

Stress and Adjustment among Croatian Armed Forces Cadets

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INTRODUCTION

- **Many university students are stressed by academic demands, coping poorly with these demands, and experience symptoms of negative affect (Robotham & Julian, 2006; Eisenbart, Champeau, & Donatelle, 2013).**
- **Military cadets have additional duties and responsibilities above those of traditional university students.**
- **Prevention of extreme stress responses and possible pathology among cadets must be in the center of interest for military education institutions.**



THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

- **Transactional theory of stress (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984)**
- **Primary and secondary appraisals**
- **2 different styles of coping: problem-focused and emotion focused coping**

STUDY OBJECTIVES

- **To examine how cadets experience various aspect of life at the Croatian Defence Academy**
- **To examine measures of primary and secondary appraisals, coping and adaptation outcomes among cadets**
- **To examine gender differences in cognitive appraisals, coping strategies and adaptive outcomes**
- **To examine the levels of anxiety and depressive symptoms related to measures of cognitive appraisals**

PARTICIPANTS

- **N = 90 military first-year cadets (66 males and 24 females)**
- **4 foreign cadets**
- **on average 19 years old**
- **all unmarried**
- **completed secondary education**

MEASURES

- **Sources of stress:** selection one of 8 categories of potential stressors.
- **Primary appraisal (0-3);** perception of:
 - *Stress intensity,*
 - *Suddenness,*
 - Meaning of stressors as *loss, threat* and *challenge.*
- **Secondary appraisals (0-3);** perceived impact on:
 - Occurrence,
 - *Outcome* of stressors.

Measures

- **Coping** - 11 situational specific 4-item coping scales:
 - *Planning*
 - *Active accommodation;*
 - *Reinterpretation*
 - *Negotiation*
 - *Venting emotions*
 - *Seeking social support*
 - *Avoidance*
 - *Passivation*
 - *Fatalism and religion*
 - *Wishful thinking*
 - *Humor*
- Participants appraised how often they used each presented strategy (1 = not at all, 4 = often).

MEASURES

Adaptation outcomes:

- **Self assessment of adjustment;** 1-item scale (0 = not at all successful to 3 = completely successful)
- **State of anxiety :** Endlers anxiety scale; 20-item scale (1 = never to 4 = very often); two subscales (cognitive and autonomous-emotional component of anxiety)
- **State of depression:** Zung depression scale; 20-item scale (1 = never to 4 = very often).

PROCEDURE

- **The data collections were performed in November 2014, three months after their arrival in the military**
- **Conducted by military psychologists employed at the CDA; separately for each study programme**
- **All participants were informed of the main goal of the research; participation was obligatory**
- **Sample includes total population of first year cadets**



DATA ANALYSIS

- **Descriptive statistics**
- **Procedures for determining significance of central value differences (t-test)**
- **Regression analysis**

RESULTS

<i>SOURCES OF STRESS</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>%</i>
1_housing	3	3,33
2_relations with other cadets	1	1,11
3_disconnection of civilian life	17	18,89
4_relations with subordinates	1	1,11
5_unclear situations in the military	4	4,44
6_military regime	2	2,22
7_academic demands (academic obligations)	11	12,22
8_academic demands (learning conditions)	51	56,67
<i>Total</i>	90	100

RESULTS

Cognitive appraisals	total N=90		males N=66		females N=24		t-value	p
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD		
PSP_stress intensity (0-3)	1,60	.68	1,47	.66	1.96	0.62	-3,14**	.002
PSP_suddenness (0-3)	1,18	.68	1,14	.70	1,29	.62	-0,96	.34
PSP_loss (1-4)	0,64	.46	0,58	.43	0,79	.51	-1,95	.05
PSP_threat (1-4)	1,12	.64	0,96	.53	1,56	.72	-4,25***	.000
PSP_challenge (1-4)	1,62	.72	1,70	.62	1,43	.94	1,59	.12
PSP_controllability of occurrence (0-3)	1,06	.83	1,03	.82	1,13	.85	-0,48	.63
PSP_controllability of outcomes (0-3)	1,33	.86	1,33	.87	1,33	.87	-0,00	1

RESULTS

Coping styles (1-4)	<i>total (N=90)</i>		<i>males (N=66)</i>		<i>females (N=24)</i>		t-value	p
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD		
Planning	2,93	.50	2,90	.46	3,03	.62	-1,11	.27
Active accommodation	3,41	.40	3,37	.40	3,51	.40	-1,46	.15
Reinterpretation	3,02	.58	3,01	.58	3,06	.59	-0,39	.69
Negotiation	2,14	.51	2,08	.52	2,29	.46	-1,74	.09
Venting emotions	1,55	.51	1,48	.45	1,74	.62	-2,14*	.036
Seeking social support	2,91	.60	2,80	.59	3,23	.51	-3,17**	.002
Avoidance	2,00	.49	1,92	.44	2,21	.57	-2,44*	.017
Passivation	2,84	.61	2,83	.59	2,84	.68	-0,07	.94
Fatalism and religion	2,06	.70	1,95	.72	2,33	.58	-2,33*	.022
Wishful thinking	1,64	.53	1,65	.51	1,64	.57	0,10	.92
Humor	2,90	.80	2,88	.79	2,95	.84	-0,34	.73

RESULTS

ADAPTATION OUTCOMES	<i>total</i> (N=90)		<i>males</i> (N=66)		<i>females</i> (N=24)		t-value	p
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD		
Self-assessment of adjustment (0-3)	1,82	.65	1,83	.62	1,79	.72	0,27	.79
Anxiety (1-4)	1,73	.52	1,60	.45	2,06	.55	-4,03***	.000
Anxiety_cognitive (1-4)	1,85	.63	1,72	.56	2,20	.68	-3,46***	.001
Anxiety_somatic (1-4)	1,60	.49	1,49	.42	1,93	.55	-4,02***	.000
Depression (1-4)	1,69	.33	1,63	.29	1,84	.38	-2,72**	.008

RESULTS (regression analyses)

Variables	ANXIETY			
	males		females	
	BETA	p	BETA	p
PSP_stress intensity	-0,12	.24	0,04	.86
PSP_suddenness	-0,11	.21	0,13	.49
PSP_loss	0,28	.006**	0,38	.17
PSP_threat	0,71	.000***	0,50	.043*
PSP_challenge	0,06	.49	0,25	.24
PSP_controllability of occurrence	0,30	.001***	-0,10	.61
PSP_controllability of outcomes	0,03	.75	0,06	.76
R	0,81		0,74	
R²	0,66		0,55	
adjusted R²	0,61		0,35	
F	15,56		2,81	
p	.000***		.041*	

RESULTS (regression analyses)

Variables	DEPRESSION			
	males		females	
	BETA	p	BETA	p
PSP_stress intensity	0,24	.06	-0,25	.13
PSP_suddenness	-0,10	.41	0,06	.66
PSP_loss	0,21	.10	0,68	.003**
PSP_threat	0,29	.032*	0,35	.06
PSP_challenge	-0,25	.017*	-0,11	.49
PSP_controllability of occurrence	-0,02	.86	-0,21	.17
PSP_controllability of outcomes	0,04	.75	0,12	.42
R	0,66		0,88	
R²	0,43		0,77	
adjusted R²	0,36		0,66	
F	6,19		7,19	
p	.000***		.001***	



STUDY LIMITATIONS

- **Small number of participants**
- **Other relevant variables could have been used**
- **Results are based on self-reports of the study participants**
- **Additional research could be explored**

CONCLUSION/FUTURE DIRECTION

- **Study reiterated the importance of stress management for cadets**
- **Justification of development of various intervention measures** (i. e. providing psychological assistance, education of stress management, physical training, use of social support, etc.)
- **Need for advising commanders on adjusting the process of leading and managing cadets**



**Thank you for your
attention!**

Questions?