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# Pushing the Limit: The Impact of OPTEMPO on the Health of U.S. Soldiers

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***OPTEMPO Report Series #12***



# Purpose

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- Present OPTEMPO and health findings based on data from the U. S. Army, Europe & Seventh Army and U. S. Army Medical Research Unit-Europe OPTEMPO/PERSTEMPO study.



# Outline

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- **Summary of Findings**
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  - **Work, Sleep and Depressive Symptoms**
  - **Work, Sleep and Psychological Well-being**
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# Summary of Findings

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**This technical brief presents the findings a two-year longitudinal study designed to assess the impact of operations and personnel tempo on soldier and unit readiness.**

Work hours did not show a clear linear relationship to depression symptoms, well being scores, or number of physical illness symptoms.

## **Sleep**

- Lower number of sleep hours was related to higher depression, lower well-being, and to more physical symptoms.

## **Exercise**

- Lower amounts of exercise was related to depressive symptoms and lower well-being in conditions of high work hours.

## **Alcohol**

- Less alcohol use was related to fewer physical symptoms under conditions of low work hours.



# Introduction

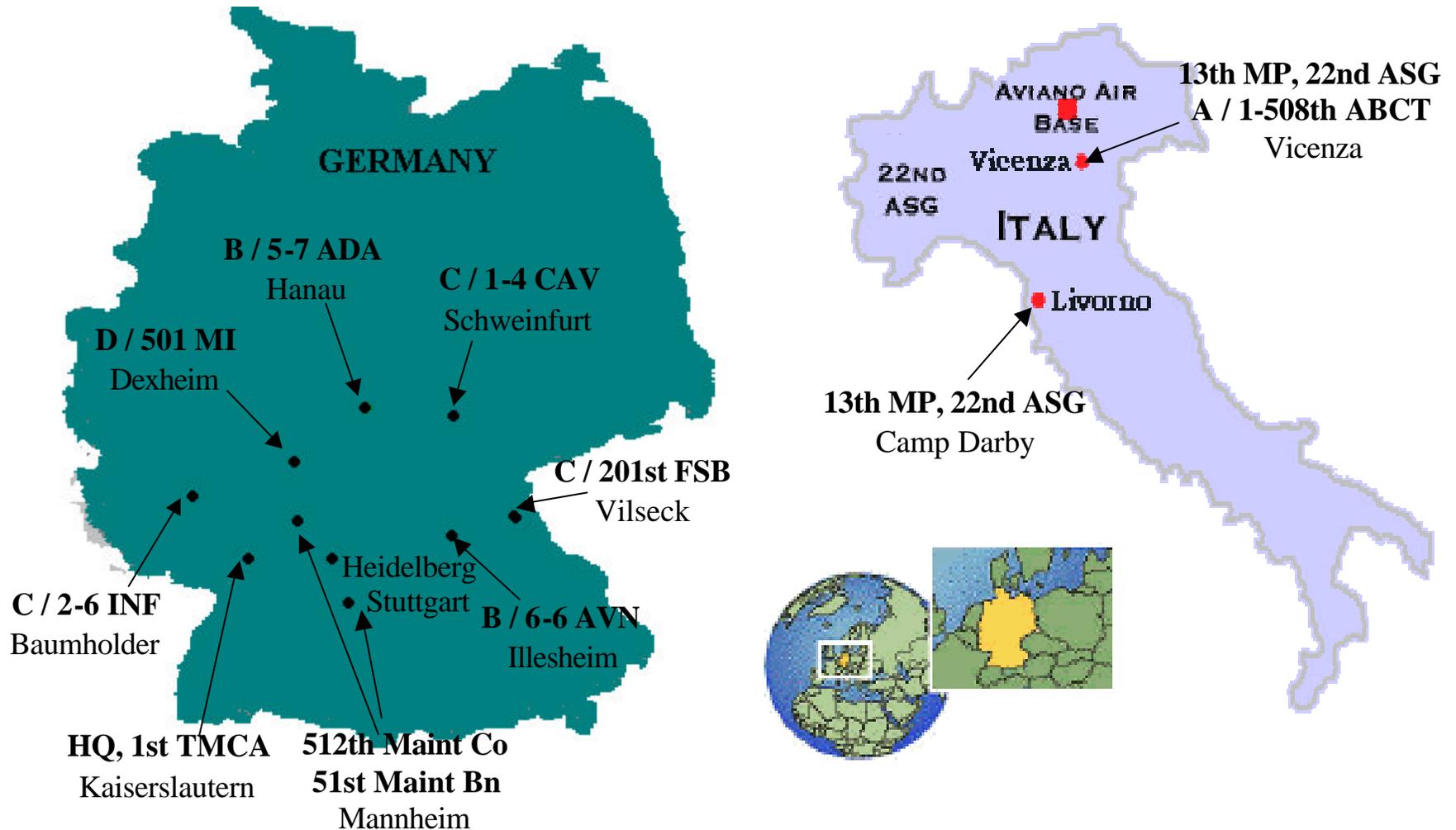
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- Soldiers in the US Army are facing increasing operational demands (Castro & Adler, 1999).
- Research in non-military work environments suggests that work overload is associated with decreases in well-being (Adler & Matthews, 1994; Repetti, 1993).
- The degree to which work-related stressors affect soldier health is unclear.
- Research on three wellness behaviors, sleep, exercise and alcohol use, indicate that they may exert a moderating effect on both psychological and physical health (Allgöwer, Wardle & Steptoe, 2001; Brown, 1991; King, Taylor, & Haskell, 1993).



# OPTEMPO Study: Unit Locations

- U.S. soldiers in Europe are primarily located in Central Europe.





# Research Questions

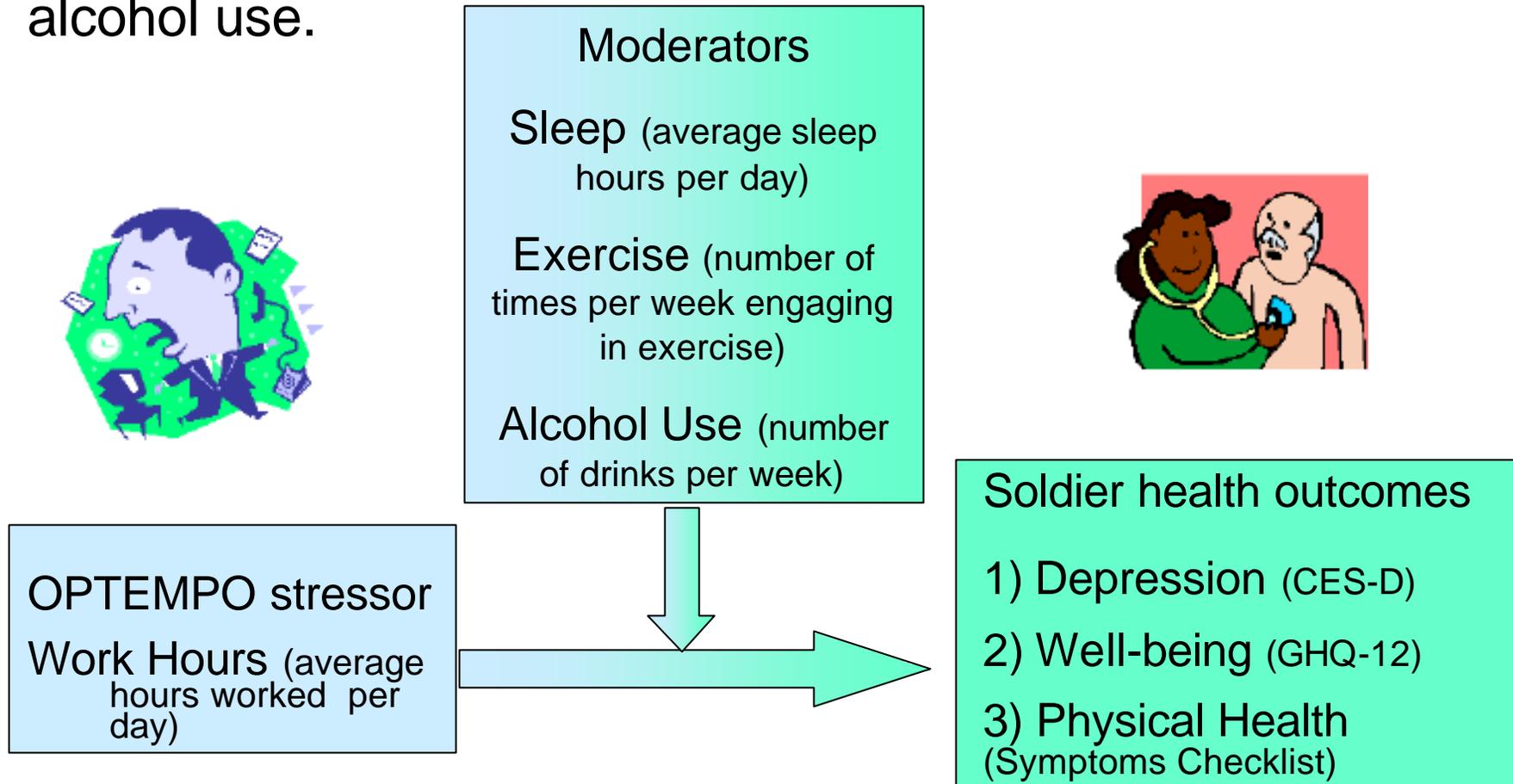
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1. What impact does workload have on soldier physical and psychological health?
2. What role do wellness behaviors (sleep, exercise and alcohol use) play in this relationship?
  - Direct relationship?
  - Moderating effect?



## Work hours and health

The Stressor – Strain model predicts that workload affects health outcomes, but is moderated by sleep, exercise and alcohol use.





# Medical and Psychological Health Measures

## Soldier health outcomes

### 1) CES-Depression

7 items ( $\alpha = .88$ ), measures depression, sample items: "felt sad", "felt lonely"

### 2) GHQ-12: Psychological Well-being

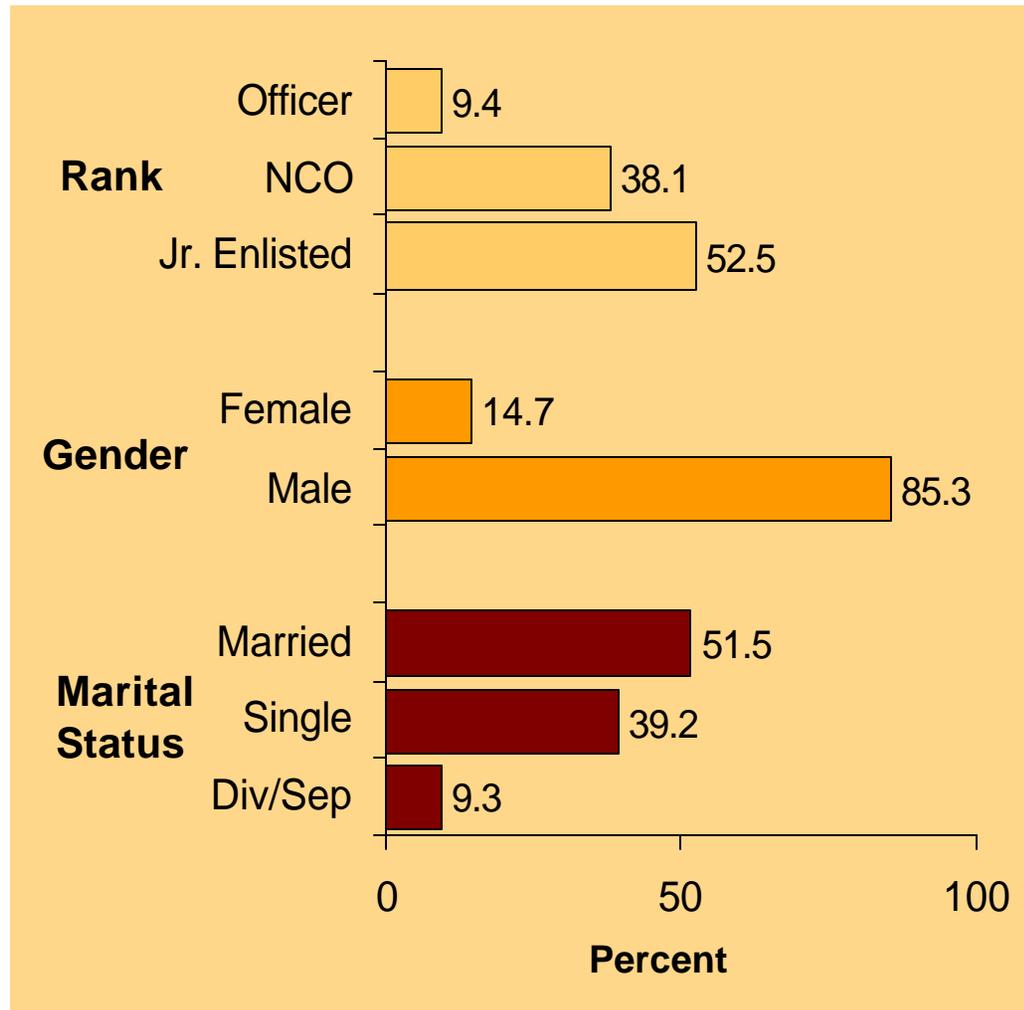
12 items ( $\alpha = .76$ ), measures well-being, sample items: "felt constantly under strain," "been losing confidence in yourself."

### 3) Physical Symptoms Checklist

Physical symptoms, 22 items, measures frequency of illness symptoms.



# Demographics and Procedure



**Participants & Procedure**

Surveys administered:  
April 1999 - June 2000

Sample: n=1422  
U.S. Army Soldiers/Europe

- 4 Combat Arms
- 6 Combat Support

**Environment:**

- garrison duty station
- training exercises
- deployed settings



# Soldier Workload

## Workload: Work hours

- worked **11.9 hours** per day
- worked **5.6 days** a week
  - **53%** reported performing duty-related work more than 5 days in the past week
  - **65%** reported working on scheduled days off

## Workload: Training and Temporary duty

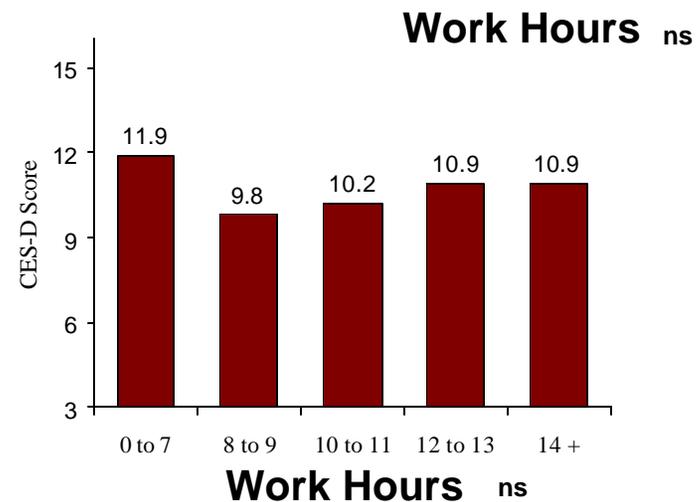
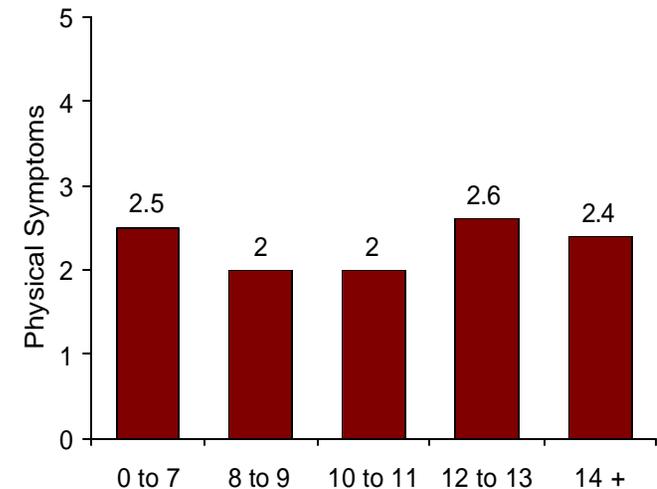
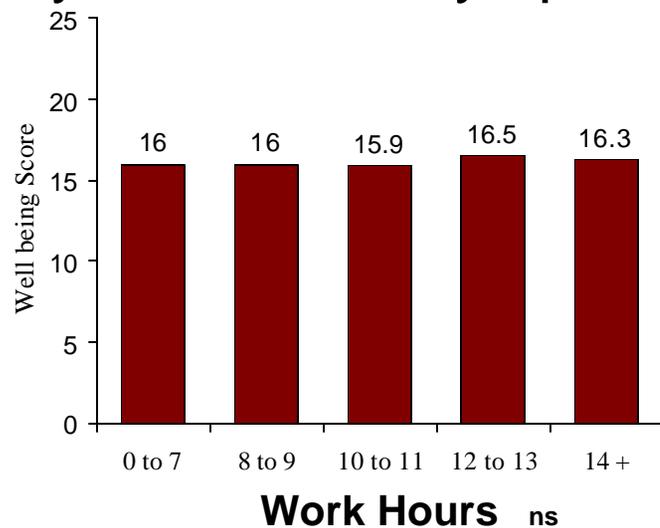
- took part in field exercises during the past 6 months
  - 16.30% 0 days
  - 24.4% 1-14 days
  - 17.3% 15-28 days
  - 14.5% 29-42 days
  - 27.5% 43 days +
- Average of **39.8 days training/TDY** (away from home) in past 6 months





# Work Hours and Health

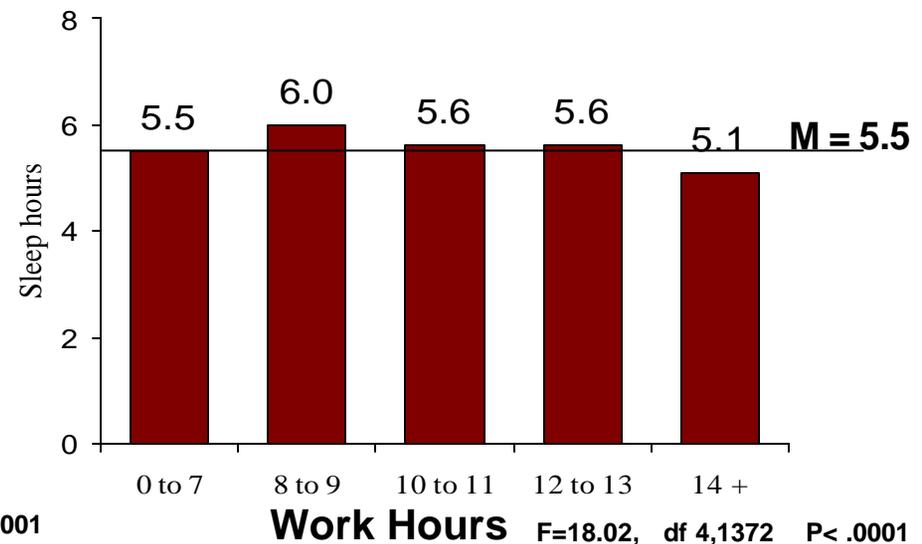
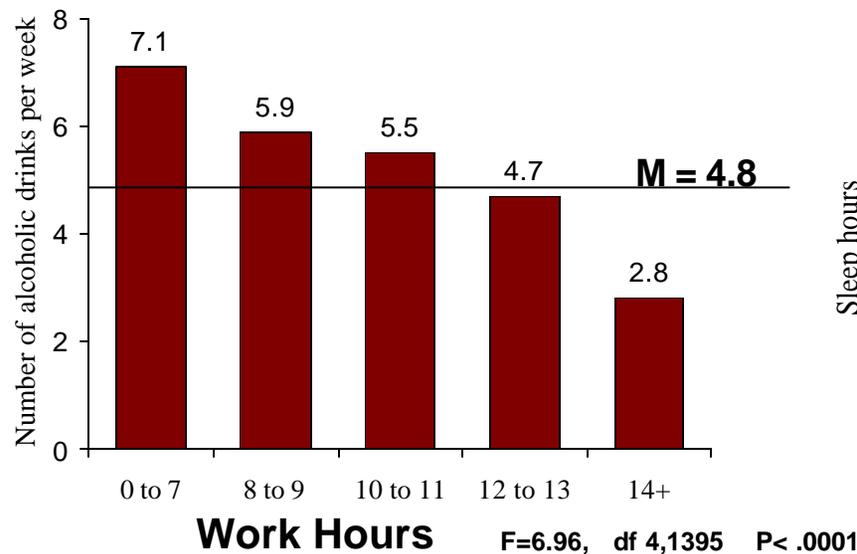
We found that work hours did not show a clear linear relationship to depression symptoms (CES-D, Mirowsky, 1996), well being scores (General Health Questionnaire, Goldberg, 1972), or number of physical illness symptoms.





# Work Hours and Health Behaviors

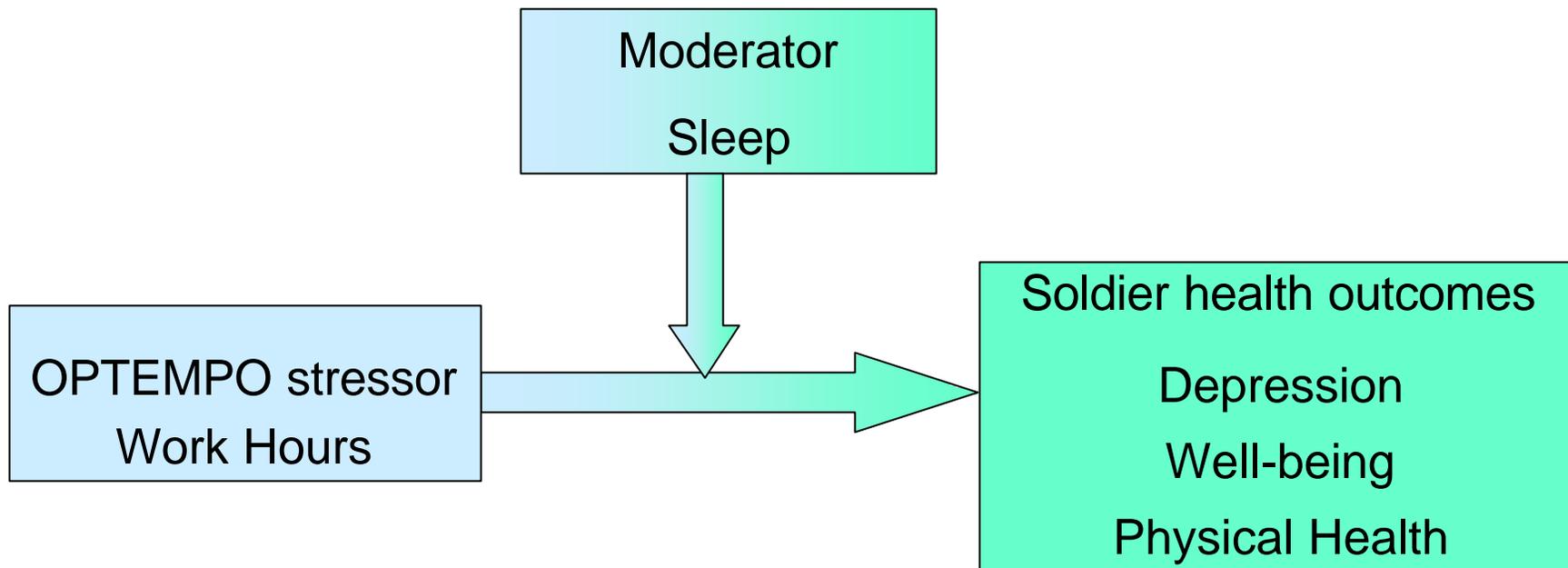
- A clear relationship emerged for alcohol use: Higher number of work hours was associated with lower intake of alcohol.
- There was no clear relationship between work and sleep hours.





# Work Hours, Sleep and Health

In our first series of moderated regression analyses, we tested sleep hours as the moderator.

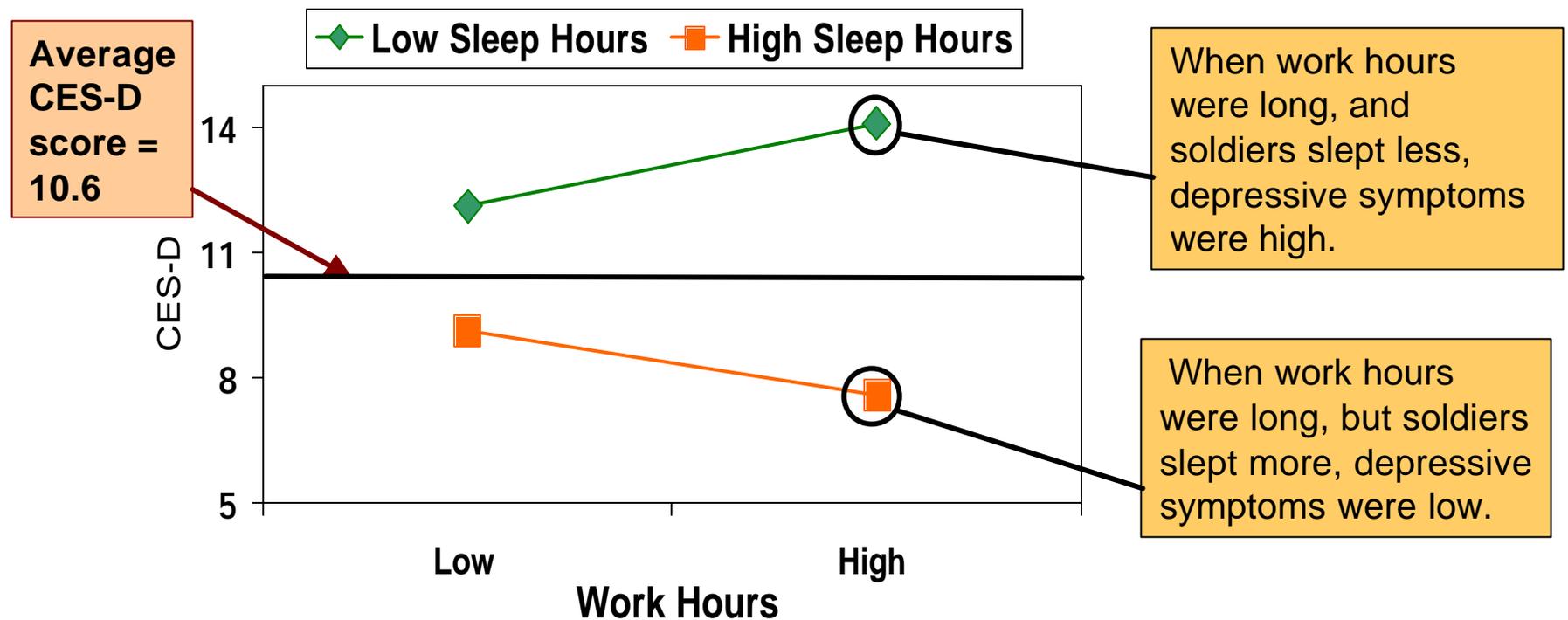




## Work, Sleep and Depressive Symptoms

- Using hours of sleep as a moderator, the impact of work hours on soldier depression was assessed.
- Lower number of sleep hours was related to higher depression.

High work hours + low sleep = more depressive symptoms

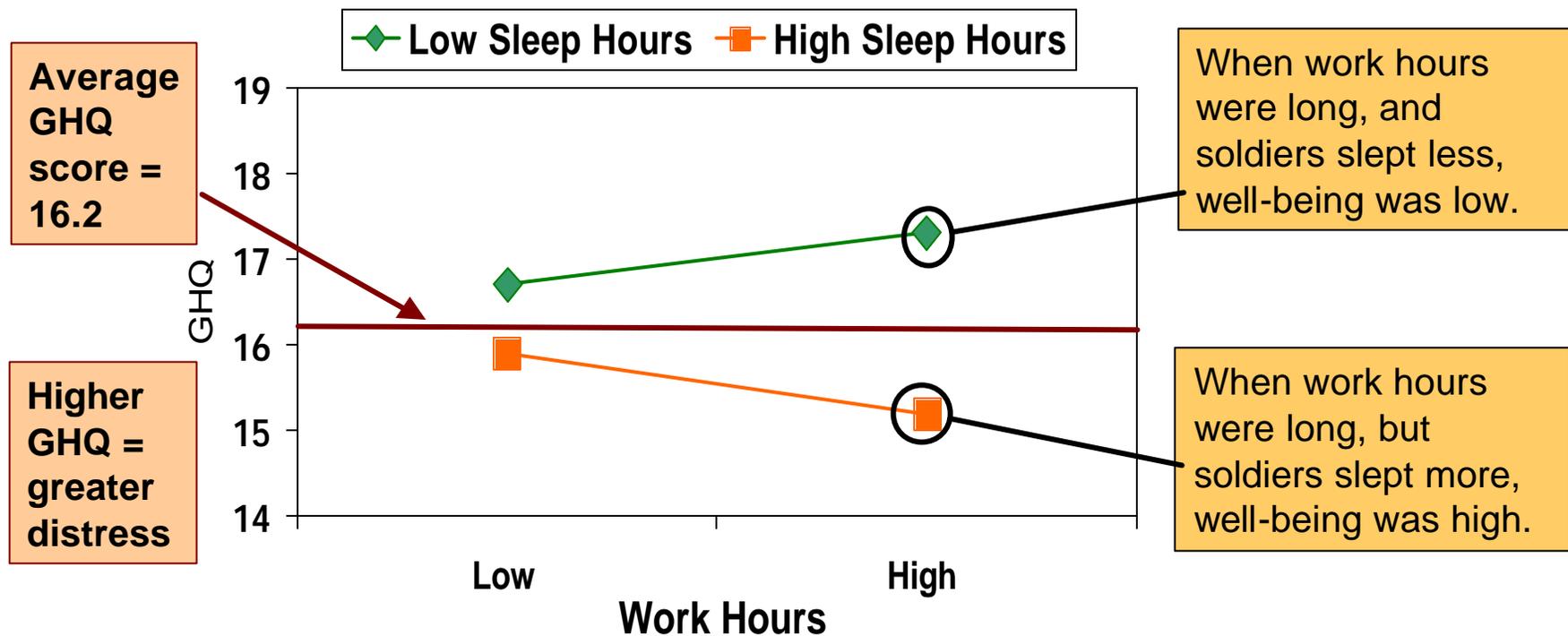




# Work, Sleep and Psychological Well-being

- Using hours of sleep as a moderator, the impact of work hours on soldier well-being was assessed.
- Lower number of sleep hours was related to lower well-being.

High work hours + High sleep = better well-being

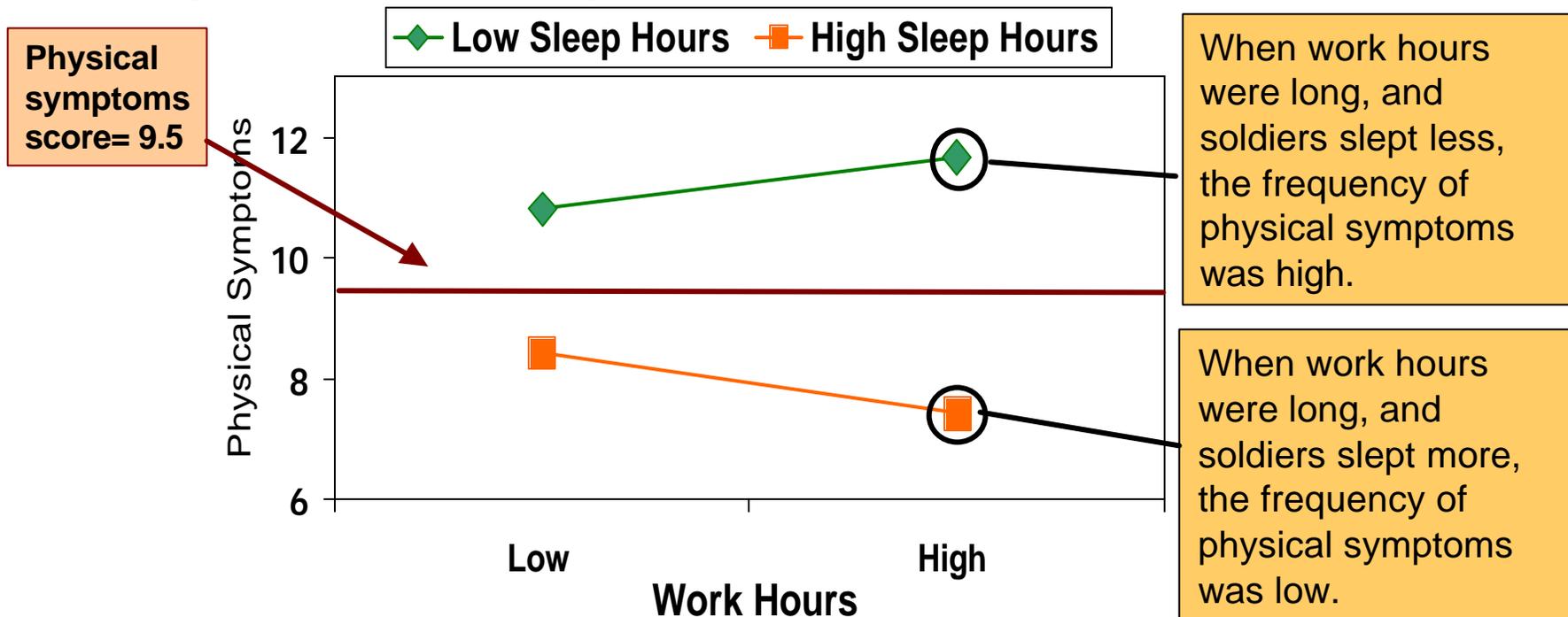




## Work, Sleep and Physical Symptoms

- Using hours of sleep as a moderator, the impact of work hours on soldier physical health was assessed.
- Lower number of sleep hours was related to more physical symptoms.

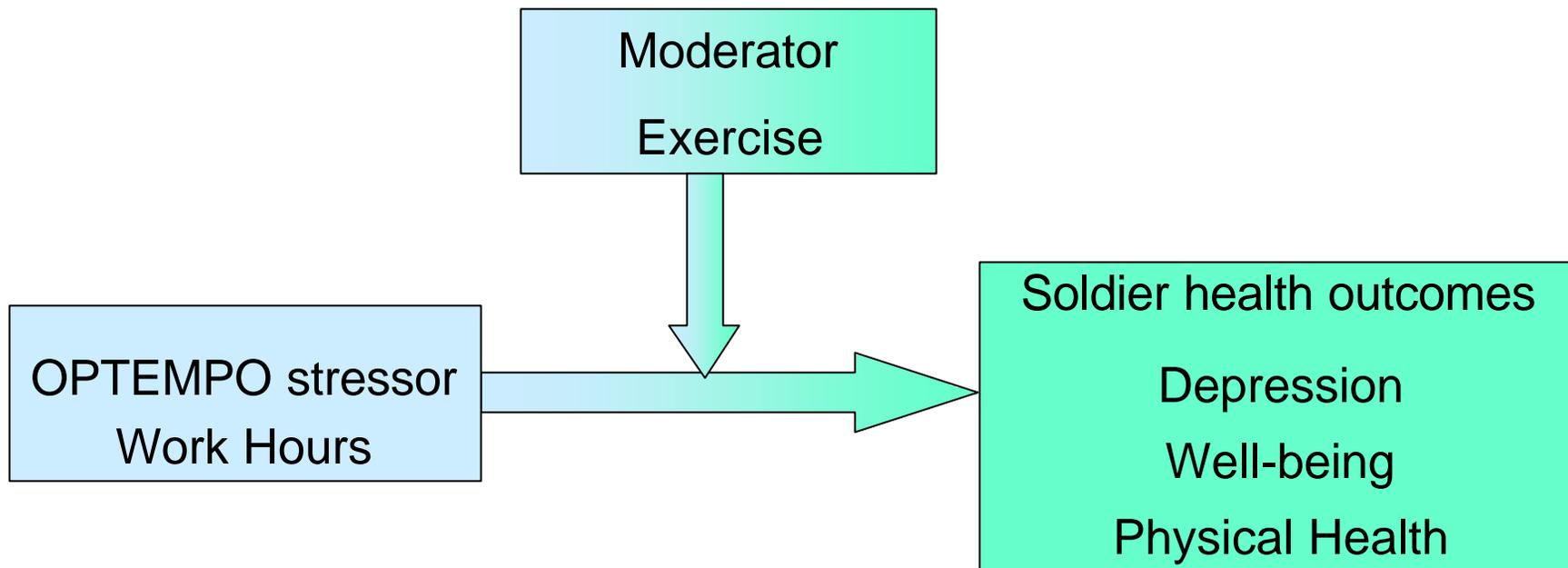
High work hours + High sleep = better physical health





# Work Hours, Exercise and Health

In our second series of moderated regression analyses, we used exercise as the moderator.

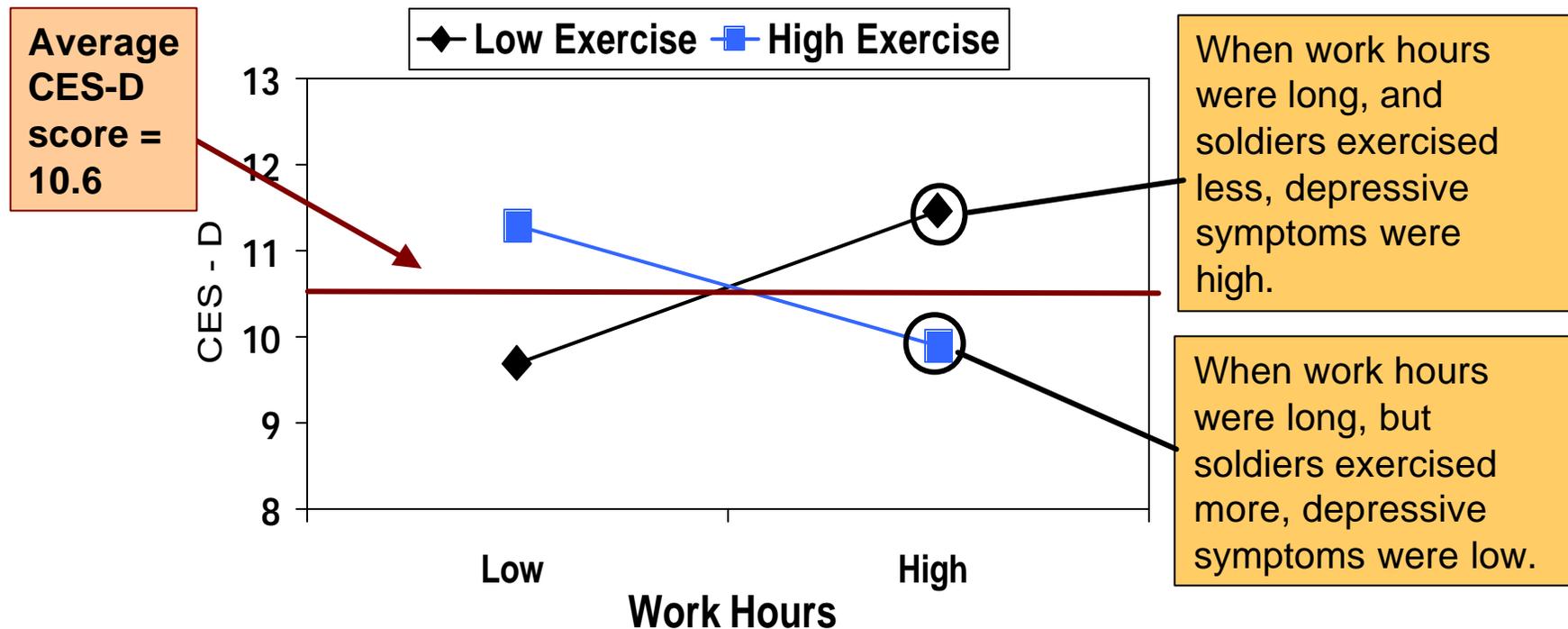




## Work, Physical Exercise and Depression

- Using amount of physical fitness as a moderator, the impact of work hours on soldier depressive symptoms was assessed.
- Lower amounts of exercise was related to depressive symptoms in conditions of high work hours.

High work hours + Low exercise = more depressive symptoms

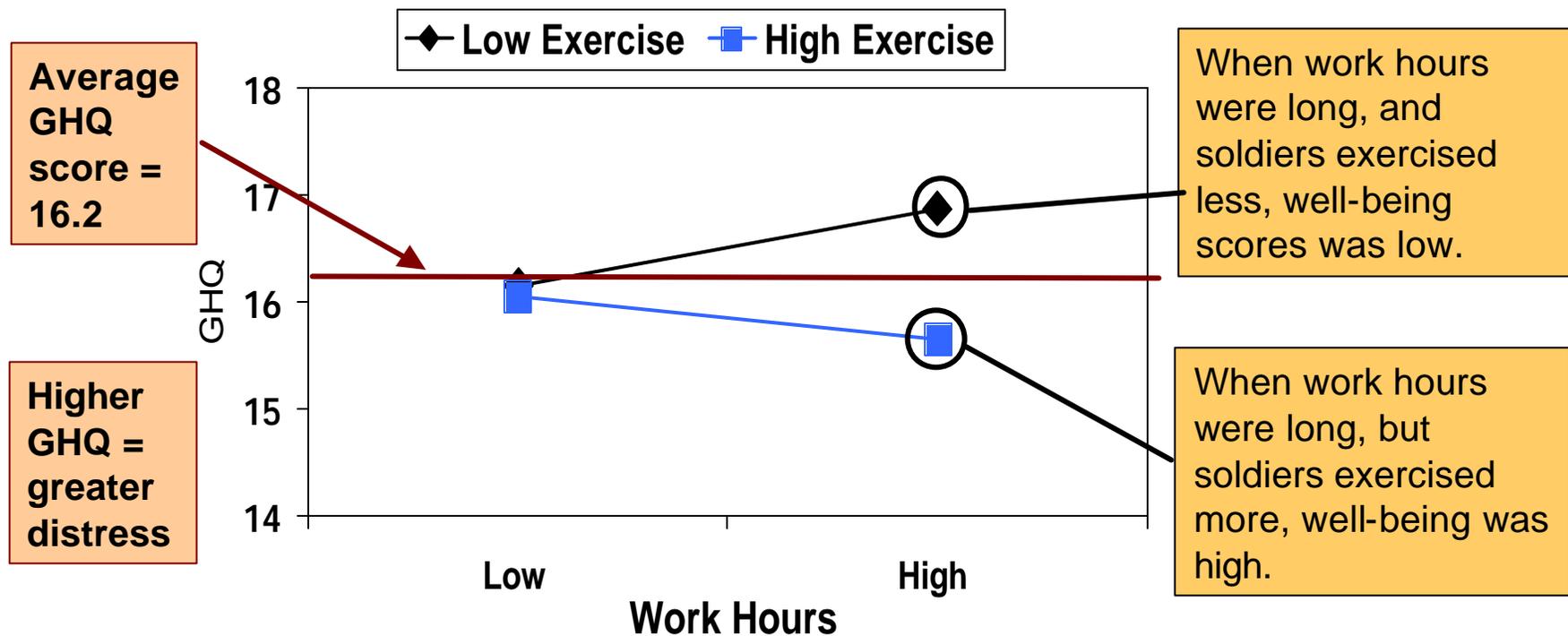




## Work Hours, Exercise and Well-being

- Using exercise as a moderator, the impact of work hours on soldier well-being was assessed.
- Lower amounts of exercise were related to lower well-being.

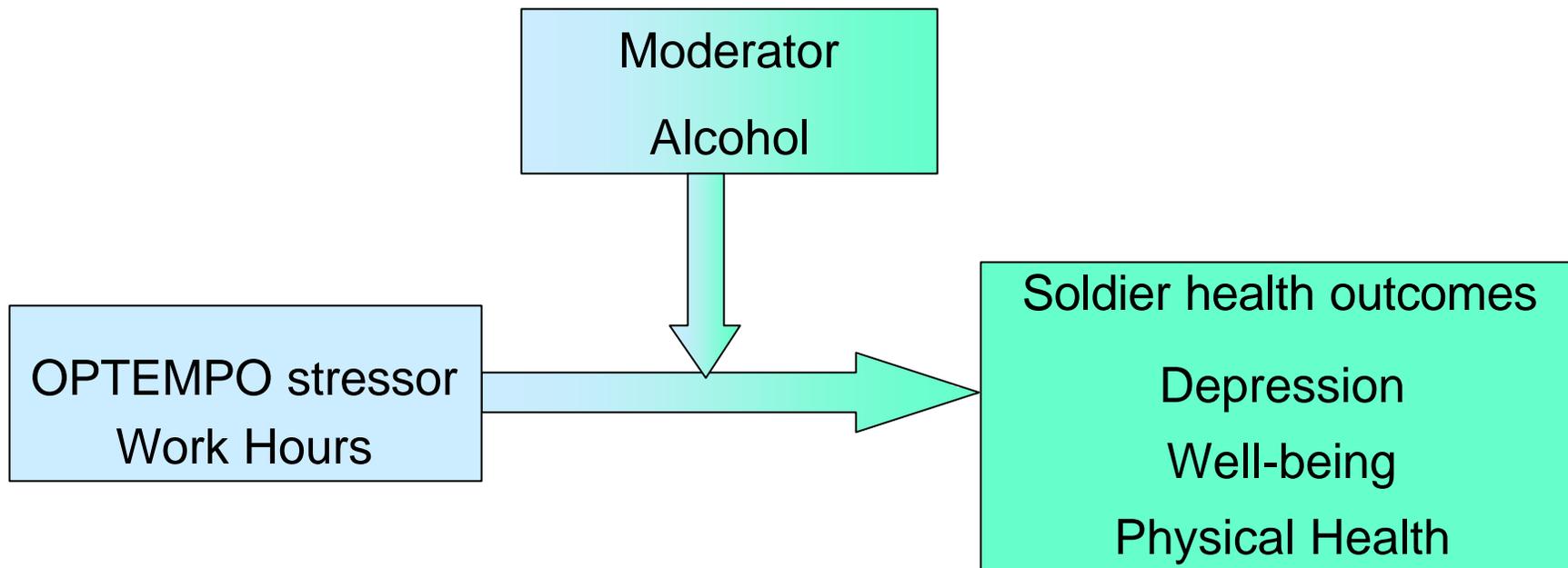
High work hours + High exercise = better well-being





# Work Hours, Alcohol Use and Health

In our final of moderated regression analyses, we used alcohol use as the moderator.

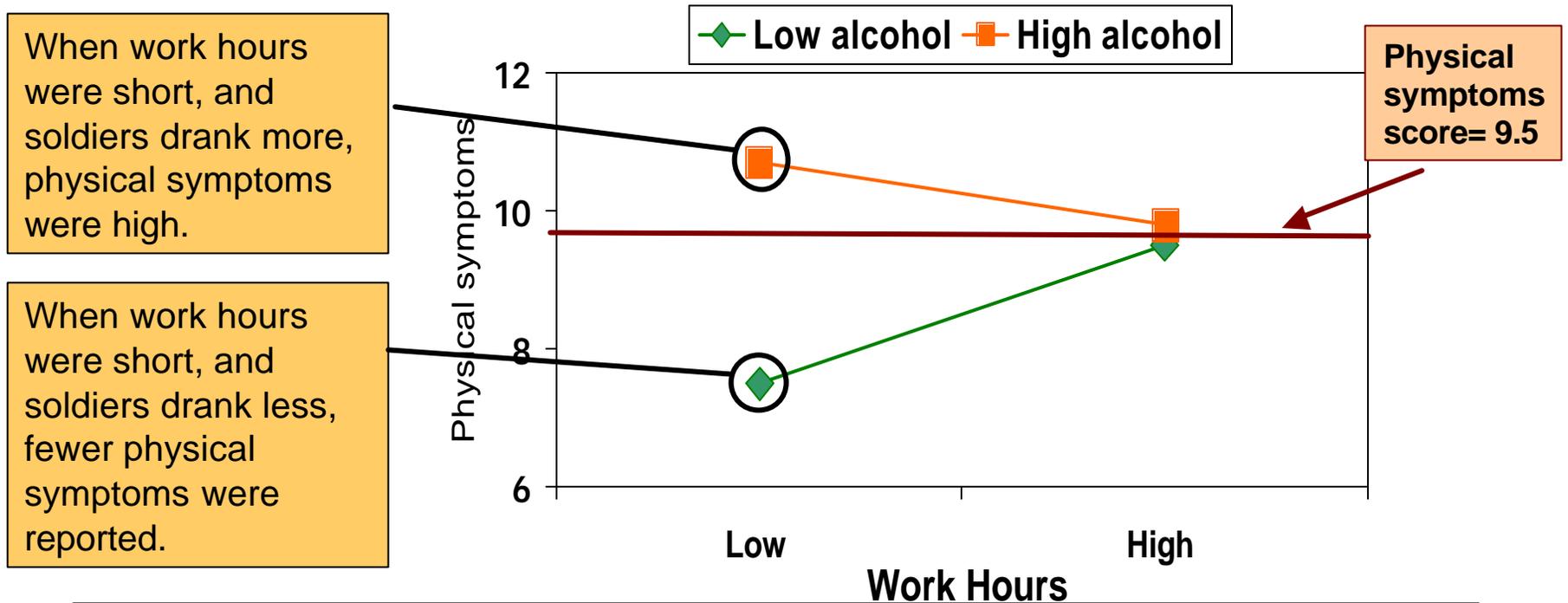




## Work, Alcohol Use and Physical Symptoms

- With alcohol use as a moderator, the impact of work hours on physical symptoms was assessed.
- Less alcohol use was related to fewer physical symptoms under conditions of low work hours.

Low work hours + Low alcohol use = fewer physical symptoms





# Summary

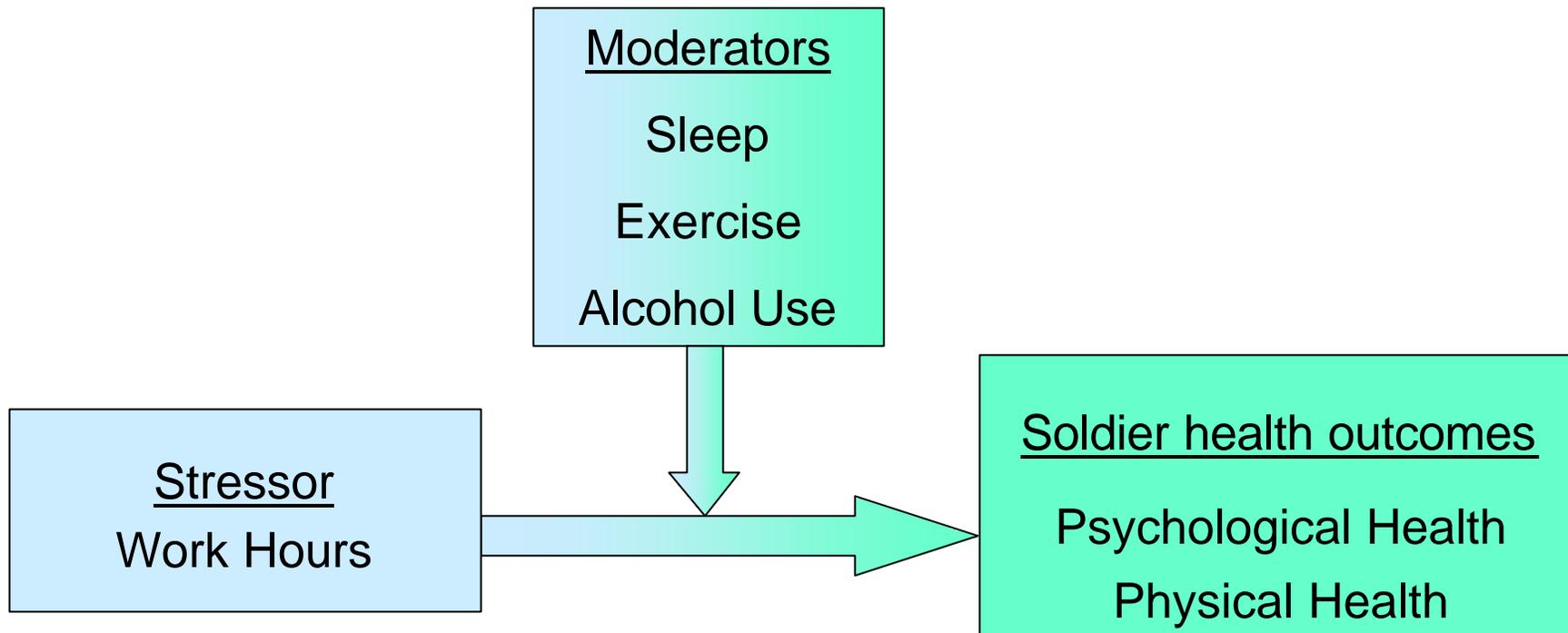
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1. What impact does workload have on medical readiness?
  - No direct relationship between work hours and depressive symptoms, well-being, physical symptoms, and caffeine and tobacco use.
  - There was an inverse relationship between work hours and alcohol use.
2. What role does sleep, exercise and alcohol use play in this relationship?
  - Sleep moderated the negative impact of long work hours on depressive symptoms, well-being and physical symptoms.
  - Exercise exerted its moderating effect on depressive symptoms and well-being.
  - Alcohol use moderated physical symptoms when work hours were low.



## Work Hours, Coping and Health

- There was support for the Stressor – Strain model in that workload affected health outcomes when moderated by sleep, exercise and alcohol use.





## Discussion

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- Multiple wellness behaviors are necessary: One size does NOT fit all
- Proactive behaviors – soldiers can and do engage in behaviors that moderate the effect of workload
  - Practice sleep discipline
  - Engage in physical exercise regularly
  - Reduce drinking
- Leaders can encourage these proactive behaviors
- Future research:
  - Link medical readiness and performance
  - Assess caffeine and cigarette use as moderators



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# Point of Contact

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# Soldier OPTEMPO Survey

U.S. Army Medical Research Unit-Europe, Walter Reed Army Institute of Research  
U.S. Army Medical Research and Materiel Command



## Privacy Act/Informed Consent Information

ver: 29 Nov 1999

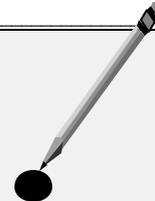
OPTEMPO Survey

- Authority:** 10 U.S.C. Sections 136 and 5 U.S.C. 552a; Executive Order 9397
- Purpose:** USAMRU-E/WRAIR is conducting a study of soldiers' responses to OPTEMPO and PERSTEMPO.
- Uses:** I understand the purpose of this survey is to develop information to benefit soldiers and units, and that I may not directly benefit from this survey.
- Disclosure:** Disclosure of your Social Security Number is voluntary. I consent to the use of my answers by staff of the U.S. Army Medical Research-Europe, Walter Reed Army Institute of Research (USAMRU-E/WRAIR), to compile statistics of group data.  
I understand my name or any other data from which I could be recognized will not be available to anyone beyond the professional staff conducting the study.  
I understand I have the right to withdraw my consent to participate in the study at any time.  
I understand USAMRU-E/WRAIR may access other military records identified by, or filed under, my social security number in conjunction with this survey.

### RESULTS ARE CONFIDENTIAL!

#### Instructions:

- Use a #2 pencil
- Mark your answer by filling in the bubble completely like this:



<b>SOCIAL SECURITY NUMBER :</b> 0 <input type="radio"/> 0 <input type="radio"/> 1 <input type="radio"/> 1 <input type="radio"/> 2 <input type="radio"/> 2 <input type="radio"/> 3 <input type="radio"/> 3 <input type="radio"/> 4 <input type="radio"/> 4 <input type="radio"/> 5 <input type="radio"/> 5 <input type="radio"/> 6 <input type="radio"/> 6 <input type="radio"/> 7 <input type="radio"/> 7 <input type="radio"/> 8 <input type="radio"/> 8 <input type="radio"/> 9 <input type="radio"/> 9 <input type="radio"/>			<b>YOUR AGE:</b> 0 <input type="radio"/> 1 <input type="radio"/> 1 <input type="radio"/> 2 <input type="radio"/> 2 <input type="radio"/> 3 <input type="radio"/> 3 <input type="radio"/> 4 <input type="radio"/> 4 <input type="radio"/> 5 <input type="radio"/> 5 <input type="radio"/> 6 <input type="radio"/> 6 <input type="radio"/> 7 <input type="radio"/> 7 <input type="radio"/> 8 <input type="radio"/> 8 <input type="radio"/> 9 <input type="radio"/> 9 <input type="radio"/>		<b>TODAY'S DATE:</b> MONTH    DAY    YEAR JAN <input type="radio"/> 0 <input type="radio"/> 0 <input type="radio"/> 2000 <input type="radio"/> FEB <input type="radio"/> 1 <input type="radio"/> 1 <input type="radio"/> 2001 <input type="radio"/> MAR <input type="radio"/> 2 <input type="radio"/> 2 <input type="radio"/> 2002 <input type="radio"/> APR <input type="radio"/> 3 <input type="radio"/> 3 <input type="radio"/> 2003 <input type="radio"/> MAY <input type="radio"/> 4 <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> JUN <input type="radio"/> 5 <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> JUL <input type="radio"/> 6 <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> AUG <input type="radio"/> 7 <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> SEP <input type="radio"/> 8 <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> OCT <input type="radio"/> 9 <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> NOV <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> DEC <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/>		
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<b>YOUR UNIT:</b> Squad: _____ Platoon: _____ Company: _____ Battalion: _____		<b>COMPONENT:</b> <input type="radio"/> Army <input type="radio"/> Navy <input type="radio"/> Air Force <input type="radio"/> Marines  <b>STATUS:</b> <input type="radio"/> Active <input type="radio"/> Reserves <input type="radio"/> Guard <input type="radio"/> Civilian <input type="radio"/> Other?	<b>RANK:</b> E <input type="radio"/> 1 <input type="radio"/> O <input type="radio"/> 2 <input type="radio"/> WO <input type="radio"/> 3 <input type="radio"/> 4 <input type="radio"/> 5 <input type="radio"/> 6 <input type="radio"/> 7 <input type="radio"/> 8 <input type="radio"/> 9 <input type="radio"/>	<b>WHAT IS YOUR MOS?</b> (Answer in 3 digits only. Example: a "67B would bubble in "6," "7," and "B.") 0 <input type="radio"/> 0 <input type="radio"/> A <input type="radio"/> K <input type="radio"/> U <input type="radio"/> 1 <input type="radio"/> 1 <input type="radio"/> B <input type="radio"/> L <input type="radio"/> V <input type="radio"/> 2 <input type="radio"/> 2 <input type="radio"/> C <input type="radio"/> M <input type="radio"/> W <input type="radio"/> 3 <input type="radio"/> 3 <input type="radio"/> D <input type="radio"/> N <input type="radio"/> X <input type="radio"/> 4 <input type="radio"/> 4 <input type="radio"/> E <input type="radio"/> O <input type="radio"/> Y <input type="radio"/> 5 <input type="radio"/> 5 <input type="radio"/> F <input type="radio"/> P <input type="radio"/> Z <input type="radio"/> 6 <input type="radio"/> 6 <input type="radio"/> G <input type="radio"/> Q <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> 7 <input type="radio"/> 7 <input type="radio"/> H <input type="radio"/> R <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> 8 <input type="radio"/> 8 <input type="radio"/> I <input type="radio"/> S <input type="radio"/> Other: <input type="radio"/> 9 <input type="radio"/> 9 <input type="radio"/> J <input type="radio"/> T <input type="radio"/>			

Do you have a **family member** enrolled in the Exceptional Family Member Program (EFMP)?

Yes  No

Is your **spouse** in the military?

Yes  No

Not Married

How many **years** have you been **in the military**?

*Example: If you've been in 9 years, you should write in and bubble in "0" and then "9".*

<u>0</u>	<u>9</u>
<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
0 <input type="radio"/>	0 <input type="radio"/>
1 <input type="radio"/>	1 <input type="radio"/>
2 <input type="radio"/>	2 <input type="radio"/>
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How many **hours** of work have you averaged **per day** in the past week?

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Think about your "days off" during the past week. On average, how many **hours** did you perform duty-related work during a "day off"?

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How many **days** have you been on a **training exercise** in the past 6 months?

*Example: If it is 19, you should write and bubble in "0" and then "1," and "9".*

<u>0</u>	<u>1</u>	<u>9</u>
<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
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In the past week, how many **days** have you performed military related work?

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How many days of leave and/or passes have you **taken** in the past 12 months?

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How many days of leave and/or passes have you **lost** in the past 12 months?

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How many **days** have you been **TDY** in the past 6 months?

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How many **hours of sleep** have you averaged **per night** in the past week?

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Have you ever served in **combat**? (e.g., Vietnam, Persian Gulf, Grenada, Panama, Somalia)

Yes  No

Have you ever served on a **peacekeeping or humanitarian mission**?

Yes  No

How many **months** in total, have you served in the **Balkan Region** (e.g. Kosovo, Albania, Bosnia, Croatia, Macedonia, Hungary)?

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0 <input type="radio"/>	0 <input type="radio"/>
1 <input type="radio"/>	1 <input type="radio"/>
2 <input type="radio"/>	2 <input type="radio"/>
3 <input type="radio"/>	3 <input type="radio"/>
4 <input type="radio"/>	4 <input type="radio"/>
5 <input type="radio"/>	5 <input type="radio"/>
6 <input type="radio"/>	6 <input type="radio"/>
7 <input type="radio"/>	7 <input type="radio"/>
8 <input type="radio"/>	8 <input type="radio"/>
9 <input type="radio"/>	9 <input type="radio"/>

In total, how many **deployments** have you completed that lasted more than 30 days? (not including training exercises or unaccompanied tours)

<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
0 <input type="radio"/>	0 <input type="radio"/>
1 <input type="radio"/>	1 <input type="radio"/>
2 <input type="radio"/>	2 <input type="radio"/>
3 <input type="radio"/>	3 <input type="radio"/>
	4 <input type="radio"/>
	5 <input type="radio"/>
	6 <input type="radio"/>
	7 <input type="radio"/>
	8 <input type="radio"/>
	9 <input type="radio"/>

Please use the following scale to tell us how much you **agree** or **disagree** with the statements below:

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
1. I am proud to be in the U.S. Army	<input type="radio"/>				
2. I am an important part of my company	<input type="radio"/>				
3. What I do in the Army is worthwhile	<input type="radio"/>				
4. My company is ready for combat	<input type="radio"/>				
5. I am confident in my unit's mission-essential equipment	<input type="radio"/>				
6. I think we are better trained than most other companies in the Army	<input type="radio"/>				
7. I think the level of training in this company is high	<input type="radio"/>				
8. I have real confidence in my unit's ability to perform its mission	<input type="radio"/>				
9. If we went to war tomorrow, I would feel good about going with my unit	<input type="radio"/>				
10. I think my unit would do a better job in combat than most U.S. Army units	<input type="radio"/>				
11. The members of my unit are cooperative with each other	<input type="radio"/>				
12. The members of my unit know that they can depend on each other	<input type="radio"/>				
13. The members of my unit stand up for each other	<input type="radio"/>				
14. The officers in my unit establish clear work objectives	<input type="radio"/>				
15. The officers in my unit are interested in my personal welfare	<input type="radio"/>				
16. The officers in my unit delegate work effectively	<input type="radio"/>				
17. The officers in my unit let soldiers know when they have done a good job	<input type="radio"/>				
18. The officers in my unit avoid micromanaging soldiers' work	<input type="radio"/>				
19. The officers in my unit are interested in what I think and how I feel about things	<input type="radio"/>				
20. The NCOs in my unit establish clear work objectives	<input type="radio"/>				
21. The NCOs in my unit are interested in my personal welfare	<input type="radio"/>				
22. The NCOs in my unit delegate work effectively	<input type="radio"/>				
23. The NCOs in my unit let soldiers know when they have done a good job	<input type="radio"/>				
24. The NCOs in my unit avoid micromanaging soldiers' work	<input type="radio"/>				
25. The NCOs in my unit are interested in what I think and how I feel about things	<input type="radio"/>				
26. The leaders in this company would lead well in combat	<input type="radio"/>				
27. I am impressed by the quality of leadership in this company	<input type="radio"/>				
28. My chain-of-command works well	<input type="radio"/>				

In your opinion, what is the ideal length of time in **months** that a deployment should last?

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11

In your opinion, what is the ideal **number** of deployments that a soldier should go on over a 3 year period?

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 or more

Which best describes your current active-duty Army **career** intentions? Select one option.

1. **Definitely** stay in until retirement (or longer)

2. **Probably** stay in until retirement

3. **Definitely** stay in beyond my present obligation, but not necessarily until retirement

4. **Undecided** about whether to stay after completion of my current obligation

5. **Probably** leave upon completion of my current obligation

6. **Definitely** leave upon completion of my current obligation

When you **leave** active duty, do you plan on serving in the Reserves or National Guard?

Yes  Undecided  No  Not Applicable







