



PSYCHOLOGICAL ASPECTS OF MILITARY BEHAVIOUR IN HIGH RISK SITUATIONS



Capt. Adrian-Dumitru HALIP
ROMANIAN ARMED FORCES
PSYCHOLOGICAL DIVISION

BACKGROUND



Our desire, our determination to understand, to get a good grip and foretell the human behaviour moves us, through science, to conduct beneficial researches.

The scope of this enterprise is to highlight the necessity of using specific psychological methods in order to train military from different countries to get the same best results operating in the same missions as their counterparts from other partner countries.

The scientific tools that I found necessary to use were the longitudinal research – I experimented in a direct and unmediated way, the behaviours of soldiers through the uncertainty of a possible following mission, the confirmation of the mission to come, the selection process, the pre deployment phase, the deployment and the post deployment phase.

As a research method I used direct observation, without the constraints of time and space, and without my being perceived as an outsider, as an external factor. Thus, I think, the results were the best they could be. The discretion was a priority, given the fact that I was not reporting anything on the chain of command concerning our common endeavour.

Talks and interviews were the main tools, and initial anamnesis was refined with relevant data gathered while on the project.

As a result, I wish to underline the necessity of the augmentation of the time the military spend training and preparing using psychological methods that are tailored talking into account their particularities and the specificity of the mission they are about to undertake.

AIM

Our purpose was first to understand and second to determine if the way military adapt to Theatre of Operations is influenced by the specificity of their cultural and psychological background. Secondly, we wanted to see if military can benefit from a psychological training program specifically tailored for their needs in order to sustain quick and efficient adaptation to the demands of the everchanging conflict operations.

FREQUENT QUESTIONS

What is adaptation ? How do we react to stress ? What is psychological support ? To whom do we go when in need ? Is cultural influencing the way we perceive psychological support ? Are leaders responsible for offering psychological support ? Are classes an efficient way of developing hardiness ? Can we do more to support our troops in the Theaters of operations ?

SAMPLE

To understand the means used by the Romanian military to adapt and cope with stress, we used a representative sample of armed forces employees (number = 128, median age = 37, 85% men, average number of leaders = 30%, armed forces service years = 5 years).

MEASURES

We measured the coping mechanisms of the subjects at an individual level, using methods such as talks and interviews.

RESULTS



The necessity of specific psychological programs:

As human beings we are unique but we have similarities, traits that can be found in our cultural background. Romanian military will cope with stressful situations relying on their self worth being able to reframe the negative situation and see it a positive light. We also rely on strong faith and friends.

MANIFESTATION OF COPING MECHANISMS

- The subjects presented a strong sense of humor used in stressful situation to vent off negative feelings;
- The subjects addressed their mates when in need, being able to discuss difficult situations. Some of their mates were in fact relatives. They developed strong social connections;
- The subjects developed trust in their skills acquired during the pre-deployment phase;



MANIFESTATIONS OF STRESS ON THE BATTLEFIELD

- Stress is perceived differently and different people react to the same stressor in different ways;
- Groups can reduce or even augment the level of perceived stress;
- While under stress the leadership plays a very important role. Their way of acting will influence the perception and the action of the military they command; They need psychological training tailored for their needs;
- Emotions are quick to spread so a training soldiers to overcome their impulses, to improve their awareness is very important ;

UNDERSTANDING PSYCHOLOGY:

- People need to understand that addressing a psychologist is the same as addressing a doctor for treating an injury to a limb;
- It is highly useful for leaders to understand and act accordingly in order to develop a strong and realistic culture regarding the aid that psychology can offer.
- Psychology is present in day to day life but it is not addressed scientifically and it is not perceived as a leverage as something that can improve your performance on the battlefield. The difference between two top athletes is the mental strength, the beliefs and the appraisals that form the mental environment.

DISCUSSION

We consider that the tailoring of specific psychological programs is a must. Not only do the military feel that they are really learning something they also develop new ways of thinking, adapted to specific situations. The best way for them to learn to adapt would be, in my opinion to undergo specific training not held only in classes but developed for specific situation on the training field. We also have to change mentalities, and the way we perceive psychology.