CHAPTER 4

PSYCHOLOGICAL STRESS

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INTRODUCTION

This chapter pursues three questions. Whether the interviewee had problems stemming from the separation from his/her family and if so, which ones? Whether the interviewee had any psy chological problem and stress during deployment and if any, how did the interviewee face them? And lastly: Could the soldier please tell about the re-adaptation to normal life after the mission?

The three questions differ in several aspects. The first question touches questions regarding general life stress and in this way points to specific causes for problems, i.e. soldiers´ separation from family no matter when, how, and for how long. The next asks for any problem or stress experienced duringdeployment and how the soldier has dealt with them; the last question asks veterans to tell about both good and bad experiences to normal life after the mission? The last two questions relate specifically to during and after, while the first question can relate to all three periods as long as the soldier is away from home.

It is argued that the three phases of deployment, *before – during – after*, imply different types of problems/stress and that they are caused by stress-factors or stressors at specific levels. In table 1 the distinction is made distributing problems by time and causes by levels.

**Table 1** - The Hypothesized Pattern of Problems/Stress and Stressors

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Levels of stressors | Problems of Deployment | | |
| Q 14. Family separation problems Before and during | Q 15. Psychological Problems  During | Q 16. Re-adaptation Experiences After |
| Society |  |  | \* |
| Organization |  | \* |  |
| Person | \* |  |  |

Table 1 illustrates the first hypothesis that problems relate to specific phases of deployment and levels of causes or stressors. For instance, it is argued that problems *before* deployment have mainly personal life stress reasons, i.e. family; problems *during* deployment stem from the dangers abroad and the military organization with its rules and regulations; problems *after* deployment come from society due to its lack of support and understanding for the veteran.

A second hypothesis is that a problem caused by a stressor is normally coped with “right on,” i.e. dealt with at the same level from where it came. For instance, family separation is a stressor at the personal level and is coped with at the same level by discussing the problems with the family.

A third hypothesis is that a stressor in one period is not necessarily a stressor in another, i.e. family may be a stressor before and during deployment but a helper after.

This chapter consists of four parts: A theoretical presentation on stress literature, an overview of the combined results for all three questions, a presentation of different problems for each question illuminated by cited soldiers´ remarks including their coping strategies, and finally a discussion of the validity of the three hypotheses.

RESEARCH ON THE RELATION BETWEEN WAR AND COMBAT STRESS

Research on the perception of soldiers’ stress by Western armed forces handling of their soldiers can be divided into different periods, which mark dif fe rences in the wars’ purpose, spirit, morale, cohesion, recruitment, training, leadership, organi zation and technologies. Specific stressors of combat change with these periods and have deep impact on the capacity of the soldier, the family of the soldier and of civil society to cope combat stress.

During WWI, doctrine held that soldiers were personally motivated to fight. Accordingly, soldiers unable to fight due to combat stress caused by, for instance, ‘shell shock’ were rejected and called ‘cowardice’, and were often executed1.

Later, as a result of the research carried out during WWII the

––––––––––––––––––––––– 1 Birenbaum, 1994: 1484.

doctrine from WWI that men fought for moral reasons such as patriotism, esprit de corps, pride and leadership was changed in favor of small-group psychology2. The new explanation is best articulated in the “Big Three” studies on combat motivation, demotivation, wellbeing and stress: S.L.A. Marshall’s study on American soldiers fighting in the Pacific theatre[[1]](#footnote-1), the four volumes edited by S.A. Stouffer, published as one of the first modern scientific research projects in military unit cohesion[[2]](#footnote-2) and finally the study of combat motivation and disintegration in the Wehrmacht by Shils and Janowitz[[3]](#footnote-3). Their research partly based on primary group theory provided components for a better understanding and measurement of military performance and stress, was based on the integrity of the soldier’s primary group and not on the quality of each soldier.

After WW II much research on the performance of soldiers was related to small group studies where the definition of cohesion, motivation and combat stress came to include multiple other concepts and factors[[4]](#footnote-4).

From around 1980 the concept of PTSD was introduced which again changed the views on combat motivation and combat breakdown according to Wessely[[5]](#footnote-5): “Military academics continued to instruct on the importance of the primary group, and military training

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2 Simon Wessely, ‘Twentieth-century Theories on Combat Motivation and Breakdown’, *Journal of Contemporary History*, 2006, 41:268; Ben Shephard, ‘Pitiless psychology: the role of prevention in British military psychiatry in the Second World War’, *History of Psychiatry*, 1999, 10: 491; Ted Bogacz, ‘War Neurosis and Cultural Change in England, 1914-22: The Work of the War

Office Committee of Enquiry into Shell-Shock’, *Journal of Contemporary History*, Vol. 24, No. 2, Studies of War (Apr., 1989), pp. 227-256

remained centered on the creation of primary groups, often via the deliberate creation of adversity. Yet the new psychiatric concepts of breakdown in wartime now emphasized individual factors – most importantly the personal experience of battle trauma. The influence of the group, and the failure of the group, is largely ignored in contemporary psychiatric formulations of trauma-induced breakdown. PTSD is seen instead as the interaction between a person and his or her exposures to traumatic events.”[[6]](#footnote-6) Two research-positions emerged from the simple question: whether primary group cohesion or personal qualities was the more decisive factor for soldiers’ performance.

So today, one will find one group of researchers who argues that *social cohesion*is relevant to performance: ‘Cohesion and morale have been found to be associated with combat effectiveness, job performance, overall well-being, and satisfaction’[[7]](#footnote-7), and another group who argue just the opposite: ‘Researchers have repeatedly found that (1) task cohesion has a modest but reliable correlation with group performance, whereas (2) social cohesion has no reliable correlation with performance and, at high levels (“clubbing”), can even undermine task performance’[[8]](#footnote-8).

Andrews et al. indicate an answer to the problem, when they state, that the discrepant findings in the literature concerning prevalence to some extent can be explained as a matter of definition[[9]](#footnote-9).

So today, research on military stress can be related to two different perceptions of cohesion: a horizontal *social* cohesion or vertical *task* cohesion[[10]](#footnote-10). Where the horizontal research position mostly is carried

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out as field studies with *direct* observations of the empirical life-expressions of the research objects, research into the vertical task cohesion typically uses indirect observation in the use of a questionnaire. The two different theoretical positions can be seen as either a rationalistic view (Esprit de Corps) or an empirical view (social cohesion) on the performance of soldiers. This view reflects the fundamental difference between the logic of concepts and the empirical actions of psychology and sociology13. The logic of concepts is not empirical science and does not deal with actually acting objects. It explores idealistic laws and structures and this research is characterized by its inner logic. In contrast, psychology and sociology are empirical sciences that explore the behavior of actual human individuals and groups14.

As a consequence research on military stress has to be aware of the concepts and definitions of different periods as they decide research objects and methodologies.

The present horizontal cohesion research using direct observation resemblances the ‘Big Three’ approach by relating soldiers’ behavior to the primary group[[11]](#footnote-11) and focus soldiers’ behavior as a results of bodily routines, tra ditions, rituals, symbols all of which eventually transforms into the logical theoretical concepts of the researcher.

The present vertical cohesion research using individual factor analysis here presented in before, during and after deployment, results show that ‘general life stressors’[[12]](#footnote-12),[[13]](#footnote-13),[[14]](#footnote-14) are: Before deployment

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1. Zahavi, Dan. *Husserls fænomenologi* (Viborg: Gyldendal 2001) p. 15
2. Kold, Claus, ‘Synthetic Soldiers and A Priori Commands - Opposing Positions for Observing the Military?’, *Security Studies*, Forthcoming

psychiatric problems[[15]](#footnote-15)19,20 low education, being single,21,22,23 and repeated deployments.24

“Erase”*.* More studies into this phase find that general life stressors, unit cohesion, reports of patriotism and nationalism are predictive of predeployment morale. They also find that positive military experiences, general overseas military stressors, and postdeployment unit cohesion are significant predictors of postdeployment morale.[[16]](#footnote-16) On the negative side more studies find empirical evidence indicating that negativism, vulnerability and neuroticism is interacting with trauma exposure in the prediction of PTSD.[[17]](#footnote-17)

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Life Changes: Development of the Life Experiences Survey’, *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*, 1978, Vol. 46, No. 5, pp. 932 to 946

1. Ward, W. ‘Psychiatric Morbidity in Australian Veterans of the United Nations Peacekeeping Force in Somalia’, *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Psychiatry*, 1997, 31, pp. 184-193
2. Elhai, J. D., J. D. Richardson, D. J. Pedlar, ‘Predictors of General Medical and Psychological Treatment use among a National Sample of Peacekeeping Veterans with Health Problems’, *Journal of Anxiety Disorders*, 2007, No. 21, pp. 580-589
3. Bramsen, I. A.J.E. Dirkzwager, H.M. van der Ploeg, ‘Predeployment Personality Traits and Exposure to Trauma as Predictors of Posttraumatic Stress Symptoms: A Prospective Study of Former Peacekeepers’, *The American Journal of Psychiatry*, Jul, 2000, 157, 7, pp. 1115
4. Thoresen, S., L. Mehlum, Bjørn Møller, ‘Suicide in Peacekeepers’, *Social Psychiatry and Psychiatric Epidemiology*, 10/2003; 38(11):605-610. DOI:10.1007/s00127-003-0687-3
5. Richardson, J. D., J. A. Naifeh, J. D. Elhai, ‘Posttraumatic Stress Disorder and Associated Risk Factors in Canadian Peacekeeping Veterans With HealthRelated Disabilities’, *La Revue canadienne de psychiatrie, 2007, Vol. 52, No. 8*

*During deployment.* Central findings are that intensity of combat is the main determinant of behavioral health challenges, followed by duration of operation, deployment frequency, time between deployments.27 Other central factors are feelings of being threatened, being powerless, perception of the mission as meaningless, and having no control over the situation.28 This state of stress can however be buffered by ‘hardiness’29 and ‘self-engagement’ during deployment.30 Peace operations seem to stress soldiers in combining potentially threatening situations with the task of self-control. This type of stress has been termed the *UN soldier stress syndrome*.[[18]](#footnote-18) Peace operations also expose soldiers to cumulative stress resulting from boredom.[[19]](#footnote-19),[[20]](#footnote-20)

*After deployment*. Correlates of distress and PTSD symptoms and exposure of traumatic events during deployment, number of deployments, pre-deployments personally traits or disorder, and postdeployment stressors. On the positive side, perceived meaningful missions[[21]](#footnote-21), post-deployment social supports, and positive perception

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1. Castro, Gurk, Traumatology, 2007, Vol. 13, No. 4, pp. 6-23
2. Bramsen, I. A.J.E. Dirkzwager, H.M. van der Ploeg, ‘Predeployment Personality Traits and Exposure to Trauma as Predictors of Posttraumatic Stress Symptoms: A Prospective Study of Former Peacekeepers’, *The American Journal of Psychiatry*, Jul, 2000, 157, 7, pp. 1115
3. Adler A.B., Carol A. Dolan, ‘Military Hardiness as a Buffer of Psychological Health on Return from Deployment’, *Military Medicine*, 2006, 171, 2:93
4. Britt, T.W., P.D. Bliese, ‘Testing the Stress-Buffering Effects of Self Engagement Among Soldiers on a Military Operation’ *Journal of Personality*, 2003, 71:2, April

of homecoming35,36 reduce the likelihood of distress and PTSD. On the negative side, some soldiers report ‘self-disclosure’37, ‘denial’ and ‘numbing’relations with their spouse, children, family and friends38 Other soldiers report misuse of alcohol or other kinds of misuse.39 Some soldiers report stress and PTSD even if they have not been exposed to combat or other traumatic situations.40

A comparison of the scientific results from WW I till today on reasons for soldiers stress and PTSD must take into consideration the different types of warfare and armed conflicts such as ‘new wars’ and ‘peace operations.’ Accordingly, the importance of the qualities of the individual soldier versus the primary group has changed. Therefore, it is difficult to compare direct observations of exhausted and stressed soldiers in battle at Verdun with a questionnaire of stressed and depressed drone pilots placed in a control center in Texas.

METHOD

The method used in this chapter went through three phases. First the three questions were isolated from the other questions of the

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1. Bolton, E. E., D. M. Glenn, S. Orsillo, L. Roemer, ‘The Impact of Homecoming Reception on the Adaptation of Peacekeepers Following Deployment’, *Military Psychology*, 2002, 14(3), 241-252
2. Sareen, Stein, Thoresen, Belik, Zamorski, Asmundson, Canadian Journal of Psychiatry; Jul. 2010; 55, 7, 464-472, p. 464
3. Bolton, E. B., D. M. Glenn, S. Orsillo, L. Roemer, B. Litz, ‘The Relationship Between Self-Disclosure and Symptoms of Posttraumatic Stress Disorder in Peacekeepers Deployed to Somalia’, *Journal of Traumatic Stress*, Vol. 16, No. 3, June 2003, pp. 203-210
4. Ruscio, A. M. F. W. Weathers, L. A. King, and D. W. King, ‘Male WarZone Veterans’ Perceived Relationships With Their Children: The Importance of Emotional Numbing’, *Journal of Traumatic Stress*, October 2001, Vol. 15, No. 5
5. Goodwin, L., M. Jones, R. J. Rona, J. Sundin, S. Wessely, N. T. Fear, ‘Prevalence of Delayed-Onset Posttraumatic Stress Disorder in Military Personnel: Is There Evidence for This Disorder?’, *The Journal of Nervous and Mental Disease*, 2012, Vol. 200, No. 5
6. Frueh, Elhai, Graubaugh, Monnier, Kashdan, Sauvageot, Hamner, Burkett, Arana, Journal of Psychiatry (2005), 186, 467-472

survey, and then imported into an Excel spreadsheet. The little differences in categories between the countries contri bu tions’ were changed into common military categories of for instance the names for different levels of education. Also different names occurred for military rank, which were aligned.

After this, the spreadsheet was ready to be imported into NVivo 9. The questions were by NVivo separated into two different categories: descriptive and codeable categories. For the codeable answers a first basic analysis was done using NVivo’s function for word frequency, resulting in different words standing out as a category in the soldiers’ answers.

Next phase was manual coding which resulted in new additional categories emerging which the NVivo program was not capable of identifying. This coding process is a recursive and iterative process in which major categories and different gaps in knowledge are identified. This recursive process continues until no new categories are generated and the sampling is ended. As a consequence of format limi tation this presentation only includes the major categories. References are referred to as ‘r’ before the numbers of word counts.

OVERVIEW OF CURRENT STUDY

The 542 soldiers answers were here analyzed as one sample. To each question the soldiers had four response-options: “No,” “Normal,” “Yes/High” and “No answer.” The “No” and “No answer” were very seldom followed by comments in contrast to the “Normal” and “Yes/High” answers. The term “problem” and “stress” covers the same phenomenon. The distribution of answers from the 542 soldiers to the three questions is listed in table 2, below.

Table 2 shows that a majority of the answers, 62 % in Q 14, 73 % in Q 15, and 62 % in Q 16, held “No” or “No answer” indicating that two out of three answers expressed no problems/stress, at all.

Reversely, 38 % of the answers in Q 14, 27 % in Q 15, and 38 % in Q 16 expressed “Normal” problems and “Yes/High” problems/stress as shown in italics. So in average, three out of ten answers express problems/stress, but more answers do so before and after deployment with respectively 38 % and 38 % than during with only 27 %.

**Table 2** - Reported Problems, Stress and Re-Adaption by 542 Soldiers

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | Q 14  Whether the interviewee had problems resulting from the long separation from his/her family and if so, what ones | Q 15  Whether the interviewee had psy cho logical problem and stress during the mission? If any, how did the interviewee face them? | Q 16  Could the soldier please tell about the re-adaptation to normal life after the mission |
| No N/% | 245 / 45 % | 273 / 51 % | 139 / 26 % |
| Normal N/% | **85 / 16 %** | **94 / 17 %** | **72 / 13 %** |
| Yes/High N/% | **119 / 22 %** | **55 / 10 %** | **135 / 25 %** |
| No answer N/% | 91 / 17 % | 118 / 22 % | 194 / 36 % |
| Total N/% | 542 / 100 % | 542 / 100 % | 542 / 100 % |

Another observation is that more soldiers have answered Q 14 than Q 15 and 16. One explanation could be that Q 14 includes problems felt by both the soldier and his/her family members, as well, whereas problems in Q 15 and 16 are only related to the individual soldier. Consequently, in Q 14 more soldiers may state problems both personally and problems felt by his family. A third reason for the 38 % answers of the soldiers’, answering they have problems, is that the soldiers foresee problems to arise when abroad and thus tell about them.

Another overview is given by focusing only on the NVivo program that does not count each person’s answers as statistical ‘yes’ or ‘no’ answers, but looks at the *discourse*. This focus makes it possible for the soldier to give more and even contradictive answers to one question. The NVivo program accumulates whenever the themes of the soldiers’ discourse group round a specific problem. It reveals the magnitude of a specific problem. The most shared problems in each of the three Qs are distributed along the three levels of stressors and their coping strategies are listed in table 3 below.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **T**  **a**  **b**  **l**  **e**    **3**  -    I  m  p  o  r  t  a  n  t    P  r  o  b  l  e  m  s  /  S  t  r  e  s  s  o  r  s    a  n  d    T  h  e  i  r    C  o  p  i  n  g    S  t  r  a  t  e  g  i  e  s | |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  | | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | | Q    1  6 | C  o  u  l  d    t  h  e    s  o  l  d  i  e  r    p  l  e  a  s  e    t  e  l  l    a  b  o  u  t    t  h  e    r  e  - | | a  d  a  p  t  a  t  i  o  n    t  o    n  o  r  m  a  l    l  i  f  e    a  f  t  e  r  t  h  e    m  i  s  - | | s  i  o  n | C  o  p  i  n  g    s  t  r  a  t  e  g  i  e  s | (  4  6  ) | C  i  v  i  l  i  a  n    l  i  f  e |  |  |  | | | E  x  p  e  r  i  e  n  c  e | |  | F  a  m  i  l  y    s  u  p  p  o  r  t | | | | R  e  -  a  d  a  p  t  i  o  n    p  r  o  - | b  l  e  m  s    (  2  0  7  ) | F  i  n  d    b  a  c  k    t  o    C  i  v  i  - | l  i  a  n    r  o  u  t  i  n  e    l  i  f  e | (  4  3  ) | R  e  t  u  r  n    t  o    m  i  l  i  t  a  r  y |  | o  r  g  a  n  i  z  a  t  i  o  n    (  2  0  ) | W  i  t  h    C  i  v  i  l  i  a  n    L  i  f  e  (  4  3  ) | | S  y  m  p  t  o  m  s    (  4  3  ) | I  n    g  e  n  e  r  a  l    (  3  8  )  W  i  t  h    F  a  m  i  l  y    l  i  f  e  (  3  4  ) | | | | Q    1  5 | W  h  e  t  h  e  r    t  h  e    i  n  t  e  r  v  i  e  w  e  e    h  a  d    p  s  y    c  h  o    - | l  o  g  i  c  a  l    p  r  o  b  l  e  m    a  n  d    s  t  r  e  s  s    d  u  r  i  n  g  t  h  e | | m  i  s  s  i  o  n  ?    I  f    a  n  y  ,    h  o  w    d  i  d    t  h  e    i  n  t  e  r  v  i  e  w  e  e | f  a  c  e    t  h  e  m  ?    (  =  c  o  p  i  n  g    s  t  r  a  t  e  g  y  ) | C  o  p  i  n  g    s  t  r  a  t  e  g  i  e  s | (  1  8  5  ) |  |  |  | R  e  l  a  t  e    t  o    c  o  l  l  e  a  g  u  e  s |  | T  e  a  m    s  p  o  r  t | I  n  d  i  v  i  d  u  a  l    s  p  o  r  t | | | | | N  o  n  -  a  t  t  a  c  h  m  e  n  t | | P  s  y  c  h  o  l  o  g  i  c  a  l    p  r  o  - | b  l  e  m  s    (  1  4  1  ) |  |  |  | V  i  o  l  e  n  c  e  ,    o  p  e  r  a  -  t  i  o  n  s  , | M  i  l  i  t  a  r  y    L  e  a  d  e  r  s  h  i  p | C  o  n  s  t  a  n  t  l  y    a  t    a  l  e  r  t | D  a  n  g  e  r  s | B  u  d  d  y    c  o  n  c  e  r  n | | | | M  i  s  s  i  n  g    f  a  m  i  l  y | | Q    1  4 | W  h  e  t  h  e  r    t  h  e    i  n  t  e  r  v  i  e  w  e  e    h  a  d    p  r  o  b  l  e  m  s | | r  e  s  u  l  t  i  n  g    f  r  o  m    t  h  e    l  o  n  g    s  e  p  a  r  a  t  i  o  n    f  r  o  m | | h  i  s  /  h  e  r    f  a  m  i  l  y    a  n  d    i  f    s  o  ,    w  h  a  t    o  n  e  s | C  o  p  i  n  g    s  t  r  a  t  e  g  i  e  s | (  8  0  ) |  |  |  |  | |  | C  o  m  m  u  n  i  c  a  t  e    b  a  c  k | h  o  m  e | | D  u  t  y | | C  o  m  r  a  d  e  s | | F  a  m  i  l  y    s  e  p  a  r  a  t  i  o  n | p  r  o  b  l  e  m  s    (  2  0  4  ) |  |  |  |  | |  | F  a  m  i  l  y  -  a  b  s  e  n  c  e    (  a  s  a    p  r  o  b  l  e  m  )    (  1  4  7  )  F  a  m  i  l  y    (  a  s    a    s  t  r  e  s  - | | s  o  r  ) | (  D  i  v  o  r  c  e  )    (  8  1  ) | D  i  s  t  a  n  c  e  /  D  u  r  a  t  i  o  n  (  8  1  ) | | |  | | | | | | M  a  j  o  r | p  r  o  b  l  e  m  s | S  o  c  i  e  t  y |  |  | M  i  l  i  t  a  r  y | |  | P  e  r  s  o  n  a  l | |  |  |  | | |

Table 3 shows, in the second row of “Major problems” that the most stressful problem is family with 204 answers followed by *readaption* with 187 answers and psychological problems mentioned in 141 answers. As more answers express problems in Q 14 and Q 16 than in Q 15 it indicates that soldiers abroad in general feel fewer psychological problems than at home.

The last three rows in table 3 show specific problems and coping strategies within the three phases of deployment and at all three levels of stressors. In Q 14 is listed 204 problems vs. 80 coping strategies, in Q 15 the figures are 141 vs. 185, and in Q 16 207 vs. 46. The relation between the number of coping strategies to problems shows a ratio for Q 14 at 39 %, for Q 15 131 %, and for Q 16 at 22 %. So abroad, fewer problems are coped with by more strategies than before and after deployment. The answers points to soldiers being psychologically better off abroad than at home, maybe because of the military being aware of military stress thus teaching the soldiers different coping strategies which are then facilitated during deployment. This result can explain a better understanding and closer ties among soldiers when abroad than at home. The many coping strategies abroad can also be seen as a result of a pressure in three different ways: An *external* pressure made by the dangerous situation in an often hostile and violent area shared by all soldiers for which reason they will help each other. An *internal* pressure created by the primary group feeling based on a mutual dependency for the group to survive[[22]](#footnote-22). A *personal* pressure created by the soldier’s own expectations to him-/herself thinking to make a difference by doing something important, etc. Contrary to this, the family as an institution has no stress strategy. The practices for coping with military stress in the family seem to be tacit and weak.

Now, the causes for problems exemplified through soldiers´ own remarks and their coping strategies for each of the three questions will be presented.

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Q 14. Family Separation Before and During Deployment

In Q 14, 245 answers of the interviewed 542 soldiers were “No problem” and 91 “No Answer,” while 85 answers were “Normal Problems,” 119 “Yes/High Problem”, and 84 answers held coping strategies. However, if a “No Answer” includes a remark such as: “Not beyond the normal deprivation, as you will normally experience” (DKA5) it will count for a “Yes.”

Two quotations illustrate family separation problems expressed in 38 % of the answers: “Right now, I’m a little bit used to it, but I’m a little home sick sometimes” (PHC02) and “No specific problems, but longer separation does affect your family life.” (SIC25).

But family separation is not only a problem it is a stressor, as well, creating 7 other problems. First, *Children.* Absence in daily life from children causes concern for soldiers: “Yes, I had minor problems where my child got seriously ill and there was nothing I could do to be there. Being away from you family does have an effect” (SAB6) or “My eldest son has had adaptation problems in the school during my absences. He became more vio lent and sad” (SPAB14) or “My children grew without me at their side. As a result, I don’t have a close relationship with my son” (PHC08). These remarks illustrate that separation now is a stressor causing other no matter nationality, age, gender, rank, or service.

Family separation is also a stressor as it excludes soldiers from

*Life Events* such as christening, weddings, birthdays, funerals, health, etc*.*These problems are often seen in connection with the demands from the military work and values: “It was a problem, because my son had an injury that he was even operated for on his leg in my absence. It was not easy for me to cope in the deployment” (SAC43). So, the stressor is not only the absence as such but its conflict with the work and values of a professional soldier. We can talk about “double loyalty” towards family and the armed forces.

A third type of problem created by family separation is the *Greedy Military Institution* competing with the family for the presence of the soldier: “That’s our problem in the military. Even if you’re close to your family, our job requires us to go. We consider the family as second priority” (PHC01), or “…but what can you do, you must serve your country” (SAC8) even if a heavy price has to be paid for by the soldier. One soldier sought to resolve the tension this way: “I always set my mind that my first priority is my work and second is my family. I believe that a “good soldier is a good father”” (PHC13). Here, the problem is solved by aggregating the two roles of ‘father’ and ‘soldier’ into one.

Absence for longer periods also makes it sometimes difficult for the soldier to *redefine his/hers former* practical and emotional *position in the family*: “After returning, it has been difficult to find my place in the family again. They learn to cope without father / husband so there is not much ‘space’ when you come home” (DKC18). Another soldier likewise says: “I could not play a father’s role” (KRC09).

A fifth family problem is *Separation* and *Divorce.* More soldiers explain divorce and separation as a result of their deployment: “I have had problems. Actually I divorced mainly due to the mission.” (SPAB29), or “…if you are married, there is cheating by you in the mission area and also the partner back home.” (SAC28); “My wife sometimes gets suspicious; she visited me in Mindanao then to check if I had a mistress.” (PHC15) Of course this affects the morale of the soldiers as a major tells from his experience as a leader: “Some of them lost their girlfriends or wives during their mission in Afghanistan what caused also some discipline problems” (SIC38).

*Duration of the absence period* is almost referred to whenever separation is mentioned, but then often related to other factors, such as distance and practical possibilities for going home or the lack of having visitors: “…sometimes I couldn’t go home because it’s raining too hard and the road going down becomes very treacherous” (PHC05).

The seventh problem is *First Mission*. It is the hardest mission both to the family and the soldier: “The first mission is usually the hardest; the third is almost a routine for me” (SIC34). But a difference between the three services seems to exist as navy personal is more used to being separated for longer periods: “We are accustomed to overcome those problems” (ITB06). However, it is not the fear of violence that creates stress but three other types of fear: *Personal fear* such as anxiety, fear, and nervous ness due to the fact of always being on the alert, *related family feelings* such as homesickness, missing the family and feeling lonely and *lack of control* of one’s situation abroad and at home: “I was not able to render help in case of family difficulties. I felt continuous tension both physically and mentally” (KRA08).

Three major coping strategies towards problems of separation are identified. First, *to communicate back home*: “It was good that there were internet in the base, which provided contact with the family” (BGA17). Second, to see the separation as a duty: “As a soldier I felt it is my duty … to become a soldier you must accept such things at any time” (SAC4). Third, to relate to fellow soldiers: “This problem never affected my duty because of the presence of other soldiers in the team. In the first place, separation from the family is part of our duty” (PHC10).

To conclude Q 14, family separation is a problem and/or a stressor expressed in 38 % of the answers. The 7 problems created by family separation such as absence from children and life events, the greedy military institution, redefining one´s place in family, divorce, and the first mission indicates that the separation is a minor problem in itself, but a major factor as a stressor. Three coping strategies were identified: to communicate back home, to see the absence as a duty, and relate to other soldiers, where the first and last are found at the organizational level.

Q 15. Psychological Stress/Problems During Deployment

In Q 15 273 answers of the interviewed 542 soldiers were “No problem” and 118 “No Answer,” while 94 answers held “Yes, Normal stress, could cope,” 38 ”Stress was High,” and 17 “Stress was High and a Problem,” cfr. table 2. The combined “No” and “No Answer” amounted to 73 %, whereas 27 % mentioned psychological problem.

Many causes for stress during deployment can be listed. First, *manifest and latent dangers* from attacks in op er ations, snipers, suicide bombers, mines, etc. made soldiers fear for their lives and constantly stay on the alert and acting carefully, as “carelessness would be fatal” (BGA2). This risk feeling was also present in no risk situations: “I had a stress from possible terrorist attacks by poisoning foods, so I con duc ted food inspection very carefully” (KRC09) which caused a “sense of risk and frequent fati gue” (BGC15). The stress was caused by the “desire [among] all of us to return alive and well” (BGC2) and the uncertainty of the situation: “…you never know when a suicide bomber will strike and if you have intelligence in this way stress is even higher” (SIC23) and “I had a great stress from potential attacks from the enemy. I thought it was difficult to overcome and the only solution was to adapt to the given situation” (KRA04).

Another cause for stress during deployment is *Buddy Concern*: “My fellow soldier was wounded during an encounter. We requested for medical assistance but it was taking so long to arrive. We were so worried he might die. But we applied first aid first” (PHC07) and “The most stressful situations were when Italians and Spanish had victims at the same roads where Slovenians were also patrolling” (SIC46). Buddy concern goes for allied soldiers, too.

A third cause indirectly pointed at is the *inex peri enced leadership* when the soldier expects the officer in charge to deal with his/hers stress and even the stress of the whole combat group: “Being a chief (major) of a company you (must) reduce stress. So, if a unit has been in battle – they debrief. When we have so many with stress it is because we have big pro blems: 5 kil led, 70 wounded in Afghanistan team 9. 7-8 psychologists down here-Soldiers are facing completely different things in Afghanistan than in 2 WW” (DKC22).

A fourth reason for stress is the new *type of operation* with its occasional foes in the conflict with no battle front and mixed operative goals other than to defeat an enemy, but still with modern weaponry and gear as expressed here.

A fifth cause for stress was the *social condi ti ons abroad*: “Doing CMO (Civil Military Operations) exposes me to the poverty of the people in the coun try. There is nothing we can do but to accept that ours is a poor country.” (PHIB04) and “The killings of women and children, this we face by going to talk the rebels to stop the killings” (SAC44).

A sixth stressor during deployment was *Missing Family*: “Only stress if you family is ok back home. If you can contact them every day it becomes easier” (SAA17), “You don’t have problems because you go on a peace mission, but because it means being four months far from home” (SPAB02), “the family so far from me, not being able to be with them and help then in the difficulties” (SPAC17), and “Due to medical problems of my family, I was subjected to psychological problems and had pills” (TURA21).

The most important coping strategy is *Sport and Exercise* mentioned twice as much as any other strategy: “I tried to overcome stress by sports” (KRB05), “You need to take part in any activities to make your mission your second home, then you won’t have any problems” (SAC41), and “To overcome you must be ful ly active or be busy with things that take your mind of from home” (SAA6). The second coping strategy is *establishing good relations to colleagues*:

“Got together with good colleagues who were open-minded” (KRC30). Here words like ‘team’, ‘friends’, ‘colleagues’ or ‘mates’ are central refe ren ces. Good relations to other professions and military leaders were essential, too: “We do have psychologists, social workers, and chap lains on the ground ready and willing to support you during those times” (SAC26) and “When you have a com mander who is supportive, you will enjoy deployment” (SAC37). A third coping strategy is to stay morally firm and dis ci plin ed and not to get personally emotional or engaged: “Many soldiers fight stress by keeping their emotions at bay” (PHC17) and “We’re soldiers, I think we’re prepared” (SPAA05).

To conclude, the main stressor during deployment is manifest and latent dangers of life, buddy concern, inexperienced military leadership, asymmetric warfare, social conditions abroad, and missing family. Three major coping strategies were found to be sport and exercise, good relations to colleagues and non-attachment.

Q 16. Re-Adaption Experiences After Deployment

In Q 16 139 answers of the interviewed 542 soldiers were “No problem” and 204 “No Answer,” while 29 answers held “Yes, I Had a Problem,” 43 “Symptoms,” 38 “Had Period of Re-adaption, in general,” 34 had specific re-adaption problems with “Family Life,” 43 with “Civilian Life,” and 20 “Going Back to Own Military Organization.” So, 62 % of all the answers reported no re-adaption problems, 38 % did so 4 out of 10 answers expressed problems with re-adaption. Contrary to Q 14 and 15, the “No problem” with readaption answers in Q 16 was often accompanied by remarks such as ‘easy’, ‘quickly, and ‘fast.’ As in Q 14 and 15, Q 16 makes a distinction between re-adaption as a problem and a cause for creating problems with family, military organization, civilian life. Even if both positive and negative experiences from the re-adaption process were asked for, most answers expressed the problems.

Re-adaption is a task for each soldier to solve on many levels. Some soldiers expect to re-adapt overnight: “Pro blems in the first days only” (ITC32) and “Two days after I re turn ed home my first child was born, so I really did not have any special time available to adapt back to the home routine” (SIC14). Others foresee several months to pass before being back to nor mal. Here, problems of readaption become a self-fulfilling prophecy surely expected to occur and often depending on the deployment period: “The longer the de ploy ment period, the longer it seems to take for re-adaptation” (SAA18), “Took about a month to get back into normal life and to adapt to having a family around you again” (SAC03), and “When I come home. I want to work for a week just to get used to normal life again. And then 14 days on vacation” (DKC1, *4 deployments).*

More stressors causing re-adaption problems can be listed. First, *Battle-mind*, which is caused by the transition from high-pitched military operations to a slower, non-violent civilian every-day life: “Due to the large workload and the fact that you are constantly ‘on’, it was challenging to come home to a silent and quiet work and family life, where you have to deal with “little unimportant stuff” where it does not apply life or death” (DKA5), “In the first days after the mission you look around in a very attentive way, you control the road, etc. At the end you become calm again” (ITC29), and “The more the mission lasts, more difficult it is to get re-adapted,” (SIC34).

Another factor creating re-adaption problems is *Back to Family Life* demanding the soldier to find his/hers role in the family, again: “The return was rather uneasy to me, I wasn’t accustomed to the presence of a little baby, all the world was turning around her. I felt rather marginalized” (Italy, male, tenant, army) and “But the others (in the family) were at work, so I took another job to pass the time off/vacation. The girlfriend was at work and did not have time” (DKC6) and “I felt like I’m useless, because my duties were divided between other family members and on the workplace happened the same” (BGC7).

A third cause for re-adaption problems is *Civilian Life*, sometimes seen as “From the ashes to the fire in 24 hours” (DKC16) and its institutions and values: “I’m irritated by the press and media I am disgusted by people’s constant interest in money and consumption. The ideals I worked for at times seem distant in our society. It is as if there is a civilian versus a military code of honor and ideal.” (DKC20), I had “to adapt to ‘abundance’.” (SAB5), and “When I go home and join with civilians, I have trouble adjusting because I can’t do away with my military discipline” (PHC23).

A fourth cause for the veteran’s re-adaption problems is the *Mi-*

*litary Organization*: “The problems were only in Army, because they didn’t know what to do with us when we returned from the mission. After return, we were ordered to do some stupid tasks.” (SIC32), “It was very difficult for me to deal with the jealousy of some of my superiors for the fact that they have no mission behind and because of the many rewards that I came back from the mis sion, but unfortunately they (rewards) were not perceived well by them (superiors). I tried not to highlight my participation in the mission and awards, which I was honored” (BGC21).

More soldiers identify both the military and the family as greedy institutions with opposing and absolute demands to the soldier: “When I go home, I just try to get along with everybody. I must be the one to adjust to them. Then, when I come back again to the camp, I switch focus to my work” (PHC24). “Family” does not always win this battle no matter the gender: “I really lacked and missed all the routines, work colleagues, the ship and all that comes with sailing” (DKB3).

Two coping strategies are essential for the re-adaption of veterans. First, *Experience*: “After ISAF 9 there has not really been a problem. Knew just what it was like coming home” (DKC8), “After the first mission, some problems, but the second time was easy” (ITC28), and “I am now used to leading an “abnormal life” during operations. It gets easier as you do more of it” (PHC06). Second, *Family*: “I readapted very easy. Family very supportive and always willing to listen to my experiences” (SAB11) and “The family is the best antidote. Things are arranged by themselves. I guess people who do not have many commitments are adapting more difficult” (BGA17).

To conclude, 38 % of all the answers referred to re-adaption as a problem or a cause for other types of problems such as battle-mind orientation, role in family, the civil society with its institutions and values and the military organization back home. Here, family and military were by some veterans perceived as greedy institutions competing for the soldier’s time and focus. Two coping strategies were identified Experience and Family support.

DISCUSSION

Even if the soldiers have experienced different mission types the answers they choose to give have some resemblances in what they emp hasize as stressors and as coping strategies. Still, some of the answers indicate that different stressors exist between war and peace operations, see PHIB04’s and SAC44’s answers, p. 246.

In general, in the open ended answers of the soldiers they gave answers which resemble the factors found in research using individual factor analysis. This resemblance can be found in that the soldiers themselves choose to talk about stress factors such as not participating in life events and factors related to family, such as divorce or illness stressing them even before deployment; and talking about violent incidents as the main stressor during deployment. They also themselves talked about feeling ‘marginalized’ in the life of the family after returning from deployment, see DKC6, p. 248; an answer which can be interpreted as self-disclosure.

More of the soldiers’ answers also indicate the findings of primary group research in that they talk about the feelings of buddy concern as a stressor, leadership and different forms of socializing as a coping strategy during deployment.

*Hypotheses*

Our first hypothesis was that *problems were related to specific phases of deployment and levels of causes or stressors*, cfr. table 1 above is partly confirmed in all three Q, as shown in table 4.

**Table 4** - The Found Pattern of Problems/Stress and Stressors

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Levels of stressors | Problems of Deployment | | |
| Q 14. Family separation problems Before and during | Q 15. Psychological Problems  During | Q 16. Re-adaptation Experiences After |
| Society |  |  | \*A |
| Organization |  | \*A | \*C |
| Person | \* A | \*B | \*B |

Table 4 illustrate by “\*A” that *Family* is both a problem and a stressor before (and during) deployment in Q 14 at the personal level. In Q 15, *Dangers, Buddy Concern and Military Leadership* are problems and stressors at the organizational level. The dominating problems and stressors in Q 16 are *Battle Mind, Family Life* and *Greedy Institutions* (meaning the veteran has to face two basic but very different institutions). Both, Q 15 and Q 16 deviate from the hypothesized pattern. In Q 15, psychological problems and stressors are found at the personal level, as well, as indicated by “\*B” and in Q 16, re-adaption problems are found at all three levels illustrated by “\*B” and “\*C” Table 4 moreover shows that problems and stressors occur at the personal level in all three Qs, cfr. “\*B”. In short, the “B” and “C” contradict the first hypothesis.

Several points of criticism can be listed. As presented above the term “stress” is not well-defined, neither is the term “deployment.” There are different types of deployments. Some soldiers are deployed to remote territories to combat insurgents “right on,” while others live in comfortable barracks doing administrative work in a nice office, etc. This difference – together with various national values, military recruitment, education, and career - influences the magnitude and type of problems.

The second hypothesis that *problems and stressors are normally coped* with “right on,” i.e. dealt with *at the same level from where it came*, is confirmed, cfr. table 3. For instance, family separation in Q 14 is a stressor at the personal level and coped with at the same level. Battle-mind and family life problems in Q 16 are handled by experience and by family support at the personal level. However, the presumption that coping strategies and their problems exist at the same level can be criticized. In Q 15, a soldier can cope with an unpleasant military chief at the organizational level by individual sport and pumping iron at the personal level to forget or overcome problems with the boss.

The third hypothesis that some stressors do not remain so, for instance, family may be a stressor before and during deployment but a helper after as clearly confirmed in table 3. In all three Qs “Family” is a problem and in Q 14 and Q 16 family is a support, as well. Even if “Family” represents different social constructions in the eight countries the hypothesis is true no matter how different family life is for a Philippine soldier who actually never lives with his wife and has not been home for a year compared to a Danish soldier who will almost certainly have been divorced. So even if the family is a basic hu man institution to all the soldiers, it is a profoundly hetero geneous institution, which also leads to different stres sors and patterns of stress.

CONCLUSION

Three hypotheses were tested showing that stress problems were related to time, often were coped with “right on” and that a stressor is no constant factor. Furthermore, we found that most problems of stress arise at the personal level and that the returned veteran is in a tenser situation, which he has difficulties in handling, than expected as he/she is back home and safe. So, the period “after deployment” is accumulating both problems and stressors from all three periods, before, under and after deployment and is therefore more complicated and critical than the other two periods. This finding can be explained by the confrontation between a family man left to a heterogeneous behavior when coping with stress versus a military man left to a homogenous behavior coping with stress[[23]](#footnote-23) within a structural framework of the military organization and society´s rational institutions as suggested by Kold (2011). If so, the presence and cure of a soldier in stress is depending on factors far away from the original causes of stress.

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