STRESS, COPING AND SOME RELATED FACTORS AMONGST SERVING COMBAT VETERANS

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Introduction

Brutal as war is, it has provided a research setting that could perhaps never be duplicated in civilian life. As a result of this unique situation, plus pressure of military necessity growing out of a large number of soldiers experiencing combat, marked psychological changes occur amongst combat veterans. The cumulative impact of these effects on innumerable combat veterans is pervasive, with significant potential to have a profound effect on society at large (Grossman & Siddle, 2000).

Research on combat veterans began after World Wars and a lot of studies have been carried out on the subject since wars in Vietnam, Korea, Israel, Gulf War and more recently, war in Iraq. A large volume of research work has been carried out to study various psychological aspects dealing with combat veterans. Most studies carried out relate to negative outcomes of war and its impact on combat veterans, especially combat stress reaction (Dekaris et al., 1993; Figley, 1978; Holmes, Tariot, & Cox, 1998; Noy, 1989; Solomon et al., 1993; Southwick et al., 1993), post traumatic stress disorder (Blake et al., 1990; Figley, 1985; Kulka et al., 1990; Solomon, Weisenberg, Schwartzwald, & Mikulincer, 1987; Sutker & Allain, 1996; Weisenberg, Schwarzwald, & Solomon, 1991) and other psychological problems occurring due to combat (Cronin, 1998; Gal & Mangelsdorff, 1991; Gruber, 2004; Khan, 2000; Solomon, Openheimer, & Noy, 1986). A little research literature shows certain positive outcomes of experiencing combat (Gal, 1987; Jex & Thomas, 2003; Kishon-Barash, Midlarsky, & Johnson, 1996; Taylor, 1989).

The present study has been planned keeping in view the immediate need and demands of the military environment. Hence, the research focuses on types of military personnel with reference to combat experience with respect to stress in routine military life, coping resources, altruism, religiosity, and self-perception. Further, the study also attempts to probe into differences amongst serving military personnel due to number of years of military service and rank status.

Statement of the problem

The present research is aimed at studying stress in routine military life, coping resources, altruism, religiosity, and self-perception amongst serving combat veterans. To assess these aspects, difference in perception of serving combat veterans injured in battle (CVI), serving combat veterans uninjured in battle (CVU), and other serving armed forces personnel of Indian
army not initiated as yet into combat (who will be referred to as non-combat veterans (NCV)) have been found in the present study.

The present research also attempts to find difference among groups with reference to number of years of military service (0-10 years of military service and 11-20 years of military service respectively).

The present research also attempts to find difference among groups with reference to rank status (officer rank and personnel below officer rank).

**Objectives of the study**

The study is based on following objectives:

1. To find out whether serving combat veterans injured in battle, serving combat veterans uninjured in battle, and other serving armed forces personnel not initiated as yet into combat differ with respect to stress in routine military life, coping resources, altruism, religiosity, and self-perception.
2. To find out whether serving military personnel from range 0-10 years of military service and serving military personnel from range 11-20 years of military service differ with respect to stress in routine military life, coping resources, altruism, religiosity, and self-perception.
3. To find out whether military personnel from officer rank differ from personnel below officer rank (PBOR) with respect to stress in routine military life, coping resources, altruism, religiosity, and self-perception.
4. To find relationship between stress and coping resources, altruism, religiosity, and self-perception amongst serving combat veterans.

**Variables examined in the study**

- Stress
- Coping resources
- Altruism
- Religiosity
- Self-perception
Hypotheses

Main hypotheses of study are:

1. Serving combat veterans injured in battle, serving combat veterans uninjured in battle, and other serving armed forces personnel not initiated as yet into combat differ on stress in routine military life.
   1a. Serving combat veterans injured in battle perceive lesser stress in routine military life as compared to other serving armed forces personnel not initiated as yet into combat.
   1b. Serving combat veterans uninjured in battle perceive lesser stress in routine military life as compared to other serving armed forces personnel not initiated as yet into combat.
   1c. Serving combat veterans injured in battle perceive lesser stress in routine military life as compared to serving combat veterans uninjured in battle.

2. Serving combat veterans injured in battle, serving combat veterans uninjured in battle, and other serving armed forces personnel not initiated as yet into combat differ on coping resources.
   2a. Serving combat veterans injured in battle have better coping resources as compared to other serving armed forces personnel not initiated as yet into combat.
   2b. Serving combat veterans uninjured in battle have better coping resources as compared to other serving armed forces personnel not initiated as yet into combat.
   2c. Serving combat veterans injured in battle have better coping resources as compared to serving combat veterans uninjured in battle.

3. Serving combat veterans injured in battle, serving combat veterans uninjured in battle, and other serving armed forces personnel not initiated as yet into combat differ on altruism.
   3a. Serving combat veterans injured in battle are more altruistic as compared to other serving armed forces personnel not initiated as yet into combat.
   3b. Serving combat veterans uninjured in battle are more altruistic as compared to other serving armed forces personnel not initiated as yet into combat.
   3c. Serving combat veterans injured in battle are more altruistic as compared to serving combat veterans uninjured in battle.

4. Serving combat veterans injured in battle, serving combat veterans uninjured in battle, and other serving armed forces personnel not initiated as yet into combat differ on religiosity.
4a. Serving combat veterans injured in battle display more religiosity as compared to other serving armed forces personnel not initiated as yet into combat.

4b. Serving combat veterans uninjured in battle display more religiosity as compared to other serving armed forces personnel not initiated as yet into combat.

4c. Serving combat veterans injured in battle display more religiosity as compared to serving combat veterans uninjured in battle.

5. There is no difference in self-perception of serving combat veterans injured in battle, serving combat veterans uninjured in battle, and other serving armed forces personnel not initiated as yet into combat.

6. There is a negative correlation between stress and coping resources amongst serving combat veterans.

7. There is a negative correlation between stress and altruism amongst serving combat veterans.

8. There is a positive correlation between stress and religiosity amongst serving combat veterans.

9. There is a negative correlation between stress and self-perception amongst serving combat veterans.

Additional analyses have also been carried out by considering number of years of military service (0-10 and 11-20 years respectively) and rank status (officer and personnel below officer rank) with respect to measured variables, namely, stress in routine military life, coping resources, altruism, religiosity, and self-perception.

**Method**

**Sample**

Total sample for present research constitutes 360 serving armed forces personnel. The sample includes 120 serving combat veterans injured in battle, 120 serving combat veterans uninjured in battle, and 120 serving non-combat veterans. Each group has a further split of 60 personnel from range 0-10 years of military service and 60 personnel from range 11-20 years of military service. In each sub group, 30 officers and 30 personnel below officer rank are included in equal numbers.
Tools used

A personal data sheet has been developed to obtain basic demographic information of respondents. It also facilitates in categorizing serving armed forces personnel into different groups according to their combat experiences including injury in battle, number of years of military service, and rank status.

Following tools have been used to measure variables under study:

- Stress measurement scale (developed by present researcher).
- Coping resource inventory (Hammer & Marting, 1988).
- Altruism test (Jain, 1989).
- Religiosity scale (Bhushan, 1990).
- Self-perception inventory (Martin, 1968).
- Personal data sheet (developed by present researcher).

Procedure

Data have been collected from 360 serving armed forces personnel, all posted in Pune city. Rapport has been established with individuals and before administration of tests; their consent to voluntarily participate has been confirmed. Importance of their sincere and honest responses has been stressed upon to all individuals.

On the basis of information obtained from personal data sheet and as per control variables of types of military personnel with respect to combat experience, number of years of military service and rank status, suitability of military personnel for the present study has been confirmed. For standardized tests, respondents have been given instructions as stated in manual along with examples regarding how to answer. All doubts have been clarified personally by the researcher and it has been ensured that instructions were clear and have been understood by one and all.

Data Analyses

Quantitative analyses

The present study involves testing differences and relationships. This necessitates use of certain statistical techniques that have been applied accordingly for analyses of data.

Three way (3 x 2 x 2) multivariate analyses of variance (MANOVA) and subsequent multiple univariate analyses of variance (ANOVA) have been implemented to study differences between types of military personnel with respect to combat experience (serving combat veterans
injured in battle, serving combat veterans uninjured in battle, and other serving armed forces personnel not initiated as yet into combat), number of years of military service (0-10 years and 11-20 years), and rank status (officer rank and personnel below officer rank) with respect to measured variables.

Product moment correlation coefficients have been calculated to examine relationship between stress and measured variables for serving combat veterans.

Chi-square has been calculated to find differences in alcohol consumption and smoking habits of serving armed forces personnel.

Cronbach’s alpha reliability analysis has been implemented to calculate reliability coefficient for tools on local sample.

**Qualitative analyses**

In qualitative analyses, two case studies have been considered to understand experiences and perceptions of serving combat veterans in greater detail.

**Results**

The responses of serving combat veterans injured in battle, serving combat veterans uninjured in battle, and other serving armed forces personnel not initiated as yet into combat have been compared by using multivariate analyses of variance. The results showed that serving combat veterans injured in battle, serving combat veterans uninjured in battle, and other serving armed forces personnel not initiated as yet into combat significantly differed from each other on all the measured variables except coping resources.

Further subgroups of military personnel based on number of years of service have been compared on all the variable selected in the present study by using univariate analyses of variance. In the present study it has been found that military personnel from the range 0-10 years of military service significantly differ on military personnel from the range 11-20 years of military service on all the measured variables. Also, officers and personnel below officer rank have been compared on the measured variables by using univariate analyses of variance. In the present study it has been found that officers and personnel below officer rank significantly differ on the measured variables.

Correlation between stress and other variables for combat veterans showed that stress is significantly correlated with variables of coping resources and self-perception in the present
study. It has been found that stress is not correlated with variables of altruism and religiosity in the present study.

Results of chi-square analyses indicate that more number of combat veterans tend to consume alcohol as compared to non-combat veterans. Also, more combat veterans injured in battle tend to consume alcohol as compared to combat veterans uninjured in battle. With respect to smoking, non-combat veterans tend to smoke more than combat veterans.

**Conclusion**

The research study considered illustrates positive aspects of combat experiences. Most of the other studies have been unable to uncover positive outcomes of combat experience and on the contrary, give negative outcomes like depression, PTSD, combat stress reactions, and acts of uncivilized behavior. Importance of the study is to show that where all these negative outcomes of combat experience do exist and cannot be wished away, there is hope of some positive outcomes as well which gives a sense of worth and meaning to life to combat veterans after experiencing threat of death and destruction.

The present investigation examined perceptions of combat veterans on variables of the study. For the same, perceptions of combat veterans have been compared with those other serving armed forces personnel not initiated as yet into combat. The present research also explored differences in military personnel with respect to number of years of military service and rank status of an individual on variables selected in the study.

Findings of present study reported following conclusions:

1. Serving combat veterans perceive lesser stress in routine military life as compared to serving non-combat veterans. It is observed that serving combat veterans injured in battle reported significantly lesser stress in routine military life as compared to other military personnel. Findings of the study indicate that military personnel with 11-20 years of military service perceive lesser stress than military personnel with 0-10 years of military service. Also, officers have lesser stress as compared to personnel below officer rank.

2. There is no significant difference between serving combat veterans and serving non-combat veterans on coping resources. Findings of the study indicate that military personnel with 11-20 years of service have better coping resources than military personnel with 0-10 years of service. Also, officers have better coping resources as compared to personnel below officer rank.
3. Serving combat veterans are more altruistic as compared to serving non-combat veterans. Findings of the present study indicate that military personnel with 11-20 years of service are more altruistic than military personnel with 0-10 years of service. Also, personnel below officer rank are more altruistic as compared to officers.

4. Serving combat veterans display more religiosity as compared to non-combat veterans. Findings of the study indicate that military personnel with 11-20 years of service are more religious than military personnel with 0-10 years of service. Also, personnel below officer rank display more religiosity as compared to officers.

5. Serving combat veterans have better perception of self as compared to serving non-combat veterans with respect to adjustment. However, serving combat veterans uninjured in battle display least maladjustment as compared to serving combat veterans injured in battle and serving non-combat veterans. Besides, military personnel with 11-20 years of service have better perception of self as compared to military personnel with 0-10 years of service. Also, officers have better perception of self as compared to personnel below officer rank.

**Limitations of the study**

The study does not consider intensity, multiplicity, and duration of combat experience of serving combat veterans. Further research could include these aspects.

Armed forces personnel with recent exposure to combat experience are posted in ‘live’ combat zone in Jammu and Kashmir as well as Manipur. However, this study is conducted in Pune city where the research has been carried out. The sample has not been taken from a ‘live’ combat zone which is a limitation of the study.

Like in most studies, methodology of data collection with exclusive use of self-report inventories has been a limiting factor in present study. Besides, rigorous controls exercised for getting precise results have placed a few restrictions in selection of the sample. These are:

a) Study is limited to serving armed forces personnel from army only and does not include serving personnel from navy or air force.

b) Study does not include females although they are also serving in armed forces.

c) Study has been limited to serving armed forces personnel posted in military cantonment of Pune city only.
d) Study includes only serving armed forces personnel and does not include retired armed forces personnel.
e) Study includes only those serving armed forces personnel who have less than 20 years of military service. Serving armed forces personnel with more than 20 years of military service have not been considered for present study despite the fact that they have plenty of combat experience, especially in higher ranks in officer cadre.

Besides, research on other variables like leadership, morale, and motivation is also important but present research has focused only on stress, coping resources, altruism, religiosity, and self-perception amongst serving combat veterans.

Suggestions

Limitations and findings obtained in the present study give certain directions that future research is recommended on following lines:

1. Present study considered only few personality variables, namely, altruism, religiosity, and self-perception. Several other relevant variables like Type A behavior, self-esteem, self-concept, self-confidence, achievement motivation, hardiness, and leadership styles may be studied in relation to serving armed forces personnel.

2. Further research may consider socio-demographic variables like family environment, social support, education, type of combat or logistic arm, childhood experience, age at time of enrolment, number of siblings, birth order, and type of family that may influence serving armed forces personnel.

3. The present study reflects perceptions of armed forces personnel while they are still in service. It seems extremely probable that perceptions of serving soldiers will undergo considerable transformation when the soldiers retire. While in service, the soldier is buttressed by military discipline and sustained by sense of solidarity with other military personnel. Lack of these things will produce corresponding reactions among veterans. The soldier is likewise protected from certain unpleasant realities by rationalizations which, however, are adequate to their task as long as soldier remains in army, since everyone refrains from questioning them. Likewise, the soldier is isolated from many aspects of communication and shielded from competition. Such protective devices no longer function when the soldier retires and becomes a civilian. For these reasons, studies of perceptions of serving soldiers are useful only insofar as
they can be evaluated in the light of probable changes which will occur after release from the armed forces. Hence, it is imperative to study retired military personnel as well.

4. Further research could be done to identify substantial individual and group characteristics critical to combat. This may lead to improvements in training to enhance combat readiness and performance among individuals and unit or sub-unit. It may also provide necessary directions for better recruitment, selection and training programs.

Longitudinal studies need to be carried out on serving armed forces personnel before they are inducted into battle and follow up studies done to determine perceptual and behavioral changes amongst armed forces personnel due to combat.

The findings of this study offer insight into the role of coping resources and few related factors in dealing with stress in the military environment, however, several questions remain. Specifically, what other psychological and social resources could assist a soldier in continuing a mission while experiencing extreme stress in combat.
References


