



THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS
AT ARLINGTON

Healing on a Hog: Wind Therapy Project Report



“You never know what a person is going through. That ride may be what’s keeping them alive.” – female Veteran

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Thank You

Thank you for your generous grant that funded our investigation into Veterans' experiences of Wind Therapy. With your \$5,000 gift we provided incentives to research participants, gave graduate students invaluable experience on a funded research project, and purchased software licenses necessary to analyze the data. Those expenditures resulted in understanding the unique experiences of Veterans who use wind therapy as a means to manage their mental health symptoms. We also gained insight into the specific needs and experiences of female Veterans who ride. Additionally, the preliminary work we conducted on wind therapy facilitated an interdepartmental collaboration between Social Work and Kinesiology that will benefit the Veteran community in North Texas. Thank you again for your generous support of research that contributes to improving mental health.



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Accomplishments

What are the major goals of the Wind Therapy project?

The major goal of the Wind Therapy project was to answer the following research questions:

- What are the characteristics of Veterans who participate in wind therapy?
- What is the lived experience of wind therapy for Veterans with military-related post-traumatic stress injuries?
- What are the therapeutic aspects of wind therapy?
 - How does wind therapy help Veterans self-manage mental health symptoms?
 - What are the benefits and drawbacks of wind therapy?
 - For which Veterans is wind therapy most/least beneficial?
 - Does wind therapy create a gateway to traditional therapy for at-risk Veterans who would not otherwise seek professional help?
 - How has the COVID-19 pandemic impacted the participation or experience of wind therapy?
 - How does participation in wind therapy affect social (dis)connectedness and resilience?

What was accomplished under these goals?

Major Activities

- Conducted a descriptive phenomenology
- Conducted a quantitative, non-experimental case study

Results and Findings

Characteristics of Veterans who participate in wind therapy

Most of the Veterans who completed the survey were male, White, non-Hispanic/Latino, and middle-aged. The average age of participants was about 45 years, ranging from as young as 18 and as old as 76. The majority of respondents reported being in a committed relationship, were living with shelter, and did not live in a rural area. All of our respondents had graduated high school or received their GED, with many of them having attended college. Of those who completed a degree, most earned a bachelor's and almost 10% earned a doctoral-level degree (e.g., M.D., J.D., Ph.D.). Most of the respondents had a household income of between \$60,000 and \$119,999. See Table 1.

Table 1

Demographic profile of Veteran wind therapy survey respondents

Characteristic (Number of respondents who answered the question)	Number	Percentage of Respondents who answered the question
Gender (<i>n</i> =169)		
Man	137	81.1%
Woman	30	17.8%
Other	2	1.2%
Sexual Orientation (<i>n</i> =171)		
Straight	154	90.1%
LGBTQ+	17	9.9%
Relationship Status (<i>n</i> =167)		
Committed relationship	115	68.9%
Not in a committed relationship	51	30.6%
Prefer not to say	1	0.5%
Race (170)		
White	143	84.1%
Black, African American	7	4.1%
Other	20	11.8%
Ethnicity (<i>n</i> = 171)		
Non-Hispanic/Latino	148	86.5%
Hispanic/Latino	23	13.5%
Relationship Status (<i>n</i> = 164)		
Committed Relationship	100	58.8%
Not in a committed relationship	50	29.8%
Prefer not to say	14	8.2%
Rurality (<i>n</i> =171)		
Does not live in a rural area	95	55.2%
Lives in a rural area	76	44.2%
Highest level of education (<i>n</i> = 171)		
High school / GED	28	16.4%
Some college	58	33.9%
College graduate	55	32.2%
Post college	21	12.4%
Other	9	5.3%
Highest degree completed (<i>n</i> = 144)		
Associates	35	24.3%
Bachelors	40	27.8%
Masters (MBA)	19	13.2%
Doctorate (MD, JD, PhD)	10	8.9%
Degree not completed	29	27.1%
Don't know	1	0.7%
Household Income (<i>n</i> = 168)		
Less than 59,999	40	23.5%
\$60,000 – 119,999	74	43.5%
More than 120,000	48	28.2%
Prefer not to say	6	3.5%

Table 2

Characteristic (Number of respondents who answered the question)	Number	Percentage of Respondents who answered the question
Branch of Service (<i>n</i> = 172)*		
Army	80	43.5%
Marine Corps	37	20.1%
Air Force	30	16.3%
Navy	26	14.1%
Coast Guard	9	4.9%
Other	2	1.1%
War Era (<i>n</i> = 172)*		
Vietnam	12	4.6%
Cold War	51	19.5%
Gulf War	43	16.4%
Pre-9/11 (Peacetime, Bosnia, Kosovo)	69	26.3%
Post-9/11	87	33.2%

***Note:** Branch of Service and War Era responses exceeded total number of respondents because some individuals served in multiple branches and eras across their careers.

Figure 1



Lived Experience for Veterans who participate in wind therapy

- Veterans reported that wind therapy shared many familiar elements of military culture (e.g., specific roles and responsibilities, precision, “uniforms”[vests], organizational structure of clubs).
 - “You’re riding say, 65, 70 miles an hour on an 800 to 1,000-pound of machinery two to three feet away from somebody else doing the same thing with somebody four to five feet behind you doing the same thing and somebody four to five feet in front of you doing the same thing.” [Veteran 5]
 - “It’s not male dominant. You get on your bikes. You know, you go out, and you have a good time. You sit, and you have a meal together, and you just feel like you’re in the military again” [Veteran 8]
- Calculated risks.
 - Speeds exceeding 100 mph were endorsed by the majority of interviewees
 - Precision rides
- Safety measures.
 - Helmets and other gear
 - Road Captains
 - “Very loud horn on my bike that sounds like a semi-truck” [Veteran 1]
 - Following at safe distances
 - Riding staggered in groups
 - Avoiding alcohol or driving intoxicated
 - Ensure bike is in working order before riding
 - Carry pistol
 - In group rides, there is a safety signal that causes the whole group to stop
 - Safety classes were underwritten by Stay-the-Course¹

Therapeutic aspects of wind therapy

- Relief from stress or unpleasant emotions
 - “It’s a stress reliever” [Veteran 1]
 - “It causes an actual relaxation in the inner soul because you have wind therapy.”
 - “Things feel a little better. You have an opportunity to put some things into perspective. Usually I feel better.” [Veteran 2]
 - “[Riding] is kind of like exposure for me, you know, exposure therapy. I’m forcing myself into social situations that I’m not normally comfortable with. And I’m doing something I like doing...I don’t like being in social situation. So...like after our last ride, It got really uncomfortable being in a big room with all my brothers, and their wives and stuff. It’s not because I feel like they’re going to hurt me. It’s just because I don’t like being in the social situations. But it’s good exposure.” [Veteran 14].

¹ Stay-the-Course is a local Veteran-serving agency that is the treatment arm for One Tribe Foundation. A North Texas non-profit whose mission is to raise awareness and combat suicide by empowering veterans, first responders, medical frontline workers and their families through traditional and non-traditional therapies.

- Presence/Mindfulness
 - “I have to be very present. I have to be in the moment. Unlike a car, you have to concentrate more. You’re more vulnerable physically. So, you are more aware of your immediate surroundings. And so I think it helps me to kind of get – in one way, it helps me get in the moment and live in the present, and I don’t think about the stresses.” [Veteran 3]
 - “[Presence while riding] is very different for me because hypervigilance, it comes with a Lack of trust, in my opinion, because I can’t trust anybody that I see. I can’t trust any place that I go to, just related to my combat experience coming back. . . But on the motorcycle...I can trust myself, and I have to trust myself because there’s nobody else...That’s when I kind of connect with a bigger Zen.” [Veteran 2]
 - “[Riding] soothes me down. So, if I go by a pasture where, like, flowers are blooming, or if I go by, like a bakery, I’ll concentrate on the smell, not normally, not like I’m trying to concentrate more, but I’ll catch a whiff” [Veteran 6]
- Emotional Expression
 - “Well, it definitely helps because if you just start screaming while you’re riding because that might make you feel better, it might be just what you need at that moment. Nobody looks at you weird because they don’t know what you’re doing.” [Veteran 11]
- Effects Last beyond the ride
 - “[Improved mood lasts for] three or four days because you can still reflect on what you did and what you saw and the times that you had with your friends or your spouse or whatever” [Veteran 1]
 - “[Patience does persist into regular life] because if I can be patient on the motorcycle – it’s almost lifesaving sometimes – then I can transfer that to the car because I have no idea what the other person is doing or why they drive the way they are.” [Veteran 2]

How Wind Therapy helps Veterans self-manage mental health symptoms

- Better quality, longer length, and quicker onset of sleep for some, but not all
 - “The mood improves, but the sleep doesn’t.” [Veteran 1]
 - “I probably sleep better again because you’re – unlike driving in a car, you’re more physically engaged when you’re riding a motorcycle. And so you do get tired...You’re fatigued from the elements, from the stress, from the noise, all that kind of stuff. It wears you out, and when it’s time to lay down, you usually sleep pretty soundly.” [Veteran 3].
 - “I might sleep a little bit longer, but I’m still up and down all night” [Veteran 4]
 - “I sleep about four hours a day. I don’t sleep more than that...If I’ve done a long day of riding, I might sleep five hours. Sometimes if I’m lucky, I get six. But you just feel so much better because it’s like you come back relaxed.” [Veteran 11]
- Increased patience
 - “Well, group rides, you have to be much more patient than by yourself because you’re riding with people, and a lot of times we have a mixture of people who will join.” [Veteran 2]

Benefits of wind therapy

- Freedom
 - “I [like] that I can travel at my own pace. I like stopping and going and stopping wherever I like. I like occasionally straying off a known road onto an unknown road and kind of exploring and maybe finding a new road” [Veteran 3]
 - “Just the freedom that comes with it, I think the combination of freedom and the challenge because you’re by yourself against the odds” [Veteran 2]
 - “There’s just a feeling about [riding]. You feel freedom and it’s peaceful. I don’t like riding with music. I just like me and the road... but I just prefer to kind of shut everything out for a while” [Veteran 7]
 - “I love smelling the cedar. You know? I love feeling the wind and the sun on my skin. I love the sound of a motorcycle. I love the feel of it between my legs. I love the openness. You know? I love letting my brain just wander. And there’s – you know, when you’re on a bike, there’s no yesterday, there’s no tomorrow, there’s no deadlines, there’s no bills to pay, there’s no – it’s just you and the bike and nature and freedom.” [Veteran 13]
- Connection to nature
 - “Scenery, animals, important wildlife...Something that you just don’t see every day.” [Veteran 1]
 - “I do like motorcycles for a variety of reasons, and I think probably one of the best, really, is the exposure to the elements. When you get out into the countryside, you can feel the difference between riding in the shade and riding in the bright sun.” [Veteran 3]
 - “I like early morning riding...I say like 4:00 or 5:00 in the morning...I like watching the sky change. When you start, it’s dark, and then, later on, it gets bright.” [Veteran 10]
- Admiration of others
 - “What’s cool about riding in a group is that people can stop and take pictures and wave and stuff like that. There’s always people that will stop on the side of the road or waving flags, taking pictures and videos or whatever they want to do.” [Veteran 1]
 - “I was leaving the Washington, DC, area, and it looked like I was passing people who are noticeably jealous. I think everybody was in awe of this perfect day. I was at the gas station, and they were all dressed for work and I was geared up to get out of town. I could see it in all their eyes, and I was heading away from DC” [Veteran 3]
- Protection of group
 - “Group riding is nice because the protection that comes with the group as opposed to solo...It’s safer to avoid traffic” [Veteran 2]
- Spiritual Engagement
 - And so I can trust in myself, and I have to trust myself because there's nobody else. If I trust in myself, it helps me to relax. That's when I kind of connect with a bigger Zen. [Veteran]

- “It’s a conversation between you and you, or God’s involved, and it’s a conversation between you and God. I mean, you are the only ones that are there.” [Veteran 11]

Drawbacks of wind therapy

- Breakdowns
 - “Some [group] ride, which aren’t always typical, but they’ll have breakdowns. Motorcycles will stop on the side of the road. They’ll go get help. They’ll do whatever they need to get done.” [Veteran 1]
 - [Solo rides]: “The only drawbacks is if you break down, you might be someplace where you don’t have phone service. [Veteran 1]
- Danger of Large group rides
 - “I don’t like riding in Large groups. I think it’s too dangerous. . .I would say anything over ten motorcycles, personal opinion.” [Veteran 1]
 - “The danger aspects. You can’t enjoy the ride because...you’re too concentrated on whether the person in front of you is going to stop because ten places above them somebody’s coming to a complete stop. It’s not that enjoyable to ride with a Large group.” [Veteran 1]
 - “The more people we have found that you add to your group, the longer it takes to get anywhere just because you’ve got to go slower. Every break that you take to go to the bathroom takes longer.” [Veteran 3]
 - “Group rides can often lead to accidents because some people are not as experienced, and sometimes they go down like dominos.” [Veteran 3]
- Solo rides
 - Another drawback of riding alone is if you witness or see something that’s spectacular, you can’t share it with anybody, either my wife or a good friend.” [Veteran 1]
 - “Time and a little bit of fear” [Veteran 4]
 - “If you break down, you’re by yourself. If you go down, you’re by yourself. If there’s a reckless driver or something did something unsafe that you might not have seen, there’s not anybody there to call your attention to it.” (Veteran 5)
- Traffic Concerns
 - “It’s just that you’re by yourself, and so you’re smaller on the road. People don’t really – they don’t really pay attention...It’s a safety concern.”
 - “More and more, it’s becoming dangerous, I think...too many people on cell phones” [Veteran 3]
- Stereotypes
 - “People thinking we’re a gang. People always want to associate us with a gang or being in a gang.” [Veteran 11]

Wind therapy as a gateway to conventional therapy

- Invitation to participate in therapies at Stay-the-Course

Veterans who benefit least from wind therapy

- Veterans with active mental health symptoms
 - “When I was in that mindset [considering suicide], I did definitely take a kind of a hiatus for probably six months to a year” [Veteran 3]
 - “I came back in 2009. And then in 2009 to 2014 is when I had the most issues. I guess it was five years...I stopped riding when I came back from Afghanistan. I did not feel safe on a motorcycle, and I had always told myself the day I don’t feel safe is when I park it. I started riding again in 2016.” [Veteran 1]

Wind therapy during the Covid-19 pandemic

- Most Veterans reported that wind therapy was not impacted by COVID-19 precautions.
 - COVID really didn’t affect my riding at all, because when you’re on a motorcycle riding down the freeway, you’re pretty much social distanced anyway. [Veteran 5]
- Some declined group rides during COVID-19 pandemic
 - “[A Veterans’ riding group] has invited me. . . and because of COVID I declined their invitation. But I’m hoping to take them up on it next year.”
- Some found riding helped with anxiety related to COVID-19.
 - “When [COVID-19] first kicked off, I didn’t want to leave the house You know, it’s still a challenge for me to leave the house...It’s general anxiety for me. You know? But, when I do get out and force myself to be on a bike, you know, I realize how much better I am and how much more fun I’m having on it.” [Veteran 14]

Wind therapy and social connectedness

- Connecting with other Veterans and riders
 - “I will say [I enjoy] the camaraderie...If you have people that you’re riding with, then the camaraderie is there” [Veteran 1]
 - “You connect just by being a rider. That connection’s there. You’re connect by seeing what kind of bike they ride, the places they have been on their bikes. As Veterans, you can talk about deployments you’ve been on, people that you know or you don’t know. Helmets, you can talk about helmets, anything that has to do with motorcycle riding” [Veteran 1]
 - “It’s the bikes themselves. You can talk to anybody about their bike. . .I may not know this person from Adam, but just because they’re on a motorcycle, then you have that connection of being a rider.” [Veteran 1]
 - “On small rides, you get to know the people better because you have more time to interfaced with them.” [Veteran 1]
 - “The emotional connection usually comes during the ride” [Veteran 2].
 - “So I ride with a group of Ladies. Most of us are Veterans. Not all, but the most of us are...We go to lunch. We go out of town. Just good rides. We just like to ride...[I enjoy] the fellowship, the togetherness.” [Veteran 4]

- “[Racism] is one thing that I have not [experienced in riding communities]. We’re all brothers and sisters in the riding community. I don’t care if you’re in Alaska or China. We’re all riders, and that’s just something that we are.” [Veteran 4]
- “There’s a sense of camaraderie of everybody doing the same thing...The level of trust that you have between people to do that, it’s just a very satisfying feeling.” [Veteran 5]
- “Just seeing the look on people’s faces, like when we’re rolling up somewhere you know? Being a group that size [about 20 bikes], it’s usually people that we really know and are close to, and we know the riding skill and their ability and have relationships outside of riding with them. So, it’s almost like a family day, you know? It feels intimate, close.” [Veteran 9]
- “It’s the camaraderie. It’s cool. It feels good. It feels like you’re included, and you’re a part of something, just like in any kind of group dynamic. You feel like you’re a part of something. When you roll up to the bar or wherever you’re going, your presence is known. It’s cool. It’s a cool feeling, you know? And I enjoy that” [Veteran 10]
- “You can get that [camaraderie] because you’re going ‘I’m in a safe place with some people that understand me, or they understand why I’m here or why I’m doing this.’” [Veteran 11]
- “Women are – still aren’t, you know, accepted into a lot of places...the [combat Veterans motorcycle club] – I think part of that is actually, the combat part. You know? They – the guys know that you’ve proved your mettle kind of thing. You know what I’m saying?...The acceptance in that is almost automatic.” [Veteran 13].
- Connecting with family
 - “[Riding] is a family thing. What drew me to riding at a young age was that my dad had a motorcycle, and he wanted us to be – we would right out in the deserts just to learn about it.” [Veteran 1]
 - “[A family tragedy] brought us closer together as far as riding as a family.” [Veteran 1]
 - “I ride with my brother” [Veteran 3]
 - “[Riding with my husband] it’s just teaching me things. I t kind of makes me feel like, ‘Hey look at us. We’re on the same sheet of music here.’” [Veteran 4]
 - “My love of riding was developed through my father riding. . . So that’s really strengthened our relationship, my dad and I. He’s the reason why I ride. There was that building the relationship with the riding” [Veteran 4].
 - “That’s why in our bylaws, one of the first things it talks about, we are about family, work, and club. If you can’t come to a meeting because you’ve got family things going on, you can’t come...Family comes first.” [Veteran 5]
 - “Me and my dad are both in [the motorcycle club]. He’s a Veteran, too. We both can ride and stuff anytime” [Veteran 14]
- Connecting with advocacy
 - Rides for Veterans (organizations and individuals)
 - Rides for First Responders



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- Military and First Responder funeral details and memorial rides, Patriot Riders
- Rides for suicide and mental health awareness, medical causes, social problems
- Donation rides for Thanksgiving, Christmas and various charities and fundraisers
- Children: Toys for Tots, Lego runs; Children's Miracle Network, Bikers Against Child Abuse (BACA), Make A Wish Foundation
- Womens' causes (e.g., promoting women riders)
- Violence prevention

Dissemination of Results

Conference Poster Presentations

The research team is currently compiling preliminary results of the Wind Therapy survey. Using these results, they will prepare an abstract for peer review, and if accepted will present the poster at the Society for Social Work Research. Student-led posters provide emerging scholars with valuable experience disseminating research findings to colleagues.

In October 2021, the team's first student-led poster on the Wind Therapy project won an Outstanding Poster award at the National Science Foundation's Conference on Social Connections to Promote Individual and Community Resilience in Post-COVID-19 Society. The conference was held in Arlington, Texas. The poster reported preliminary results of the study and compared Veterans with civilians who participate in Wind Therapy. The poster is archived on the project's website (below).

Website

<https://www.uta.edu/academics/schools-colleges/social-work/research/windtherapy>

Media Coverage

The wind therapy study website attracted the attention of the UTA Executive Director of Communications and Media Relations, Jeff Carlton. Mr. Carlton, Dr. Schuman, and the research team are currently developing a strategy to publicize Stay the Course's Wind Therapy program as well as the funded research project. Plans include a news story at the university level, as well as media coverage in the greater North Texas area.

Academic Papers

After the survey closes in the summer of 2022, the team will finalize qualitative and quantitative data analysis. The team anticipates at least three manuscripts coming from the study. Students will have the opportunity to make substantive contributions to an article which will be submitted to a reputable military-focused academic research journal.

Impacts

What is the impact on the development of the principal discipline(s) of the project?

Researchers identified the therapeutic aspects of wind therapy and the ways in which Veterans use wind therapy to manage their mental health systems. This information can be used to evaluate other non-traditional, adventure therapies that Veterans employ to relieve distressing mental health symptoms. Additionally, the information can inform the development of novel therapies, like Virtual Reality Adventure Therapy.

What is the impact on other disciplines?

The preliminary findings of the wind therapy study were presented at a National Science Foundation poster session, in which the presenters established a relationship with colleagues from the University of Texas at Arlington Kinesiology Department. The collaboration is currently developing a novel intervention, Virtual Reality Adventure Therapy (V-RATE), which will include therapeutic elements from wind therapy in a format that can be used by Veterans who live with disabilities.

What is the impact on institutional resources that form infrastructure?

Institutional infrastructure for Veterans includes the Veterans Health Administration (VA) as well as non-governmental Veteran-serving agencies. The newly formed collaboration between UTA Social Work and Kinesiology has established community partnerships with the Veterans Health Administration North Texas Health Care System, One Tribe Foundation, and UTA Military and Veteran Services.

What is the impact on student learning?

The Cheryl Milkes Moore Foundation grant funded one PhD student at half-time effort during the summer of 2021. The student honed her skills in grant writing, methods development, interviewing, data analysis, presentation, and team leadership. Additional students in all levels of social work education (BSW, MSW, PhD) have joined the project and participated in similar real-world research, analysis, and dissemination.

Challenges

Changes in approach and reason for change

We expanded our definition of trauma experience from combat-related trauma to any military-related trauma. The more expansive criteria included women Veterans who experienced military sexual trauma not associated with a combat deployment.

Actual or Anticipated problems or delays and actions or plans to resolve them

The project is progressing on schedule. All qualitative interviews have completed. Quantitative surveys will be collected until May 1, 2022. Qualitative coding is nearing completion and a preliminary analysis has been conducted on survey data.

Changes that have a significant impact on expenditures

The project came in slightly under budget due to recruitment and administrative support provided by Stay the Course/One Tribe Foundation and support from Dr. Schuman's startup funds to hire additional research assistants to support the project

Significant changes in use or care of human subjects

No changes were made. All participants received information about mental health issues related to Veterans. Referrals for care options were also provided.

Research Team

Table 3

Research Team Members

Name	Most Senior Project Role
Donna L. Schuman, PhD	Principal Investigator
Xiangli Gu, PhD	Co-Principal Investigator
Christine Highfill	Graduate Research Assistant
LaTisha Thomas	Graduate Research Assistant
Jodie Wofford	Community Partner
Warren Ponder, PhD	Community Partner
Sapphire Munguia	Summer Graduate Research Assistant

Table 4

Community Partner

Organization	Address	Support Activities
One Tribe Foundation	855 Texas Street Suite 105 Fort Worth, TX 76102	Recruited participants for interviews Provided space to conduct interviews