

Readiness of Military Professionals for Challenging Situations

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Abstract—The article deals with the readiness of military professionals for challenging situations. It discusses higher requirements on the psychical endurance of military professionals arising from the specific nature of the military occupation, which is typical for being very difficult to maintain regularity, which is in accordance with the hygiene of work alternated by relaxation. The soldier must be able to serve in the long term and constantly intense performance that goes beyond human tolerance to stress situations. A challenging situation is always associated with overcoming difficulties, obstacles and complicated circumstances or using unusual methods, ways and means to achieve the desired (expected) objectives, performing a given task or satisfying an important need. This paper describes the categories of challenging situations, their classification and characteristics. Attention is also paid to the formation of personality in challenging situations, coping with stress in challenging situations, Phases of solutions of stressful situations, resistance to challenging life situations and its factors. Finally, the article is focused on increasing the readiness of military professionals for challenging situations.

Keywords—Coping, challenging situations, stress, stressful situations, military professionals, resilience.

I. INTRODUCTION

MILITARY professionals are working in conditions that require a higher degree of psychological resilience. Life in the military and military activities has an extraordinary influence on the personality of the military professionals, as they are particularly challenging, both in terms of requirements that are placed on the physical readiness of military professionals, and in terms of psychic claims. Consolidation of military professional's resilience against challenging situations and shaping their greater adaptability to ever-changing conditions of life and human activity is an important prerequisite for their successful work during deployment. In today's highly changing environment, it is to be expected that the crises will increase, and military professionals will have to work effectively under stress while carrying out their duties during routine daily work in the unit but also in their deployment. An example might be the workload in foreign missions, and current considerations about deployment of the military to cope with the influx of refugees into Europe.

American psychologists Holmes and Rahe compiled a scale of stress situations – events that are commonly experienced in the real life. Life events are rated according to the degree of

psychological stress on the scale of 0–100 points. The degree of the overall stress accumulates. If a person in the course of one year, experiencing such changes, reaches more than 300 points, he could suffer from the severe reactions, such as depression and psychosomatic illnesses (heart attack, high blood pressure, asthma, allergies, etc.). Without any exaggeration, every military professional in the course of carrying out of their duties in military operations (regardless of the type and nature) experience such stress that according to the Holmes-Rahe Stress Scale he reaches a value of approximately 150 points. Here is included, for example, a change in eating and sleeping habits and mode of the day, a change of social and recreational activities, a change in working hours and working conditions, a change of his own habits and living conditions, etc.

All these changes will mostly happen over a period of approximately six months. It should be noted that while this calculation does not take into account the potential danger to life and health, or for the fulfillment of tasks, potential conflicts with colleagues or problematic situations that may arise in the soldier's family during deployment [1]. While performing tasks in military operations, soldiers have therefore considerable potential for changes in their psyche.

II. MILITARY PROFESSIONALS IN CHALLENGING SITUATIONS

A. Categories of Challenging Situations

A challenging situation is always associated with the overcoming difficulties, obstacles, and complicated circumstances or using unorthodox methods, ways and means to achieve the desired (expected) targets, accomplish a given task or satisfy some important needs [2]. There are so called simple challenging situations for which is typical that to achieve the objective, fulfill the task or meet a need is not achievable by conventional methods and requires overcoming some difficulties, obstacles or complicated circumstances. Even in these situations, healthy person manages to deal with the difficulties, although with some increase in physical or mental exertion. Challenging life situations for which it is necessary to specially prepare human individuals and groups are such situations, from which one can expect, apart from displays of adaption, also inadequate reactions, failure, pathological manifestations. These are situations where the demands on people are diverted from the usual framework, where there are serious constraints in meeting essential needs, or there is a clash of two or more contradictory forces on the way to achieving the objective [3].

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B. Classification and Characterizations of Challenging Situations

Challenging situations are divided into the frustration, stress and those causing conflicts. This classification is based on the nature of the consequences that these situations cause to personality. The stress is a state induced by such challenging life situations in which a disturbing factor acts on the human organism and makes it difficult to carry out the tasks and meeting the needs [4]. The stress situation is intensified, escalated everyday demand on a man. These include work overload from difficult tasks, their quantity, deadlines escalation (excessive shortening), or increasing the complexity of environmental conditions [2]. Frustration is a condition caused by the situation that prevents meeting the vital needs [4]. Conflict is a form of frustration (to be presented separately because it's form is an extremely complex and important). It reflects a clash of two or more contradictory forces on the way to the goal, to meet needs; while these are usually forces of approximately equally size (engagement of major and minor forces quickly leads to solutions so no actual conflict arises) [3].

Challenging situations may arise [2]:

- 1) Under the influence of natural conditions.
- 2) Under the influence of interpersonal and social conditions.

The first group is caused by, for example, adverse weather conditions (temperature, atmospheric pressure, humidity, air composition, the presence of undesirable gaseous components, excessive dust); presence of undesirable gaseous components, excessive dust; noise, vibration, harmful radiation. The situation caused by natural conditions may not be challenging only by a plethora of stimuli acting on the human body, but also by their lack. More diverse and complex are challenging situations caused by the effects of interpersonal and social conditions. Complexity of these situations may arise from excess or lack of stimuli, in this case, of interpersonal or social nature. Social stimuli act excessively, e.g. on commander during combat deployment. Combat action is conducted in terms of societal needs, but commanders must be conscious to the interests of the unit as a social group, or even individual soldiers. They must uncompromisingly decide to issue of the necessary orders, often without all needed information and sufficient time to consider the best course of action. Their decision making process is even more difficult because not only they decides about material values, but also about the fate of others [2].

C. Development of Personality in Difficult Situations

When considering the statement, according to which "a personality is a summary of the relationships to many realities of the outside world and personality traits are formed through these relationships," in any case there is no possibility to leave out those relationships that arise in difficult situations. They are an essential part of everyone's life; they give it a unique character, typical for a given individual. Depends on the size of the load, the quantity and quality of stressful situations and ways one can deal with them, whether formative influence on

one's personality can be considered positive or rather negative. If a person wants to get physically and mentally stronger under the influence of these factors, if the positive qualities of ones' personality are to develop and consolidate, it is necessary to acquire the efficient ways of solving and coping with these situations and learn to fight the stress. Accumulation of stressful situations, and the load of excessive demands exceeding the individual limit of resistance to stress, can lead to fixation of inadequate reactions, to the formation of such traits, such as apathy, depression, numbness, lack of initiation and also addiction, aggression and anger. These features do not contribute to the optimal development of personality [5].

For the military profession it is typical that it may be very difficult to keep a regularity of work, which is in a line with hygiene of work alternated with a rest. Military professional has to, in particular, on deployment, in situations of national danger or war show long-term and continuous tense performance that goes beyond human tolerance to stress. This leads to an extreme fatigue and exhaustion of soldiers, which are reflected in their conduct and behavior. Disorders often appear and in some case, when stress load is enormous even temporary or permanent effects on their psyche may occur [6].

Insufficient attention given to the conditions of life, e.g. in the mission leads to a weakening of psychological balance and increase the vulnerability of the psyche of soldiers. An intense impact on the psyche of soldiers have stressor (stressful and often harmful factors causing stress) related to tasks in military operations and the related threat of damage of their health or life. These operational stressors have potentially traumatic character. They are characterized by their unpredictability; on the other hand, they are easily distinguishable as the initiators of potential disruption of the psyche. According to military professionals in the current military conflicts among the stressors belong artillery fire (IDF), enemies' snipers, IED, traffic accidents, and mass graves. A typical reaction of the organism to such situation is an acute stress reaction, sometimes in literature described as exhaustion from fighting. This is a situation where some of the symptoms are so intense that the suffering soldier is acting inefficiently, paradoxically or is dangerous to himself or to the surroundings [7].

Most often, the following symptoms of exhaustion from the combat are being described as: euphoria – irritability, difficulties to obey to commanders or fulfill an obligation, reluctance to leave the safe place, lack of concentration, tension, stomach discomfort, fear, anger, difficulty with memory, immobilization, etc. The acute exhaustion from the fight can occur several hours or even a few minutes after the soldier's involvement in combat operations. Most of the affected soldiers are able to return to the initial behavior within a few hours. Despite the fact that the operational stressors have great potential to damage the mental health, it turns out that they also have a positive impact on the personality of soldiers. Own experience with such stressful situations often leads to significant changes in the importance

of life priorities, changes the perspective of soldiers on themselves and the outside world. This personal experience makes military professionals feeling of abilities, knowledge, greater professionalism and pride in themselves and their unit [7].

D. Resistance to Challenging Situations and Its Factors

Resistance to challenging situations in the life is the ability to cope with these situations without disproportionate, pathological reactions. Factors affecting resilience in difficult situations are as follows [2]:

- 1) Hereditary characteristics of an organism: physique, the strength of the nervous system – the type of higher nervous activity.
- 2) The current state of the organism (the state which is given mainly by age and immediate situation).
- 3) Acquired characteristics: intellect, social orientation, development especially of higher emotions and qualities of the will; personality trait.
- 4) Experience in overcoming stress and frustration.

Resistance reinforcing: the exercise of certain, mainly manual activities which, at least seemingly solve the situation or having the character of spare objectives, activities, distracting least temporarily in another direction; positive interpersonal relationships, and societal relationships; mobilizing conscious effort to overcome the difficult situation [2].

III. COPING WITH STRESS IN CHALLENGING SITUATIONS

Coping can be understood as a form of behavior by which it can resist or overcome stressful situations. It is the process of dealing with the external and internal requirements which are experienced as burdensome or currently beyond the capabilities of an individual. Management takes place on a conscious and unconscious level of human experience. It is obvious that stressful situations affect the functioning of the body both mentally and physically. The longer the stress act on a man, more damaging it is [8].

There is no unified guidance on how to deal and cope with the stressful situations, because each person is individual and unique. One and the same way of coping with stressful situations do not apply to every individual as well. The coping with stressful situations takes place in stages that follow each other. For each phase, when individuals manage to cope with the stressful situations, returns to a state of mental equilibrium recovery personalities and do not succumb to the effects of stress [9].

Phases of solutions for stressful situations [9]:

- 1) First phase: Alarm response is the mobilization of psychological defense forces of the organism. Creates readiness for action based on the orientation in the new conditions (regulating the body through the central nervous system and the endocrine glands). The organism prepares to avert the danger and the possibility to react promptly in the expected changed conditions.
- 2) Second phase: Resistance, increases resistance to various types – own solutions to stressful situations, which is

carried out in two ways: actively resisting negative influences (stress) or active coping with the situation (stress).

- 3) Third phase: Stabilization or depletion to represents the specific ways of coping with stress and restoring the balance or failure in the stressful situations and succumbing to the stress influences.

The duration of the each phase, their mutual interpenetration and dynamics of changes in these components determines the character of stressful situations, while personality is the central component in any situation of the psychic stress. The progress of the active process of a restoring of the balance between the individual and the environment depends on the structure and dynamics of personality and psychological assumptions of a man. All three phases are part of a process of adaptation (adaptation and integration to the new conditions) towards restoring wellbeing and normalization of living conditions [5].

IV. INCREASING THE READINESS ON CHALLENGING SITUATIONS

The concrete measures to increase the psychological resilience of military professionals and thus to increase their readiness for challenging situations, should be viewed from the two levels. On the one hand, it is a measure of an institutional nature – the procedures and actions of the armed forces themselves, on the other hand, stands alone activity professional soldier in enhancing their own psychological resistance. To understand where the organization and the place where the emphasis is on increasing the active psychological resistance of soldiers, it is necessary to understand which factors influence the coping with stressful situations [7].

Coping with stressful situations is determined by four basic components. Among the so-called *coping capabilities* there are included all personal requirements in the terms of talents and characteristics that determine and influence the managing external and internal stressors. *Coping process* means interaction at the level of the individual – environment in stress situations of different time duration that arise when threat perceptions and that ends either by removing stressors or adaptation to them. They are determined by individual control capabilities and different operating patterns. *Coping formulas* (strategies, styles) are addictive, relatively consistent formulas of processing and coping that individual uses in conflict with internal or external stressors. *Coping resources* represent important prerequisites for effective coping processes in terms of eliminating stressors or adaptation to these stressors. Differentiation shall be internal coping resources (health, ability to solve a particular problem, etc.) and external coping resources (social support, understanding to partner, etc.) [7].

A. Measures of Institutional Character

From the foregoing and real life, it is obvious that not all people have the same potential for the coping. This potential is determined by the emotional and innate characteristics of personality, character, temperament, and abilities, also by

motivation and personality focus. Psycho-diagnostic examinations conducted upon entry into the armed forces should be targeted, among others, to those personal qualities that predict coping of challenging situations. Candidates for entry into the armed forces, who meet criteria of psych diagnostic examination should have integrated personality with excessive ability to adapt and cognitive capacity, high levels of self-regulation, be emotionally stable, socially compatible and resistant to stress [7]. Another measure is to minimize stress situations resulting from stressors, which are referred to as "the difficulties related to everyday life in the area of deployment (daily hassles)". In this case, it is a kind of optimization of life in the area of deployment, providing conditions for military contacts with the family, the conditions for a meaningful leisure time, creating a space for regeneration, etc. As it seems to be the most challenging is achievement of mental readiness of soldiers, thus creating space for the creation of effective coping patterns (styles and strategies). Purposeful process of psyche preparation focused on the successful completion of tasks, as well as the process of deliberate building of a mental health is defined as a psychological preparation. If the psychological preparation is linked organically with other specialized training courses, military professional or unit may increase mental endurance in direct response to specific rehearsal of military activity. The bottom line is repeated inducing selection in stressful situations in terms of training and creating intentional training situations similar to anticipated stressful situations in the area of deployment. This enables that this way gained experience and skills can be used in situations where it is most needed [7]. It is also considerable motivation and psych hygienic importance of classifying elements of psychological preparation in training. By having simulated real-stress situations applied to training, the training gets a sense. This increases its attraction and allows to the soldier to reduce or eliminate undesirable emotional experience. It is a means of satisfying his needs, a source of self-esteem and confidence. The aim of the psychological preparation is therefore inform all factors of psychological readiness to perform tasks, regulate mental states and thus strengthen the physical and mental health. Psychological readiness factors that are mutually conditional with factors of psychical health are influenced by psychological preparation and development in the field of functional reliability of psychological processes in different types and levels of stress (successful performance and coping). In the activation-motivational level, there are strengthened feelings of activation, optimism, wellbeing, and positive attitudes. Development of psychological readiness affects concentration, attention, timely and accurate response. The last factor is the level of mental preparedness sociability, i.e. a developing of social skills, empathy and assertiveness [7].

An important role in influencing the impact of stressors on military professionals can play their superiors commanders. A consideration should be given to importance of commander behaviors in influencing the extent to which various stressors military professionals' experience (psychological health, poor

job satisfaction, low morale, etc.) are related to different types of strains (psychological health, poor job satisfaction, low morale, etc.). Commanders' behaviors are capable of reducing the actual amount of stress experienced by soldiers in garrison and on military operations. Despite there are certain stressors over which commanders have practically no control (difficult living conditions in deployments, heavy workload during critical missions, etc.), commanders have the capacity to affect certain stressors by providing soldiers the latitude to exercise judgment over how jobs are done. Commanders who provide structure and support decrease the level of stressors that military professionals experience. Military professionals who perceive that their commanders provide structure and support tend to get along with each other better (lower conflicts), know what to do in their jobs (no ambiguous roles), and feel that they are making more of an important contribution (high task significance). There is evidence to suggest that ability of the commander to provide structure is particularly important the more ambiguous the operational environment [10].

Military professionals may be prepared for difficult situations with the help of Crew Resource Management methodology in training. Crew Resource Management (CRM) is a method and system of training for the activities in which human error has devastating effects. CRM methodology includes the area of competencies, skills, behaviors involving awareness, awareness, problem solving, decision making, teamwork, leadership, follow, self-awareness. It is primarily aimed at members of the team, their own behavior, skills, and experience that can be used in the training of new military professionals or members of the teams [11].

B. Increasing Mental Resilience of Military Professionals

Increasing own mental resistance is a long purposeful process implemented at several levels: optimization of lifestyle, stress management (knowledge of stressful situations which they perceive as threatening, knowledge of own symptoms of stress and recognizing one's own coping strategies and their effectiveness) knowledge and mastery of activation and relaxation methods that have the potential to affect the overall well-being and understanding of the principles of psychological first aid [7].

V. CONCLUSION

Man lives and acts in the constantly changing environmental conditions and is able to manage the seemingly unmanageable situation. He surpassed it since ancient times and throughout its evolution as a species is comprised of a continuous alternation of various life-threatening effects. Military environment and the role of performance in military operations bring such challenging situations a lot. It is therefore necessary to address the issue of military professionals in challenging situations and their preparation.

The aim of this paper is to inform and educate on the processes that are shaping the resistance of military professionals to challenging situations. The article can serve as a guide in the preparation of military professionals to stressful situations and coping with them, both in terms of the

needs of the armed forces, commanders and military professionals themselves.

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