations were discussed.