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POST-DEPLOYMENT BATTLEMIND TRAINING FOR THE UK ARMED FORCES: A CLUSTER-RANDOMISED CONTROLLED TRIAL

Kathleen Mulligan, Simon Wessely, Neil Greenberg, Nicola T Fear, Helen Alvarez, Norman Jones *King's College, London, UK*

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Objectives Combat exposure can increase the risk of subsequent psychological ill-health in Armed Forces (AF) personnel. A US post-deployment psycho-educational intervention, Battlemind, has shown a beneficial effect on mental health in

US military personnel exposed to high levels of potentially traumatic combat events. Our aim was to evaluate the efficacy of Battlemind in UK AF personnel.

Methods Battlemind was compared with the UK standard post-deployment stress and homecoming brief in a cluster randomised controlled trial. 2443 UK AF personnel returning from Afghanistan via Cyprus completed a questionnaire about combat experiences and current mental health status before receiving their randomly allocated intervention, of these, 1616 (66%) completed follow-up approximately 6 months later. Primary outcomes were the General Health Questionnaire (GHQ-12) to measure common mental disorders, and the post traumatic stress disorder checklist (PCL-C) to measure probable PTSD. Secondary outcomes included alcohol misuse, assessed with the AUDIT. The two study arms were compared using mixed-effect models to take account of possible cluster effects.

Results We did not find a difference in mental health or overall AUDIT score between Battlemind and the standard brief. Those who received Battlemind were less likely to be classified as binge drinkers than those receiving the standard brief (adjusted OR 0.73 (95% CI 0.58 to 0.92)).

Conclusions UK post-deployment Battlemind did not improve mental health compared with the standard post-deployment brief. However, it had a modest impact on reported binge drinking. Alcohol misuse is problematic in the UK AF so an intervention that reduces binge drinking may be helpful.