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Impacts Of Counseling On The Performance Of Military Cadets With High Level Of Stress: A Global Perspective With Literature Review

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Abstract

The impact of stress management strategies is vital for improving mental well-being, fostering resilience, and confirming optimum performance among future military officers. It addresses a critical need for effective interventions within a high-stress training environment. The Purpose of the paper is to review the literature on impact of counseling on the performance of military personnel having with high level stress. Besides, it has given emphasis on the global perspective in both the subjects of discussion. It is revealed in present study that counseling as one of the significant factors for an individual or military personnel that can change his or her belief, attitude, perception and reaction towards his personal and social life and surroundings. This paper successively explained the effects of stress on performance, techniques of counseling and its impact, review of literature in the study of counseling. This paper will provide a concise idea to the researchers regarding the studies of effect of counseling on performance who works with high level stress specially in the military academy which will create interest amongst the researchers to study further ahead on different issues correlated to the counseling in the perspective of Bangladesh and globally as well. Present study is significant as it explores the impact of counseling on managing high-level stress among officer cadets at the Military Academy under immense psychological and physical pressure. These findings of the study suggest that counseling can be an effective intervention for reducing stress and improving performance among officer cadets in high-stress environments.

Keywords: Stress, Performance, Counseling, Officer Cadets, Bangladesh Military Academy.

Introduction: Whether during times of conflict or peace, the experience of military training and life imposes a distinctive level of stress on soldiers (Gold & Friedman, 2000). In the military context, stress is frequently linked to deployments, with consequential outcomes such as post-traumatic stress disorder (Fulton et al., 2015). However, military personnel, even when not deployed, encounter a range of stressors, including extended working hours, high workloads, challenging objectives, and ineffective leadership (Brooks & Greenberg, 2018). The absence of deployment-related stress also has adverse effects on emotional, mental, and physical well-being, as well as on behavior and performance (Brooks & Greenberg, 2018; Martins & Lopes, 2012). Notably, individuals in the military under the age of 25 experiences a heightened impact of occupational stress, manifesting in more pronounced mental health issues and productivity declines compared to their older or higher-ranking counterparts (Hourani et al., 2006). This underscores the importance of addressing stress in training young leaders, such as in officer training schools, and understanding its implications for performance.

Military professionals are very stressed because they are highly target driven and highly pressured on results. Military education and training are a process which intends to establish and improve the capabilities of military personnel in their respective roles. Military academies are unique and traditional organizations where cadets are trained with rigorous hardship both physical and mental to become the future officers of the armed forces. It is observed that cadets are facing lot of problems out of stress and sometimes faces difficulties with the existing new environment of military academies and thereby their performance is decreasing and a good number of cadets are drooped out every year.

Re-socialization is an important aspect of inducting a civilian into a military. Re-socialization as a sociological concept deals with the process of mentally and emotionally "re-training" a person so they can operate in an environment other than what they are accustomed. In the transition from civilian to soldier, the individual is trained to solely follow the command of his superiors. Officer Cadets undergo an exhaustive training in the respective military academies. The cadets are coming to military academy from a varied background and different emotional and mental status. The emotional climate in the family at times built the foundation of stress tolerance within an individual. But the most significant role in the context of global in molding the stress tolerance ability comes from the difference of socio-economic status and parenting style. Because cadets of the good SES receive the relatively stable family and social environment which may foster better stress tolerance ability. However, the lower SES adolescents might have a habit of frequent stress tolerance ability which may excel his performance in the stressful situations, The study throws light on the wide spread silent problem by name 'Stress', which affect the performance of the cadets in the military academies where counseling acts as an effective tool to overcome problems.

Stress: Stress is difficult to precisely define and more difficult to measure. Stress is caused not only by external factors, which are called "Stressors", but is also generated internally by our hopes and aspirations, beliefs and attitudes, as well as by our personality attributes and by our unrealistic expectations of ourselves. Stress occurs at work, at home in our social life. "A certain amount of stress occurs all the time. There is no life without stress; but all stress is not bad for us. Some stress is essential for our very existence as well as for our continued personal growth. A completely unstressed person might as well be dead. A certain amount of stress gives us a zest for life and releases our creativity. So, a right balancing is a precondition for happiness.

Types of Stress: Considering the intensity, the stress may be of the following nature:

- a) **Too Little Stress:** Where there is an insufficient challenge to achieve a sense of personal accomplishment, skills are under-utilized. Lack of stimulations leads to boredom. There is a lack of purpose or meaning in life which is not expected.
- b) **Optimum Stress:** Where there is optimum stress, life is balanced, despite being ups and downs perfectly manageable. Job satisfaction and a sense of achievement enable the person to cruise through daily work without much difficulty and without having a plea. This type of stress is expected for performing maximum of an individual capability.
- c) **Too Much Stress:** There is a constant feeling of having too much to do every day. Despite emotional and physical exhaustion the person is unable to take time off to rest and play. He is permanently overdriven but not achieving results as expected.
- d) **Breakdown:** If the efforts are continued, the person may develop chronic neurotic tendencies or one of several psychosomatic illnesses in this phase. People gets disoriented or perturbed in this phase of stress.

How Does Stress Affect the Performance of cadets: Performance is determined by what an organization expects from an individual and how well they fulfill those expectations (Campbell et al., 1993). Therefore, performance is not solely based on the actions taken but rather on the processes of judgment and evaluation surrounding those actions. Stress can make it harder for people to think and process information, leading to a decreased performance. For instance, Idzikowski and Baddeley (1983) discovered that it took double time to complete a task when people were stressed. Another study by McLeod in 1977 found that having too many tasks to do at once, called "task overload," lowered the performance quality and made the performance decline even worse than having just one task.

Although moderate stress may enhance performance, as suggested by the U-hypothesis, prolonged or extreme stress exposure can significantly harm non-task-related aspects of performance. When stress levels are high, it can also make people feel emotionally exhausted, less committed to their work, and more likely to think about leaving their jobs (Cropanzano et al., 2003).

In severe cases, stress can cause post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), a psychiatric condition that impairs daily functioning. PTSD manifests through symptoms like flashbacks, sleep disturbances, and social withdrawal, and can be triggered by deployment and traumatic experiences during service. PTSD has been detected at varying rates among veterans, including those involved in peacekeeping missions and recent conflicts in Afghanistan and Iraq (Litz et al., 1997a, 1997b; Hoge et al., 2004).

Counseling: Counselling is directed toward helping an individual to achieve more adequate personality adjustment. Counselling aims towards personality growth in the direction of maturity competence and self-actualization. 'Self-actualization' is emphasizing trend toward increasing maturity, development of potentialities and self fulfillment as a person. The purpose of counselling involves the achievement of one or more of the following specific goals:

- a) Increased insight into one's problem & behaviour.
- b) A better delineation of one's self- identity.
- c) Resolution of handicapping or disabling conflicts.
- d) Changing of undesirable habits or reaction patterns.
- e) Improved interpersonal or other competencies.
- f) The modification of inaccurate assumption about one's self and one's world and.
- g) The opening of a pathway to a more meaningful and fulfilling existence.

Military Training and Stress: A cadet needs to attain certain standard in different facets of training to be competent to defend the motherland. Thereby a huge transformation takes place during the process of making a civilian into a military man. The process however, creates an opportunity to the individual to adapt in various stresses at peace and war. As we all know that human personality greatly varied from person to person which in turn affect in absorbing the training. As a result, all cadets may not be efficient while absorbing different stresses during training. However, knowledge of managing stress and adaptation technique can help to a great extent to capitalize our human resource to yield better performance and lead a meaningful life. Cadets are likely to suffer from stress due to their body's response to physical (cold, injury, disease) and / or mental (fear, conflict, pressure) demands placed on it. Stress also can occur when cadets think they cannot meet the demands they expected to meet. Sometimes cadets overestimate the difficulty of a task or mission and sometimes they underestimate their abilities.

Effect of Stress on the Performance of Cadets at Military Academy: Stress can affect both cadet's body and mind. Cadets under large amounts of stress can become tired, sick, and unable to concentrate or think clearly to their study and military training. Sometimes, they even suffer from mental breakdowns. But just how much stress is "too much" differs from cadets to cadets. When any cadet faces too much stress for any single incident or reason, he may get perturbed or broken-down and subsequently it affects his other day to day activities for which he can not concentrate to his routing activities. In the race of military academy training, he falls behind and cannot compete with others and fails to keep

pace with the momentum of the training. In the process of time, he found himself aloof and helpless to continue training with main stream. Thereby their performance in both military and academy is going to be declined and sometimes they want to discontinue the training by flying away or committing some unexpected incidents like even suicidal attempts. In this situation he is provided with full hearted support, guidance and counseling by platoon commander, term commander as well as academy counselor/Psychologist. Beside this if the cadets are taught about the strategies of coping style of the stress tolerance certainly, they will be immensely benefited and competent enough to stand against the stress of the academy. So, considering all these aspects and the consequences of the stress on performance, cadets should know about the coping strategies of stress through proper counseling.

Literature Review: Literature reviews are an important part of research (Snyder, 2019). It helps a lot in building ideas, figuring out how to study things, and exploring different topics in various areas (Hulland & Houston, 2020).

Counseling in Military: Counseling is a structured intervention provided by qualified counselors at the Military academies involving individual or group sessions to address psychological stressors, enhance coping mechanisms, and promote overall mental well-being among officer cadets. Counseling involves the application of therapeutic skills by the counselor, including being fully present with clients, engaging in active listening, cultivating a robust therapeutic alliance, and expressing empathetic understanding without judgment (Kaplan et al., 2014). Research indicates that soldiers are particularly susceptible to distress and psychopathology due to increased exposure to stress during military missions (Hoge et al., 2004). Given the prevalence of psychological disorders in the military, it is crucial to implement interventions for both preventing and treating psychopathological conditions, with counseling being a valuable tool for these purposes (Di Fabio, 2017). Various counseling programs have effectively reduced stress levels, fostered positive coping skills, and enhanced academic performance (Gangadharan, 2014).

Stress Management: According to Joseph (2013), stress management involves the application of thoughts and actions to reduce or minimize stress levels when confronting challenging situations. There are various forms of stress management therapy exist, including cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT), mindfulness-based cognitive therapy (MBCT), and counseling methods such as relaxation and breathing techniques, all proven to have notable stress-reducing effects (Jafar et al., 2016; Khoury et al., 2015; Epe et al., 2021).

Counseling and Performance: McLeod's (2001) research highlighted a positive correlation between the provision of counseling and overall workplace benefits. Hughes and Kinder (2007) reported research findings indicating that counseling support can notably enhance employee performance. Chan (2011) concluded that utilizing workplace counseling as a tool can aid in employees' recovery and potentially elevate individual and

organizational performance. Additionally, Izzat (2014) identified a significant impact of workplace counseling on improving employee job performance.

Stress and Performance: Hanafi and Zunaidah(2018) found that job stress can affect job satisfaction and employee performance. Jamal (1985) contends that stress at any level diminishes task performance by reducing an individual's energy, concentration, and time. Vroom (1964) supports a similar perspective, suggesting that physiological responses induced by stressors hinder performance. Some psychologists propose a linear positive relationship between stress and performance. Meglino (1977) asserts that a lack of challenge at low stress levels results in poor performance, and optimal performance is achieved at the highest stress level. However, different findings were found by Hoboubi et al. (2017), who found that there was no effect between job stress and performance, and there was a significant positive correlation between job satisfaction and performance. The findings of this research were also supported by Sutrisno (2014), who obtained the result that job stress did not affect employee performance due to the high character of personality and morale.

Stress and Demographic Variables: Different personal characteristics such as gender, socioeconomic status, and marital status can cause stress that impairs a person's performance. Research by McLeod and Kessler (1990) indicates that economically disadvantaged populations are more prone to psychological stress resulting from life events, with higher rates of psychological distress observed in those with lower socioeconomic status compared to their higher-status counterparts. Adults with lower socioeconomic status are exposed to more stressful conditions and possess fewer resources to cope with these challenges compared to individuals of higher social standing (Schwartz & Meyer, 2010). The economic and social standing of officer cadets determined by factors, such as family income, educational background of parents, and possession of material resources.

Gender plays a significant role in every aspect of the stress process, influencing the input by determining if a situation is perceived as stressful and the output by shaping coping responses and the health consequences of stress reactions (Baruchet al., 1987). Gender refers to the classification of officer cadets based on biological sex, with male and female categories, as recorded in official military records and personnel files. Women not only encounter more stressful life events (Kessler et al., 1985) but also employ distinct coping strategies, which refer to the cognitive and behavioral processes individuals use to navigate challenging, enduring, hostile, or harmful conditions (Azale et al., 2018). Additionally, research indicates that women experience a greater degree of chronic stress compared to men (McDonough & Walters, 2001).

Conclusion: Army cadets frequently experience high stress during basic military training in the Academy. It is necessary to pay close attention to what factors can deal effectively with stress in new recruited cadets. Stress reduction of army cadets in their new military environment has been considered a unique area of this article. Everyone's perception of threat is different. These perceptions have a lot to do with how much or how well or badly we react to situations. We all have a different tolerance level. Stress can influence our

physical and psychological well-being. It also influences our performance on many tasks and even the ultimate course of our career. By adopting some of the coping techniques of stress which have been discussed in this article, we can certainly avoid some and cope with others. Since military cadets are always undergoing their training with numerous stresses, so by following some of the coping techniques through counseling, cadets may remain stress free and can enhance their performance in both physically and mentally. At the same time there should have a combined and comprehensive effort taken by platoon commanders and instructors at all levels to make a healthy and favorable environment for the cadets to perform his maximum by coping with stress in utilizing the techniques of counseling.

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