

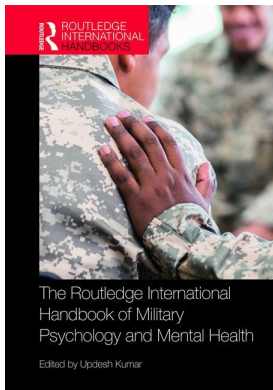
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22

STRESS EXPERIENCES AND ABILITIES TO COPE

Civil population versus military personnel

Vijay Parkash

Work stress is becoming a priority issue for all organizations today due to its economic and human consequences. There is a growing belief in all spheres of public and private sectors that the experience of stress at work has undesirable consequences for both employees and organizations. This belief has been reflected both in public and media interest and in increasing concern voiced by the trade unions and professional and scientific bodies. This chapter gives an overview of how changing work environments have led to increasingly stressful job characteristics and how these characteristics have psychological implications for the military population. It is proposed that while current stress models present fruitful frameworks for stress research, their application in the military setting varies considerably. Many of the major theoretical models that depict the stress process are described, with particular attention paid to the most influential.

Although the stress response is an individualized experience, there are, without a doubt, a wide variety of pressures in today's work settings with the potential to generate adverse stress reactions (distress) for many personnel. Excessive demands associated with multiple roles can lead to role strain, characterized by the person feeling stressed or physically and emotionally drained (Barnett & Brennan, 1995). Adverse work experiences, particularly experiences that are uncertain or outside the employee's control, result in unpleasant emotional and physiological states (Judge & Colquitt, 2004). The most vulnerable to these adverse experiences are military personnel, who most of the time are deployed in situations that place high demands on them. Though stress during war or counterinsurgency operations is understandable, it is becoming apparent that service life is stressful even in the absence of such situations. Based on data from the United States military population, a prominent researcher in this field, Pflanz (2001) asserted that military personnel suffer from occupational stress; a majority reported suffering from significant work stress and more than 40% considered work stress a significant contributor to the onset of mental illness. Though various models and researches exist on the impact of stress on general populations across continents, there are very few studies highlighting the impact of stress on military personnel. The present article attempts to encapsulate the current stress models and the existing framework of research on stress in understanding the impact of stress on military personnel. Further, a new approach that combines many of the features of existing models is proposed, which includes strong roles for military training, organizational support, and subjective perceptions. It is suggested that the proposed model could be a useful new direction for stress research in military studies.

Defining stress

The definition of stress is not simply a question of semantics; it is crucial that there exists a consensus on what can be understood as stress and the differentiation in the nature of stress for military and civil population. A lack of such agreement would seriously hamper research in this direction and the subsequent development of effective stress management strategies for military personnel. A lack of knowledge of the relevant scientific literature on stress has led to an unfortunate and popular misconception that a certain amount of stress is necessary for optimal performance. This belief has been widely used to justify poor management practices for decades and belies a lack of intensive research, as it presents stress as an indefinable and immeasurable construct. For instance, the landmark study by Selye (1976) differentiated between eustress and distress. Eustress is the positive and pleasant side of stress. On the other hand, distress refers to a destructive type of stress that depletes one's energy reserves and taxes the maintenance and defence of the bodily systems, potentially causing harm to both physical and psychological health. However, experts have not been able to set boundary conditions on when a particular amount of stress will continue being positive and when it will go beyond the threshold of positive stress and transform into negative stress. More so for a military population which is selected and trained to undergo acute stress on a daily basis, it is literally impossible to delineate boundary conditions for what will be considered eustress and/or distress. Consequently, a common-sense view of stress is weighted to the negative side.

Despite all the hyperbole surrounding various definitions of stress, it has been concluded in several different reviews that essentially and mainly there are three different types of conceptions of the nature of stress. The first approach is the 'engineering approach' where stress is seen as a stimulus or characteristic of the environment in the form of level of demand. Here occupational stress is an aversive characteristic of the work environment and is treated as an independent variable and environmental cause disrupting the well-being of employees. The second is the 'physiological approach' where the definition of stress is based upon the physiological or biological changes that occur in the person when they are in a stress state, that is, as a dependent variable and a physiological response to a threatening or damaging environment. The third approach conceptualizes work stress in terms of the dynamic interaction between the person and their work environment. This approach has been termed the 'psychological approach'.

The first two approaches are surrounded by specific criticisms at the empirical and conceptual level. Both engineering and physiological models do not adequately account for the existing data; that is, they ignore the mediation of strong cognitive as well as situational (context) factors in the overall stress process. Secondly, on a conceptual level, engineering and physiological models of stress follow a relatively simple stimulus-response paradigm and largely ignore individual differences of a psychological nature and the perceptual and cognitive processes that might underpin them. Therefore, both these approaches treat the person as a passive vehicle for translating the stimulus characteristics of the environment into psychological and physiological response parameters. They generally ignore the interactions between the person and their various environments, which are an essential part of systems-based approaches to biology and psychology. However, it is only the psychological approach which pays special attention to environmental factors and, in particular, to the psychosocial and organizational contexts of work stress. In this approach, stress is either inferred from the existence of problematic person-environment interactions or measured in terms of the cognitive processes and emotional reactions which underpin those interactions. The psychological viewpoint is perhaps the most popular conceptualization today and is considered superior (Cox & Griffiths, 1995), as it treats the individual as an active agent and takes into account the effects of cognitive and situational factors on performance and well-being.

This viewpoint has special relevance for the military population, as their operating environments undergo continuous change and their cognitive reengineering during training alters the way they perceive and cope with stress. To some extent, psychological models on stress attempt to overcome criticisms of earlier approaches (Mark & Smith, 2008).

Most contemporary stress theories are variants of the psychological approach, and the two most distinct among them are interactional and transactional. The interactional models focus on structural features of the person's interaction with their work environment, whereas the transactional models focus on the psychological mechanisms, such as a cognitive appraisal of stress and coping with stress, behind these person-environment interactions. It is the overall psychological approach which brings researchers together to a consensus on defining stress. Moreover, psychological models attempt to provide suitable answers to stress issues in both civilian and military population, but in the case of the latter, the propositions are barely empirically tested and therefore the similar applicability of principles still remains questionable. Taking a lead from various stress models integratively reviewed by Mark and Smith (2008), the following sections outline a selection of key frameworks important in guiding research and practice in the area to discern how application of various approaches to stress varies for civil and military population.

Interactional approaches

The interactive approach features how structural characteristics of the person's interaction with their work environment lead to stress.

Person-environment fit model (French, 1973)

Professor John French (1973) formulated a theory of work stress based on the explicit concept of person-environment interaction, which is an extension of Lewin's (1951) concept suggesting that an individual's personal characteristics interact with their work environment to determine strain and consequently behaviour and health. Two basic facets of fit were identified, first the degree to which an employee's attitudes and abilities meet the demands of the job and second the extent to which the job environment fulfils the employee's needs, for example, to what extent an individual is encouraged and permitted to use their knowledge and skill set at work. Lack of fit in either of these domains can cause problems; the greater the gap or mis-fit (either subjective or objective) between environmental variables (E) and person variables (P), the greater the strain as demands exceed abilities and need exceeds supply (Sonnentag & Frese, 2013). With reference to the application of this model for military population, the individual characteristics and work environment determine strain; however, job environment not fitting employees' needs does not create strain for the military population, as they have an exclusively trained sense of following their leaders under any circumstances and are guided by patriotism and motivation to serve their country. Moreover, according to Lazarus (1991), the P-E fit model represented an advance in thinking; however, the concept of fit between the person and environment is too mechanical, with emphasis on stable relationships rather than giving consideration to individual differences and subjective well-being factors that may vary personal or situational experiences causing mis-fit. Though subsequently Buunk, de Jong, Ybema and de Wolff (1998) stated that empirical support for the theory is limited, this model provides a good explanation for the factors that create stress at the workplace. Application of this model can be extended to the military population if subjective experiences and environmental exceptions are included in the model with due consideration of certain characteristic psychological aspects of military environment and their all-time united sense of purpose.

The job characteristics model and the Vitamin model

As delineated by Mark and Smith (2008), job characteristics such as task identity, task significance, skill variety, autonomy, and feedback are at the centre of the job-characteristics model of stress. The model suggests that the significant psychological states of experiencing responsibility, its meaningfulness, and knowledge of outcomes are created by various job characteristics. It is proposed that motivation, satisfaction, absenteeism, stress, and so forth are the cognitive and behavioural outcomes of various mental states caused by positive or negative work attributes (Hackman & Oldham, 1980, as cited by Mark & Smith, 2008). These outcome variables of the mentioned core job characteristics have been widely used in the literature (Kompier, 2003). Nevertheless, the model received criticisms, as only a few psychological states were considered in analyzing positive and negative characteristics. This model completely ignores the role of environmental factors and focuses only on the outcome variable. A general environmental constancy may probably be assumed for civil populations, but since continuous change in the environment is an unavoidable condition for work in the military, this model in its current form cannot explain stress outcomes in the military environment, as on one hand, the military as an organization is much more structured, and on the other, the environmental characteristics have the potential for rapid and uncertain change. However, the inclusion of specific environmental factors can widen the scope of this model not just for the military population but also for the civilian population.

Extending the job characteristics model further, Warr's (1987) Vitamin model considers certain job characteristics as analogous to the vitamins working in human body, which by virtue of their varied functioning have an effect on the mental health of the individual. In other words, some job characteristics such as task significance, safety, increase in salary, and so on can affect stress experiences and coping, but only up to a threshold, after which there is no positive or negative effect (Buunk et al., 1998). On the other side, some job characteristics such as job demands, autonomy, skill utilisation, task feedback, and social support have an additional decrement effect, such that moderate levels are the most beneficial, but too much or too little can have negative health effects (van Veldhoven, de Jonge, Broersen, Kompier, & Meijman, 2002). Notwithstanding the interesting premise of the Vitamin model, researchers state that the model is mixed and inconclusive (Buunk et al., 1998; Sonnentag & Frese, 2013) and lacks empirical evidence. The constant effects explanation in this model provides answers to how an increase in salary, safety, and task significance can only drive the military population to a certain extent, but along with standard fixedness of these aspects, it is the other job characteristics of the military environment which affect motivation to deal with combat stress. Moreover, given the inherent variations and standard policy-driven governance of various characteristics in military, the applications would significantly vary from that of the civil environment. Empirical support and expansion of the process of stress as it prevails in the military can make this model potent for application in military contexts, which does not seem to be a part of it in its current form.

The role stress approach

The role stress approach, also known as social environment model (Mark & Smith, 2008), underscores the individual's own subjective perceptions of stressors. According to Kompier (2003), role issues (such as role conflict, role ambiguity, and role expectations) are treated as central stressors in this approach, while personality variables, demographics, and social support moderate subjectively perceived environmental stressors (such as role ambiguity, conflict, lack of participation, job security, workload, lack of challenge). Though the inclusion of individual

differences and environmental stressors makes this model appropriate for the military population, difficulty in empirically testing this model highlights its complexity. Inclusion of too many factors makes it difficult to test this model on any population. Moreover, the role issues considered in this model are generally constant or well-defined in the military, whereas the same may not be the case for civil population. Not the exact present form but only a mindful selection of factors relevant in the military setup can make this model suitable for application in the military population.

Demand control support model

The original demand-control model of Karasek (1979) focused on job demand and job control as two important job characteristics. Job control is sometimes called ‘decision latitude’, which may be referred to as the working individual’s potential control over his tasks and conduct during the working day, and job demands are the psychological stressors involved in accomplishing the workload (Karasek, 1979). Karasek posits that work characteristics may not be linearly associated with health and stress as proposed by earlier models. He demonstrated that employees with low decision latitude and high job demands were found to be stressful and have low satisfaction at work. Later on, Johnson and Hall (1988) added social support as one of the job characteristics. Subsequent research evidence has suggested that support may act as a buffer in high demand situations (Cooper, Dewe, & O’Driscoll, 2001; Karasek & Theorell, 1990; Lim, 1996). Despite the expansion of the model with inclusion of social support, the model is still considered limited in the number of job characteristics in explaining the various stressful aspect of the job. Though it provides an interesting take on decision latitude and job demands which successfully explains day-to-day stress in military organizations, the model, however, is not able to include the role of individual differences in perceiving stress, as it fails to explain why the same levels of demand and control in two individuals may give rise to different behavioural or health outcomes (Perrewe & Zellars, 1999). Furthermore, seeing the inherent effect of military-specific regular training and the exclusively trained sense of having heightened control over tasks in the military, its applications would significantly vary for military personnel in comparison with civilians. If individual difference and subjective experiences specific to the military context are added as factors, this model could probably be relatively potent in explaining the process of stress in the military population.

Transactional approaches

The transactional approach underscores the role of subjective perceptions of the environment and acknowledges the role of individual differences (coping, appraisal, personality, locus of control) in understanding workplace stress. Most transactional theories of stress focus on the cognitive processes and effective behaviour underpinning the person’s interaction with their environment. They attempt to address the possible imbalance between demands and ability or competence to complete assigned tasks at the workplace.

Effort-reward imbalance model

Siegrist (1996) proposed that the experience of chronic stress can be best defined in terms of an imbalance between high costs spent and low gains received. In simple language, according to this model, low returns yielded from high efforts invested at work lead to stress. The key feature of this model is its emphasis on subjective perceptions of the environment which, rather than

being variable, is generally a standard trained aspect of the military population wherein the environment is objectively and uniformly seen by all personnel. The sources of effort invested at work are distinguished as extrinsic sources such as demands of the job and intrinsic sources such as the motivation of the individual worker in a demanding situation. Subsequently, the rewards expected from these efforts include financial gratification, socio-emotional reward, and status control (e.g., promotion prospects and better deployments). According to Peter and Siegrist (1999), the focal point of the model is reciprocity, where effort at work should be compensated by suitable rewards, and a mismatch between these will lead to stressful experiences. As compared to the civil population, the concept of reciprocity has a very low potential of application in the military, as patriotism takes a higher seat. Although the imbalance in the model is not an actual mismatch but the subjective perception of the employees with reference to their efforts made and rewards granted; in light of a greater sense of purpose and dutifulness to the nation, this aspect of imbalance takes a backseat in causing stress among military personnel. The application of this model is slightly complicated for a military organization due to the heavy emphasis on reciprocity. The reciprocal explanation does not apply in the military, as personnel's motivation towards their line of duty is not binding on what they receive from the organization. Military personnel work endlessly towards the service of the nation even when their expectations are not fulfilled. Stress due to unfulfilled expectations may be applicable for civilian employees but not for military personnel.

The cognitive theory of psychological stress and coping

This theory primarily considers the coexistence of an individual and environment in a dynamic relationship. The theory has two key features: appraisal and coping. Here, an appraisal is the evaluative process that gives these person-environment transactions their meaning (Holroyd & Lazarus, 1982). Stress is experienced when an individual perceives that the demands of the situation are beyond their coping capabilities. The later refinement of this theory suggests both primary and secondary components of the appraisal process. The first stage is where encounters are subjectively evaluated to see what is at stake in terms of potential risk (Perrewe & Zellars, 1999). The secondary appraisal is contingent upon the recognition of the problem that exists and involves detailed analysis and the generation of possible coping strategies. These conceptualizations may hold true in the case of civil populations, but the case in military populations is altogether different, as military training and the tasking approach barely leave any scope for consideration of any problem beyond one's efforts. Similarly, the coping strategies and approaches of military personnel are immediate and qualitatively different than those of civilians.

Folkman and Lazarus (1980) described many types of coping behaviours and suggested that they could be aggregated into two major categories. First is problem-focused coping, which attempts to cope using more rational problem-solving approaches, and second is emotion-focused coping, which is emotion oriented and attempts to cope by using emotional responses per the requirements of the different situations. Emotion-focused coping does not alter or solve the stressful situation but only emotionally prepares the individual to bear consequences or escaping from it. Again, these coping conceptualizations lack similar application in military settings, as military personnel are regularly trained for focusing on problem solving and high emotional control is practiced even under the gravest circumstances. The model primarily focuses on the job situation, subjective perceptions, and the potential influence of various factors of individual differences. Though the model successfully incorporates all aspects of stress, its complexity and variations in its conceptual applications in the military make it difficult to empirically evaluate this model. Briner, Harris, and Daniels (2004) have suggested that the conception of primary

and secondary appraisal is too simplistic and doesn't include individuals' histories and anticipated futures. Despite some of the major odds, this theory comes closest to explaining stress in the military organization. Firstly, the dynamic nature of the coexistence of stress and environment relates most to the dynamic nature of the job in the military. Secondly, problem-focused and emotion-focused coping attempt to explain how military personnel endure continued stress at the workplace. However, the process of how stress affects the individual is not explained in this model. This model can be applied in a military scenario if it elucidates how stress affects military personnel assuming the inherent task approach differences and regular training of keeping up high motivation and self-confidence and remaining problem focused and relatively immune to emotional encounters.

Cox's transactional model of occupational stress

Cox's transactional model has a clarified structure and emphasizes individual differences in understanding stress (Cox & Ferguson, 1991). The stress here is defined as an individual phenomenon resulting from a transaction between individual and situation. Cox's framework has five stages. The first stage includes 'the sources of demand relating to the person' and forms part of the individual's environment. These demands are either derived from the environment or an individual's psychological needs. The second stage is an individual's perception of these demands and his own capability to cope with them. Stress is experienced when an individual realizes he cannot cope with the demands of the situation given his present capability. The third stage is associated with response to stress: emotional changes occur while an individual tries to cope with stress. The fourth stage includes the consequences of coping with stress. The fifth stage revolves around general feedback that occurs in relation to all other stages of the model. Cox and Ferguson (1991) state that this framework consists of primary and secondary appraisal, where the primary appraisal concerns monitoring and secondary appraisal involves decision-making grounded in a problem-solving context. They also suggest that individual differences (locus of control, hardiness, and coping resources) exert mediating and moderating effects determining stress. While the model attempts to incorporate most of the missing features in earlier suggested models, it becomes difficult to extend its application to military given the aspects of military approach, as explained in the previous section. More aptly, the problem is about explaining the aspect that generally military personnel do not reach the level of experiencing heightened stress, as their capabilities and positive perceptions enable them to cope successfully. Though this model is comprehensive in its approach and provides a stepwise explanation of stress at the workplace, this model may better help in understanding stress in military personnel, as it factors in all possible variables affecting an individual.

Cybernetic theory of organizational stress

Derived from concepts of cybernetics or systems control, the theory states that behaviour is directed at reducing deviations from a specific goal-state. The theory is based on application of cybernetics to living systems, explaining living systems maintain themselves in steady states or homeostasis (Cummings & Cooper, 1998). Stress is experienced when this homeostasis is disrupted from either inside or outside the system by forces and an attempt is made to restore the original balance. This theory is criticized for being too simplistic and not taking into account the role of individual differences and their context specificity. Thus the model per se cannot be extended to a military organization, as stress in the military is more complicated than a disturbed state of homeostasis. Moreover, human behaviour in an organization like the military and the

functional contexts of military personnel cannot be understood just on the basis of maintaining homeostasis.

Based on the important features of the earlier models, many new models have been propounded to explain the stress experiences in variety of occupations and different situations. One such model is the job demands–resources model by Demerouti, Bakker, Nachreiner and Schaufeli (2001) that takes the lead from various approaches and categories of psychosocial factors into job demands and job resources. Job demands refer to physical or social aspects of a job that require effort and have physical and mental costs. Job resources refer to organizational aspects that help with the achievement of work goals and reduce demands. These two affect the conditions which influence key processes leading to health impairment and stress. Researchers suggest that this model is a heuristic-based model which can be applicable to any occupational setting regardless of the particular demands or resources involved (Llorens, Bakker, Schaufeli, & Salanova, 2006); whereas, few researchers assert that this has focused only on the characteristics of the work environment (Xanthopoulou, Bakker, Demerouti & Schaufeli, 2007) and the individual characteristics remain out of its coverage, which contributes to huge differences between civilians and trained military personnel.

The demand-induced strain compensation model (de Jonge & Dormann, 2003) is another model which was developed keeping in mind stress in service jobs. Its central assumption is that emotional, cognitive, and physical resources are matched as per the emotional, cognitive, and physical demands in the environment (van Veldhoven, Taris, de Jonge, & Broersen, 2005), which can be called the triple match principle. Compared to other models, if explained in specific and not a civil population—generalized perspective, the application of the triple match principle in military organizations can provide a glimpse into the effect of the emotional, cognitive, and physical demands of combat and non-combat military tasks on personnel. According to the model, cognitive demands are met by cognitive capabilities, emotional demands are met by emotional capabilities, and physical demands are met by the physical capabilities of an employee. However, this compartmentalized understanding of demands and resources is not adept at understanding stress in military personnel. On a superficial or civil population level, this compartmentalization seems efficient, but how these resources are used to attend to these different demands in a military environment is not clear. This distinction of the triple match principle is not appropriate for a military organization; however, a more relaxed approach to understanding these demands and resources can widen the scope of application in the military environment. The demand skill support model (van Veldhoven et al., 2005) is another such model with the objective of explaining the process of stress using a minimum number of factors across different situations and occupations. This model proposes that quantitative and qualitative demands are more likely to relate to stress, and skill utilization and social support are more likely to relate to attitudinal outcomes and well-being. This model is an example of a blend between interactive and transactional theories, but it is too narrow in its approach to explain the process of stress and coping, especially in a military setup where stress is a continuous process and varies in its intensity throughout service. The very difference in the characteristics of civilian and military populations and barely any research on military samples make it evident that these models cannot similarly explain the stress experiences in the military environment.

General adaptation syndrome

One of the most popular theories of stress deserves to be approached separately from other models. Famously known as the father of stress research, Hans Selye referred to non-specific physiological response to harmful stimuli as general adaptation syndrome (GAS). According

to Selye (1956), all kind of stressors, including pathogens, physical stressors, and psychosocial stressors, elicit a common pattern of physiological response which proceeds in the characteristic three stages of alarm (including immediate flight or fight), resistance, and exhaustion. During the first stage of GAS, the alarm stage, the organism's physiological changes reflect the initial reactions necessary to meet the demands made by the stressor agent. This approach asserts that when an individual is faced with excessive stimulation or any stressor, the hormone output from the adrenal cortex increases rapidly. After the initial stage of alarm reactions, the second stage of resistance comes into play with an intention to get consequent improvement or disappearance of symptoms by means of resisting or having a complete adaptation to the stressor. For the obvious reason of resistance or adaptation, the output of corticosteroids (cortisol) remains high but stable during the resistance stage. Finally, if the stressors acting on the individual are so severe and prolonged that individual's resources and somatic defences get depleted, the third stage of exhaustion occurs. Since the secretion of corticosteroid hormones has been constantly high during the resistance stage, due to over-prolonged exposure, the anterior pituitary and the adrenal cortex lose their capacity to secrete hormones, and the organism can no longer adapt to the stressor. Hence, stress symptoms reappear, and, if the stress response continues at the same degree without subsiding, vulnerable organs as determined by the individual's genetic and surrounding environmental factors are likely to break down. Selye's paradigm of GAS claims that any stressor or noxious agent, physical or psychosocial in nature, would mobilize a similar GAS response (Selye, 1974).

Though Selye's model had huge momentum, critiques of Selye's model disagree with the presence of GAS and suggest that each stressor elicits its own distinct physiological reactions (Lazarus, 1977; Mason, 1975). Though these researchers agree that there is a nonspecific physiological response to stressors, they emphasize the appraisal of any stimulation as stressful and claim that the physiological response is concomitant to the emotional reaction that occurs when situations are appraised as stressful. In his later works, Selye (1974, 1980) acknowledged that there are both specific as well as general (nonspecific) factors in the physiological response to a stressor. He also suggested that the GAS does not occur or is at least not destructive in response to all kinds of stressors; however, he maintained that the nonspecific response is not always mediated psychologically (Cohen, Kessler, & Gordon, 1995). Based on these aspects, many new ways were proposed to explain stress, some prominent ones of which have been briefly highlighted in previous sections. The specific separate focus on Selye's model here is an attempt to delineate the difference in its applications in military contexts.

In most organizations across continents, Selye's model of stress is being used for the formulation of training modules. This model is followed in the military as well, but largely due to lack of an adapted model for stress in the military. This dilemma is due to the paucity of the distinction between stress in the military and general population. To be able to formulate a model for military organizations, researchers need to pin down the differentiation between the two. The following subsection attempts to elaborate on stressors in the military organization. The subsection includes various forms of stress and different environments which are sources of these stressors.

Stresses for military populations

In the context of military settings, much attention has been devoted to the relationship between combat and non-combat stress. The aspects of combat activities have been clearly established as precipitants of psychological stress. Research has established that combat, exposure to heavy casualties, deployment of units in a war-type zone, and unexpected mobilizations of units are all correlated with higher levels of psychological distress (Pflanz & Sonnek, 2002). It seems to

be assumed that the stress of military life is primarily attributable to such things as unstable deployments, exposure to combat, and the threat of bodily harm: getting killed. The periodic change of posting station, the stationing of personnel overseas, and lack of control over duty assignments are just a few examples of the more mundane aspects of military life that may cause stress and affect the mental health of military personnel (Pflanz & Sonnek, 2002).

Going beyond combat and wartime assignments, researchers have found that work stress is a significant source of distress for military personnel during routine peacetime assignments as well. Manning and colleagues (1981) found that military mental health patients identified work-related problems as the primary contributor to their emotional problems. Another study examined the prevalence of reported job stress in military mental health patients and concluded that work stress significantly leads to emotional distress and in some cases to mental illnesses (Pflanz, 2001). The most common work stressors reported were a change in work responsibilities and change in work hours. Hence, it may be inferred that job stress in the military may have little to do with the fact that military personnel deal with the difficult business of war and may stem from more subtle aspects of military culture that foster work stress.

Psychological stressors in the military

Military deployments, in simpler terms, may be called Harsh, Ambiguous, Risky, and Distant (HARD; Pflanz & Sonnek, 2002). The personnel deployed in the field live in austere conditions. The deployment environments can be uncomfortable, harsh, and severe. The troops have limited basic facilities and recreational options available with them. The temperature and climate can range from very cold to very hot. In addition to harsh work environments, ambiguity and uncertainty are, to a great extent, a part of military deployments. The troops being deployed are often not aware of when they are deploying, where they are going, or when they are returning. The variability and unpredictability of deployments add to the experience of their stress. Also, military deployments are risky to a great extent. Especially today, deploying military personnel are heading out to counterinsurgency and low-intensity conflict areas. In these dangerous environments, the troops are exposed to the threat of enemy fire and terrorist attacks. These challenging hazardous conditions create stress, irritability, anxiety, and depression among the troops. Lastly, military deployments are distant, and military personnel are far away from home. They remain disconnected and separated from their family life (see Kumar, Parkash, & Mandal, 2013).

Combat stress and stressors in counterinsurgency

In pursuit of national security, military personnel are always combat ready and under a great deal of combat stress. Combat stress is the mental, emotional, or physical tension, strain, or distress resulting from exposure to combat and combat-related conditions. It is important to emphasize that combat stress is not restricted only to combat, but may also arise from combat-like conditions present during military operations other than war. In an operational area characterized by continuous action and high danger, forces may experience high rates of combat stress casualties unless timely interventions are applied to manage this stress. Combat stress reactions have the potential to disable the most courageous soldiers and influence the success or failure of a unit in accomplishing its mission. As my colleagues and I have put forth in our earlier works (Kumar, Parkash, & Mandal, 2013), the scenario that the military personnel are facing these days is not in the form of conventional warfare; rather, it is nonconventional warfare that more prominently involves counterinsurgency operations. Having limited human potential and striving for the security of the

motherland, the troops deployed in such areas become vulnerable to heightened stress experience that has the potential to adversely affect their mental health. Troops trained in conventional warfare experience significant stress in such counterinsurgency operations (Goel, 1998; Ray, 1997).

In conventional operations of war, limited periods of intense stress followed by adequate recovery phases do not significantly sap the psychological resources of the soldier unless the operations are unduly prolonged. The situation in counterinsurgency is diametrically opposite. Prolonged spells of stress punctuated by quantitatively and qualitatively inadequate opportunities for rest and relaxation impose immense and often unbearable demands on even otherwise robust soldiers. This may result in psychological distress, combat stress disorder, or post-traumatic stress disorder (Badrinath, 2003; Haas, 2003). Several operational factors such as harsh weather conditions, unavailability of rest time, fatigue, unpredictability of threat, zero error syndromes, extended tenures of stay, absence of recreational avenues, lack of adequate social support in terms of healthy behaviour by superiors, domestic worries, problems related to leave, and so on increase the level of frustration (Goel, 1998; Ray, 1997, as cited by Chaudhury, Goel, & Singh, 2006). Troops in long-term postings in the counterinsurgency environment are subjected to high-risk operations, forcing them to remain more vigilant round the clock. Extended and prolonged exposure to such a stressful environment adversely affects the physical and mental state of the soldiers. In threatful counterinsurgency situations, the fear and possibility of getting killed anytime coupled with long duty hours without rest put tremendous mental pressure on the troops that exceeds their cognitive capacities to resist and which may ultimately lead to maladaptive psychological functions and aberrant behaviour (Kumar, Parkash, & Mandal, 2013). It is hardly a matter of dispute that just like in the civil population, stress is a significant determinant of performance, emotional well-being, and other work outcomes in military settings (Kavanagh, 2005). What is not known is how these stressors function differently for military personnel. The nature of these stressors has been explained by various frameworks of soldier well-being. One of the most used models consists of risk factors or stressors, such as combat exposure and deployment length, which lead to a variety of negative outcomes, including decreased emotional well-being, poorer performance, posttraumatic stress disorder, and suicide (Harms, Krasikova, Vanhove, Herian, & Lester, 2013). This relationship is moderated by a number of protective factors such as personality characteristics, sources of personal support such as leaders or spouses, and training. The difficulty lies in gathering accurate information concerning the emotional and mental well-being of military personnel. They keep constantly rotating in and out of combat and even hesitate to acknowledge or report such problems while actively serving (Hoge et al., 2004). Another issue with getting an accurate estimate from the military population is that stress often manifests long after combat has ended (Milliken, Auchterlonie, & Hoge, 2007). Given the critical nature of the military profession, a balanced mind and attitude are prerequisites for the job.

A few military-specific propositions

On the basis of the issues presented above, a new stress framework is suggested for the military population. The model acknowledges the importance of the role played by organizational support and prior training in dealing with stressors in the military setting. This framework aims to represent key aspects of the stress process without getting entangled in complexities of innumerable factors and mental processes. Many aspects of this model are supported by both interactional and transactional theories, notably from Selye's (1956, 1974) general adaptation syndrome. The proposed model given in Figure 22.1 encapsulates environmental and individual factors in coping with stress in military personnel and can be called 'military model of alarm, resistance, and coping'.

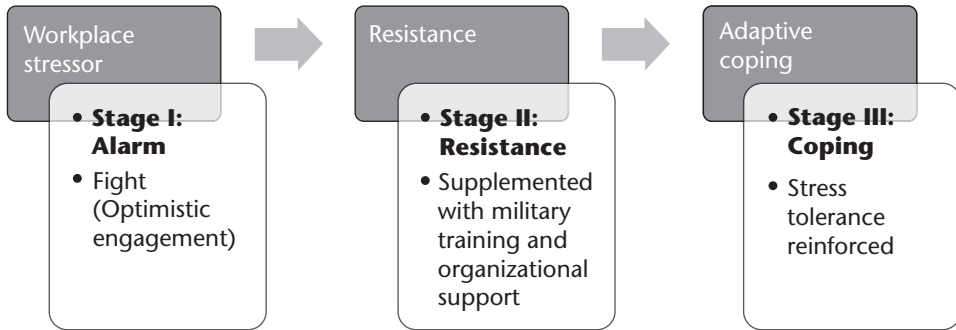


Figure 22.1 Proposed military model of alarm, resistance, and coping.

Adapting from Selye's GAS and considering the military-specific factors of training, motivation, and fight readiness, it can be asserted that when faced with stressors, military personnel, by the virtue of their regularly continued training, do not use the flight path and stressors are dealt only with fight mode of responding. During the alarm stage, an inherent capacity to fight the immediate threat and stress is activated. Military personnel are trained at a young age to fight every threat in the workplace. Their orientation is developed in such a way that they instinctively react to engage with any stimuli posing threat to them or their counterparts. Vigorous training and skill development towards positive engagement with stress make them physiologically and psychologically mechanized to deal with stress. Hence, the first stage consists of recognition and acceptance of the nature of stress. A meticulous analysis of situational demands is conducted and the military personnel chalk out a course of actions based on their cognitive mapping suggesting various alternatives with a problem-solving orientation. The alarm stage ends when the individual has acknowledged the situation at hand and is ready with a course of action in hand.

The second stage of resistance begins when the individual starts collecting available resources to sustain resistance for as long as the situation demands. The first resource available to the individual is his own training. The greatest strength of the military personnel is his cognitive capability, which has been well tested prior to their induction and functioning in the field. Military training, with the help of cognitive science principles, restructures the mental orientation of personnel in such a way that their perspective on stress transforms and they are cognitively reengineered to process mental workloads efficiently. The cognitive potential is very closely related to their self-regulation and self-efficacy to deal with stress. The strength and efficiency of utilizing cognitive capacity vary for individuals and therefore act as moderating variable in this process. Due to stringent training to deal with different work as well as personal problems, there are barely any significant individual differences in the approaches adopted by different personnel. Therefore, regardless of minor individual differences, it is the well-trained sense of fight readiness which fosters the capability to resist stressors. Organizational support is the second resource available to military personnel. The resistance stage is supplemented with organizational support such as reinforcements, buddy support, medical care, leave, social security, and so forth. This stage is where the environmental factors exert the highest influence. The camaraderie and brotherhood in the military setup make it easier for them to seek organizational support and persevere against stressors. Even though the military organization is hierarchical in nature, the respect for brothers in arms and family well-being runs through all levels. Supported by all this, unlike Selye's GAS model, there is no exhaustion stage for military personnel while dealing with stressors. They perceive resistance as a part of the job training and simultaneously keep

assimilating newly learned skills and supportive elements to deal with stress. Hence, the third stage that in general arrives for majority of military personnel is that of adaptive coping, the individual restoring back to normal functioning.

Although exceptions lie in every field, a generalizable significant strength of military personnel perceive stress and unexpected threat as an opportunity to acquire a new set of skills and test their training. They are focused on solving the problem and that too in such a way that the same stress demand becomes a mundane task in the future. Moreover, it emotionally strengthens them with positive emotions as it confirms their faith in their training and organizational support. This exclusive endurance to stress by military personnel is part of their adaptive coping nature, as they are able to internalize the skills acquired and positively appraise their own capability to deal with stress effectively. In this stage, the job satisfaction is highest and psychological distress is least. Against this backdrop, another conceptual mediation-moderation model of stress for the military population may be hypothesized (Figure 22.2). The model proposes that organizational support mediates the relationship between stressors at work and resistance capability of military personnel. Likewise, military training moderates the relationship between the stressor and organizational support, such that when military training is positively perceived, the extent of organizational support and resulting resistance to stress is high and when military training is negatively perceived, the dependence on organizational support and resulting resistance is low, the former being more prevalent in general and the latter being an exception.

This model is not intended at this early stage to be a predictive model; however, it proposes a theoretical framework which can be tested through future research and to which more relevant variables can be introduced. Many aspects of this proposed model were supported by recent research (Kumar, Parkash, & Mandal, 2013). The nature of mental processes that takes place when dealing with stress, that is, rational procedures and analysis of the situation, is not hypothesized in the proposed model in order to keep it easily comprehensible and to avoid complexities. This framework is suggestive of ways of illustrating which variables and factors may relate to stress and coping experiences in military personnel. The aspects of how and why they relate may be explored empirically through future research. As far as coping with stress is concerned, it is posited that as a general approach, emotion-focused, maladaptive, avoidant, or escape types of coping approaches seldom exist among military personnel, and problem-focused, rational, and adaptive coping dominates their behaviour due to the specialized training that they undergo to deal with different problems, more refined abilities that they possess as prerequisites of induction, and their exclusively trained sense to best utilize the abilities in somewhat concretely varied manners as compared to the civil population.

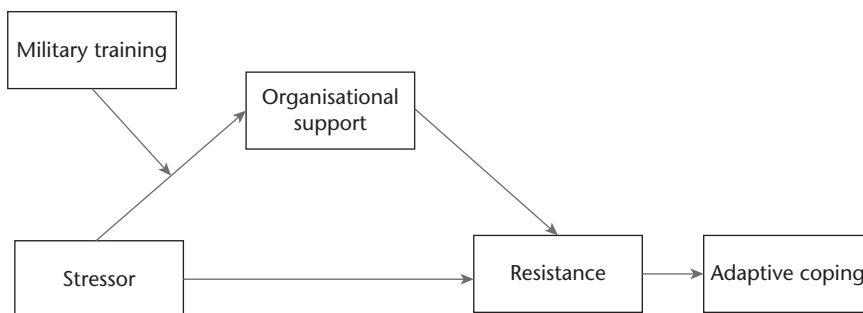


Figure 22.2 Proposed conceptual model depicting moderated mediation of stress and coping in military setting.

Summing up

The increase of work-related stress in our society highlights the need to address the economic and social costs of work-related stress and review existing research paradigms for the same. Models that explain the stress experiences of the civil population may not be applicable similarly to the military population due to its various inherently different characteristics. An overview of various models relating to work-related stress formulated for the civilian population suggests that many of them leave many unanswered questions to include a role of subjective perceptions, individual differences, and environmental context or are otherwise complex, hard to support, and lack predictive validity. Keeping in mind the distinct work environment and nature of work of the military population, most models fail to tap into key features in the military context. With few attempts to explain stress experiences specific to the military, a slightly different line of thought has been proposed to combine features of existing models and to represent the differences and complexities of the stress process in military populations. The proposed models attempt to strike a balance between an integration of aspects of interactive and transactional models while still maintaining a balance between simplicity and complexity. It cannot be denied that the chapter posits more questions to the reader rather than providing answers, but it would ignite a relatively different line of thought specific to military populations among critiques and fellow researchers.

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