

# The Falklands War and the “Desmalvinización” process. An historical review of the effects of the Falklands war in Argentinean veterans

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## Background:

The Falklands war casualties included the death of three Falkland islanders, 255 British, 746 Argentines, along with the death of 264 Argentinean ex-combatants who committed suicide, deaths that have also been considered consequence of the conflict. This war represented not only the defeat of the Argentinean army, but it also represented the fall of the Argentinean military regimen, which left the country with war veterans and a new phenomenon called “Desmalvinización”.



## Aim:

To understand how the Falklands War and the Desmalvinización process affected the mental health of Argentinean veterans, and how the Argentinean society and mental health professionals perceived these veterans.

## Methods:

This was a non-systematic literature review, for which three different search engines and 15 keywords were used to identify papers focused on war neurosis, PTSD and other mental disorders in Argentinean veterans.



## Desmalvinización, the denial of a war

The two decades that follow the war were characterised by a process called Desmalvinización, a term attributed to French academic Alain Rouquie, who considered that in order to prevent another military coup, the Falkland's war should be forgotten (1).

According to Cangiano, a psychologist veteran, the Desmalvinización was a process lead by the government with the aim of erasing the war from people's mind and improving international relationships damaged by the conflict (2). The Desmalvinización was characterised by four elements (3):

Desmalvinización	
Acting like the war never happened	Considering veterans as stupid and inept
Considering the decision of fighting Great Britain was unwise	Attributing Argentina's social and economic instability to the war



## Effects on Argentineans' veterans

The Argentinean society was supportive and concerned about the militaries, who often received chocolates and supportive letter, but after the war ended, veterans faced denial and rejection by the same society which prevent them from come back to a normal life (2,3). After the war, the identity of a hero who defended his country was substituted by the identity of unprepared kids thrown to death by pitiless and evil officials (2).

This negative views delayed any attention and care towards veterans, in fact they started receiving economic support from the government until 1990 (4). Similarly, the impact of veterans' mental health faced delay an even controversy which impact the recognition of the traumatic effects of the war.

## Effects on Argentineans' veterans

Veterans' identity was dichotomised as follow:

Soldiers	Military officials
Weak & blind	Evil
Unstable	Sadistic tyrants
Impotent automatons	The cause of conscripts' suffering
“War boys”	

## Psychiatrists' views on war veterans

Six year after the war, some doctors started identifying symptoms on war veterans described as war neurosis. However, these symptoms were initially attributed to premorbid personality or psychiatric disorders rather than to combat exposure, probably still as consequence of the Desmalvinización. It was until 1990 when psychiatrists changed their posture and started talking about post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), and how witnessing death and destruction, exposure to explosions and artillery sounds, lacking food, clean clothes and a place to sleep, as well as the eventual social rejection, caused the symptoms observed in Argentinean veterans. Finally, developing strategies to support those still struggling from the effects of the war (5).

Physical symptoms	Psychological symptoms
Anorexia & Weight loss	Insomnia & nightmares
Headaches	Anxiety & low mood
Tachycardia	Poor concentration
Chest oppression	Character changes
Sweating	Intense fear

## Conclusion

The Desmalvinización process influenced how the Argentinean society treated their war veterans, who were shunned, discriminated and denied of social recognition. The Desmalvinización also delayed the recognition of the psychological effects of the war on veterans and the consequent development of strategies to support those affected by it.

## References

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- 5 Lolich M et al (2014). Memoria autobiográfica, sentidos y fenomenología: Recuerdos de tipo traumático en ex-combatientes y veteranos de la Guerra de las Malvinas. Psyke; 23:1-13.