

Review article

Psychological preparation of soldiers for military service

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ABSTRACT

Many researchers emphasize the fact that the profession of a soldier is burdened with a significant stress, which requires individuals to have specific predispositions. The effectiveness of soldiers' actions depends on many factors, which are an important research areas in terms of health, the psychology of stress and personal security.

The quality of professional performance is influenced by external factors as well as and personality. An important requirement is resistance to stress-inducing stimuli and the ability to use adaptive ways of coping with stress. Increased mental resilience enables the individual to function better under pressure in a rapidly changing environment – hence the need for individuals to be aware of their ability to cope with stress. The article presents the process of selection, preparation and education of soldiers for military action.

KEYWORDS

education, service of soldiers, health of soldiers



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Introduction

An important area in terms of health, psychology of stress and personal security is how military personnel are selected for various positions, where resistance to stressful stimuli and the ability to use adaptive methods of coping with stress are an important requirement affecting the performance of official tasks. The importance of stress factors related to everyday life in the military environment is only emphasised in situations where efficiency and an ability to interpret situations related to the battlefield are required.

Recruitment

Hiring the right staff who are resistant to stress may help achieve tangible results in the future [1]. The costs incurred while acquiring a candidate should pay off in the future. The essence of personnel selection is to match the applicant for employment in a specific position. Both personality traits and practical skills are important. However, the criteria specified must not be too strict. The level of knowledge and skills should not be too high in relation

to the requirements. The employee must have opportunities for professional development. Otherwise, it is very likely that he will quickly lose motivation and leave the organisation [2]. It is also important to avoid having an underqualified candidate for a vacant position. In such a case, the costs incurred for training and as a result of the employee's incompetence may turn out to be disproportionate to the results. According to human resource professionals, people are the most insecure component of an organisation's link. Skilful recruitment of staff is aimed at reducing the unpredictability of employees [3]. The organisation may conduct its own human resources policy based on its own human resources. Such action has a long-term dimension.

The model process of personnel selection consists of recruitment, selection and introduction to work. Its exact procedure varies depending on the size of the organisation, specific techniques used, selection, number of candidates, etc. However, it should involve an orderly sequence of activities to select the best candidates for the job.

Apart from the aforementioned difficulties, selection for military service is often conducted *en masse*. Its procedure and criteria are also similar in many countries through standards, conferences, and experience sharing. One of the primary forms is selection and preliminary classification [4]. The aim is to select candidates who are most promising to complete basic training and specialist training. Psychological testing is one component of general suitability vetting. In addition to medical and personal examinations, these tests help make a decision on whether to accept a candidate. There are various models for organising psychological selection [5].

The essence of the system is the link between scientific research and practical selection and the participation of state institutions (courts, psychological counselling centres, hospitals). This is just one possible variant in which multi-stage selection occurs.

Commanders have no direct influence on who is selected as a soldier candidate. However, it is important to recognise the relevance of recruitment to an individual's future performance in the military [6]. The most common two methods of recruitment are positive and negative selection. During the former, only the best candidates are selected according to strict criteria. An essential condition for this approach is a large number of applicants. On the other hand, if there are few candidates, the selection is based on negative selection, which involves rejecting only those who do not even minimally meet certain criteria. So, the selection method depends primarily on the number of candidates and achievement of desired goals.

Formulating selection criteria is a difficult and responsible task. The basic determinant is the model of an ideal soldier. There are two ways of constructing such a model [7]. The first is an empirical profile, which ensures accurate selection only for a specific position at a strictly defined moment. A change in the tasks assigned to a vacancy may result in the need to change employees. Such a profile is built by analysing the experience of soldiers previously working in that position. Then, candidates whose characteristics are most similar to those of their predecessors, such as level of intellectual ability, temperamental and personality traits, are sought. In order to increase credibility, those who previously failed in a given position are also examined. Such a comparison provides an opportunity to identify desirable properties and exclude unsuitable ones. A completely different approach applies when creating a theoretical profile. Potential job tasks and psychological concepts are considered when determining the requirements for a given position [8]. In the theoretical profile, the requirements for candidates can be divided into three categories:

- psychological traits, which are formed by traits of temperament, personality, and intellect,
- knowledge resources, i.e. theoretical knowledge related to work in a given position,
- practical skills, these are specific abilities revealed in real or simulated action [9; 10].

Moreover, such requirements should not be a mere enumeration, but an orderly sequence – from the most to the least important. The requirements in the profile should have a specific level of significance that, if not met, automatically disqualifies the candidate.

One of the selection tools used in practice are psychological tests used to determine a candidate's personality. Such tests can be either:

- 1) a method of evaluation:
 - clinical – in this case, the verification of individual candidate characteristics is descriptive,
 - statistical – comparing candidates to a certain reference group;
- 2) vocational criteria:
 - ability and intelligence tests,
 - personality tests,
 - temperament tests,
 - qualification (competence) tests [11].

Psychological tests are “standardised and objectified methods by which behaviours that are a representative sample of the trait under study are assessed” [8]. Today, these are the requirements for those responsible for employee selection. Psychological tests have a specific structure and rules regarding their completion. This is most often done in the presence of a psychologist who additionally observes and evaluates the candidate. All psychological tests must meet qualities such as specific accuracy, reliability, adaptation to social conditions, and should be standardised and normalised. The bottom line is relevance and reliability. These are psychometric measures of whether a test examines the right traits and how accurately it examines them. If a test has high validity, its results can be trusted. The standard accuracy of the tests is – 0.99-0.3. However, if the accuracy and reliability values are in the range of 0.7-0.99, these are very good tests and their results can be trusted [12].

Another technique for screening candidates is personality tests. They are used to measure an individual's predispositions to behave in certain ways. Based on such tests, the psychologist is able to determine the strengths and weaknesses of the candidate and develop a proposal for a career path. The most frequently used tests are: R. Cattell's personality test, H. Eysenck's EPQ and NEE-FFI by P.T. Costa and R.R. McCrae based on the Big Five concept¹.

Temperament tests allow you to find out if a candidate is resilient to stress, how they cope with large amounts of responsibilities, working under time pressure or changing environmental conditions. The primary measure is stimulus resistance. Two types of people can be distinguished: more reactive to stimuli – stimuli-susceptible, and less reactive to stimuli – stimuli-resistant. Temperament as a set of traits accompanies every human activity. Tests measuring it are used when examining candidates for jobs that require reflexes, quick reactions or high resistance to stress (the army and other uniformed services, professional drivers). Temperament tests in current use include:

¹ The Big Five concept is a five-factor model of personality consisting of traits such as neuroticism, extraversion, openness to experience, agreeableness, and conscientiousness.

- PTS Temperament Questionnaire,
- EAS Temperament Questionnaire,
- Formal Behavioural Characteristics – FCZ-KT Temperament Questionnaire [9; 10].

Personality traits that are particularly desirable in an organisation such as the military can also be identified through the questionnaire method. One example is the commonly used MAPP sheet – i.e., the motivational analysis of professional potential. MAPP is used to examine a specific person's individual attitudes and motivations in relation to specific areas of work. It also allows a person's profile to be compared with the requirements of specific jobs. The tool consists of 71 triads; the respondent for each triad indicates the most and least relevant statement. Although there are tough methodological requirements for questionnaires, their use still faces criticism. The most common complaint is that the questionnaire examines artificial, isolated human characteristics and does not address the occupational environment [12]. The questionnaire measurement does not have to be perfect. It is merely a complementary method for other forms of professional recruitment.

Nowadays, the Assessment Center (AC) method is increasingly used. It is an effective job qualification technique that can be used in recruitment, employee evaluation, and human resource management planning. It is essentially a set of tests and verification tools that help fill senior management positions. Assessment Center consists of creating a group of experts who evaluate a small group of candidates in terms of professional qualifications, personal characteristics and behaviour. Evaluation can be divided into several stages:

- 1) the selection of candidates to be evaluated as well as expert evaluators,
- 2) informing those being evaluated,
- 3) preparing tests, conducting assessments,
- 4) analysis of results by experts,
- 5) discussion of the results with the participants,
- 6) an interview with the selected candidate [Cf.: 13, p. 18; 14].

Assessment Center² is a comprehensive approach to the selection process, personnel evaluation, and human capital planning. In the context of personnel selection, the purpose of this method is internal and external selection, identification of development and training needs of personnel, evaluation of personnel capabilities and selection of an appropriate person for a given position.

The Assessment Center method involves assessing a number of skills, behaviours and personal characteristics required for a specific position. It is designed to get to know the candidate thoroughly and to test how they might function within the company. Candidates solve specially designed tasks that test their suitability for the position. Sessions usually last from a few hours to 2 days and up to a dozen candidates are invited. They participate in tests, exercises, interviews, and simulations either in groups or individually [15]. During the Assessment Center, candidates participate in scenarios that reflect the conditions in which people in managerial and other positions work, including management games, issue analysis and presentation, directed discussion groups, *in-basket* (director's mail), which require participants to

² The origins of the use of AC – Assessment Center is the recruitment of officers of the German Air Force in the 1930s. AC was used in the British Army during World War II and later in the selection of US intelligence agents. On civilian grounds, the method was used and refined in the 1950s by the American telecommunications company AT&T, and 20 years later it found its way to Europe. Currently it is the most frequently used tool for recruiting new employees.

plan, make decisions, organise, have leadership skills, communicate and demonstrate proper motivations for action. The course of the tasks performed during AC is observed by specially designated people – usually psychologists and senior management – which is then evaluated.

The exercises include typical selection methods such as structured interviews, career planning, psychological or intelligence tests. After participants complete the tasks and leave the AC site, the observers evaluate the candidates by identifying their strengths and weaknesses, making recommendations, and suggesting training needs [5].

As a specific example of a nonprofit organisation, the military has its own recruitment mechanisms for vacancies. Its detailed rules are defined by the Law on the Service of Professional Soldiers. According to its content, a candidate for the army must meet a number of formal requirements. Article 2 states that a military candidate “may be someone who has Polish citizenship, with an unblemished reputation, whose loyalty to the Republic of Poland is beyond doubt, with appropriate qualifications and physical and mental capacity to perform professional military service” [16]. The detailed requirements differ depending on which personal corps the candidate wants to join in the future. Different criteria have to be met by a candidate for an officer position, a non-commissioned officer or a private. However, every future soldier must pass psychological tests at military psychological laboratories and physical fitness tests. Pre-selection of candidates is already conducted at this stage. The next step is basic training.

Selection of commanders

One of the responsibilities of military psychology is to select candidates for commanders at various levels. The theoretical basis for such selection changes with the level of empirical knowledge. The common belief was that the personal qualities of a candidate for a future commander were decisive [17]. So people with specific predispositions and commanding ability were sought. Today, this approach has changed. The breakthrough was Ralph M. Stogdill's 1948 analysis. He showed that only a few qualities contribute to a leader's success. The ideal commander is intelligent, has verbal skills, is original, and can react quickly. In addition, they have athletic accomplishments, show initiative and display perseverance and confidence [18]. Modern psychology distinguishes several important features of the ideal commander, these include commitment, analytical skills, interpersonal skills, initiative and resistance to stress.

The concepts of interaction and transaction, derived from social psychology, have a great impact on defining a model commander. According to the transactional theory, the success of a commander is a combination of personal and environmental characteristics. Under circumstances of stress or threat to goals and interests, such a person is inclined to reveal leadership abilities. Such conditions are applied during situation tests, of which computer games are a variation. Interpersonal skills, decision-making styles, including how to make choices, and leadership styles can be identified by testing. The transactional approach assumes that command can be learnt and personality traits are just a positive addition. Therefore, the importance of the success or failure in tests is diminishing in practice. However, forecasting is increasingly prevalent from school time through the lower and middle levels of command. It is extremely difficult to predict human behaviour in the life-threatening conditions posed by the battlefield.

In the Polish Army, selection is carried out on the basis of general abilities, selected personality traits and resistance to stress. In addition, entrance exams are organised to determine

physical fitness. Kazimierz Migdał conducted research on candidates for officer schools. The accuracy of the prediction of academic success ranged from 0.5-0.7. Despite the initial prediction, adverse selection proved necessary. Involving the exclusion of candidates who do not meet standards, show a lack of motivation or leadership ability [19].

The accuracy of any prediction of leadership ability is moderate to low. The requirements for future commanders are constantly changing [3]. The reason is modern technology and new methods of combat. The social meaning of military service is also evolving. In the absence of overt military threats, the image of a soldier as an attractive profession is diminishing. Hence, changes in the direction of educating future commanders. Today, the commander, in addition to practical skills, must have a thorough theoretical knowledge related to civilian life.

Conclusions

The recruitment process does not end with acceptance for military service. The next step is basic training. This period, commonly referred to as “Initial Entry Training (IET)”, lasts 4-6 weeks and is designed to teach basic behaviour specific to military service. It is a great opportunity for commanders to get to know the personality traits of their soldiers.

A man, usually young, who has been a civilian thus far, begins training in a military unit [5]. From the very beginning he has to adjust to military discipline, the shouting of corporals, the removal of individuality. Additionally, practically every activity involves physical effort. It starts early in the morning with a few kilometres of running and ends with a cleanup late in the evening. A young soldier does not have a moment of free time – even eating and hygiene are done in a hurry. Soldiers undergo repetitive exercises that are physically and mentally exhausting. Every action must be performed perfectly under the watchful eye of the yelling commanders. In such an atmosphere, a soldier must learn a pattern of behaviour that is essential for continued military service.

This basic training mode is not a coincidence or an invention of the commanders themselves. Transforming a “civilian” into a soldier is not an easy process. He is deprived of his freedom of movement, personal belongings, individuality (the same clothes, hairstyle), and instead is given a burdensome system of prohibitions and orders. Such seemingly meaningless orders are designed to select candidates [20]. They allow the commander to learn about individual character traits, adaptability to the situation. By performing identical actions many times, a soldier develops unconditional behaviours that pay off in the event of a threat. It is important to remember that soldiers are designed for armed combat. In such circumstances, smooth operations and trust in the commander are critical.

During basic training, a soldier must adapt to future military service, which is a complex process:

- adaptation to the material and physical environment, e.g. training far from home, participating in exercises in different weather conditions, risk of injury, loss of health, living in a shared dormitory, spartan conditions, etc.,
- adaptation to the content of the tasks performed – the need to carry out orders given by superiors, learning many military skills, increased physical and intellectual effort, rationalisation of the tasks performed,
- adaptation to the social environment – acclimatisation in a diverse group, acceptance of professed norms and values, military order and orders from superiors.

Basic training ends with a military oath. Recruits become full-fledged soldiers. Overcoming difficulties reinforces a sense of purposeful action and raises the soldier's self-esteem. Education is a prerequisite for adaptation and acclimation to a new environment. In subsequent stages of in-depth work, it should also concern coping with stress in difficult situations.

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Conflict of interests

The author declared no conflict of interests.

Author contributions

The author contributed to the interpretation of results and writing of the paper. The author read and approved the final manuscript.

Ethical statement

The research complies with all national and international ethical requirements.

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Biographical note

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Przygotowanie psychologiczne żołnierzy do działania w warunkach służby

STRESZCZENIE

Wielu badaczy podkreśla fakt, że zawód żołnierza jest obciążony znacznym natężeniem sytuacji stresowych, co wymaga od jednostki określonych predyspozycji. Sprawność działania żołnierzy zależy od wielu czynników będących ważnym obszarem badawczym w zakresie nauk o zdrowiu, psychologii stresu czy bezpieczeństwa personalnego. Na jakość realizacji zadań służbowych wpływają czynniki zewnętrzne oraz osobowościowe. Istotnym wymogiem ich jest odporność na bodźce stresogenne i umiejętność stosowania adaptacyjnych sposobów radzenia sobie ze stresem. Zwiększona wytrzymałość psychiczna umożliwia jednostce lepsze funkcjonowanie pod presją w dynamicznie zmieniającym się środowisku. Stąd konieczność, by jednostka była świadoma swych umiejętności i kompetencji odpowiedzialnych za proces radzenia sobie ze stresem. W artykule przedstawiono proces selekcji, przygotowania i edukacji żołnierzy do działania w warunkach służby.

SŁOWA KLUCZOWE edukacja, służba żołnierzy, zdrowie żołnierzy

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