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Stressors among Personal below Officer Rank (PBOR) of Indian Army: An Empirical Investigation

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ABSTRACT

Stress is an inevitable part of working life within any organization and military is not an exception. Active duty military personnel were found to have poor mental and physical health compared to veterans and reserve personnel. The present study aims to study the stress level among military personnel in the Indian Army and to study the individual and institutional coping mechanism to deal with the stress among military personnel. A standardized questionnaire has been used in order to collect data from respondents. Stratified random sampling technique has been used to collect sample from 611 respondents, who are only PBOR i.e. JCOs and Other Ranks (OR), which are picked from various battalions, arm and service. The results express that the Role Ambiguity (RA) level is highest as PBOR are often given additional and vague tasks over and above their generic role. The results show that the Resource Inadequacy level is highest because whenever PBOR are assigned a task he is generally not upfront assigned adequate resources and funds. He has to follow a tedious funding procedure, long chain of command and the hierarchical structure of the organization, which control the funds and resources. The study recommends that work culture and environment in the Army needs to be reviewed de-nova, as PBOR avoid meeting their bosses if they have not been able to work as per their expectations. Superiors should also assign tasks to their subordinates depending on their capability, aptitude and experience. An informal and interactive approach, time permitting, will help in aligning the bosses view, his own understanding of the issue and the organizational requirement. Adherence to SOPs, clear orders/instructions/briefings, awareness of standards of behavior in any organization is a must and needs to be strengthened in the Army too.

KEY WORDS: Stress, PBOR, Role Ambiguity, Resource Inadequacy Level

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INTRODUCTION

Violence by itself has become synonymous with trauma and stress. That is why many people complained of depression during wars with over three fourth of them being diagnosed with serious psychological disorders. People, especially the children, were also known to have suffered such psychological disorders in the war in Vietnam and Afghanistan. Axiomatically, warfare, without doubt, is among the most distressing circumstances that human beings endure. To be separated from the family, friends and familiar locations for long periods is sufficient enough to produce stress reaction in most healthy people. Further, mere deaths and injuries to friends and colleagues are emotionally devastating and cause intense grief reactions. Add to that the constant threat of personal maiming or death and contributions to killing of others.

Even the most mentally healthy and stable individual's experience some changes after exposure to operational/combat stress. This is reflected in the letter written by Lt Gen Sir Thomas Picton, commander, British 5th Division to Lord Wellington in the battle of Waterloo, 1815, saying,

"My Lord, I must give up. I am grown so nervous that when there is any service to be done, it works upon my mind so that it is impossible for me to sleep at night. I cannot possibly stand it and I am forced to retire".

Therefore, from Generals to the enlisted in the lower ranks, everyone in the military is vulnerable to combat stress. Thousands of cases of officers and men were evacuated as cases of shell shock in the British forces. The Indian soldiers being a victim of combat stress should therefore, not come as a surprise. The environment of Counter Insurgency (CI) operations is no different than what the Americans and the British are facing in Iraq and Afghanistan. The future is going to witness more and more stress related casualties as the future battle field environment is going to be characterized by increasing kill probability of weapons, improvements in night fighting capability and so on. As regards the effects of stress, Kulgan (1976) said : *"People who fight future wars may experience so much strain that they will breakdown, whether they will come in contact with the enemy or not".*

Traditionally, the Indian soldier came from the rural background. Though less educated, he was hardy and could easily brave the hardships of Army life. In yester years, stress was never heard of. The Indian military history is replete with incidents and descriptions of steadfastness in the face of seemingly insurmountable adversity. Under the British era, the Army was the most coveted and respected organization. The men in uniform were held in high esteem by the society. Any petition by a soldier was, therefore addressed with top priority. Even after independence, the Indian Civil

Services (ICS) officers were directed towards the welfare of the soldier. Later, during the 1950's and 60's, the soldier was still viewed as the savior of the nation. But the humiliating defeat during the Sino - Indian war of 1962, gave a setback to the fine image of the Army. Soon thereafter, it revived after the 1965 war with Pakistan. The humiliating defeat of the Pakistan Army in 1971 gave further fillip to the image of the Army and the uniformed man continued to enjoy high status in the society. The 80s and 90s were the turbulent decades for the Indian Army. Beginning with the militancy in Punjab in the mid-80s, soon an uninterrupted cycle began in 1987, with the innocuous induction of the Indian Peace Keeping Force (IPKF) in Sri Lanka. It was soon involved in a war, which was neither intended nor was it structured to fight. As it was being recalled, even before completing its mandate, insurgency erupted in the valley in the 90s and later graduated to a full proxy war. Since then the Army has been engaged in two widely separated regions, fighting proxy war in Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) in the west and insurgency in the North East (NE) region. In 1999, there was a brief focus on fighting conventional war in Kargil. It was the first war which got televised for the Nation and the world. Though it briefly revived the status of the soldier as the national hero, but the euphoria of victory was short lived.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Stress is an inevitable part of working life within any organization. Every employee encounters different types of stressful situations, which ultimately shape our attitudes towards, and perceptions of, the organization we work for. Military stressors faced by soldiers during peacekeeping missions such as isolation, ambiguity, powerlessness, boredom, and danger/threat. Active duty military personnel were found to have poor mental and physical health compared to veterans and reserve personnel in a study conducted¹. Heavy workload, infrequent rest breaks, long working hours, shift work, hectic and routine tasks that have little inherent meaning as important job conditions leading to stress (National institute for occupational safety and health, 1999). One attribute of transformational leadership that enhances positive outcomes, particularly about work stress, is social support and individual consideration of employees. To investigate the effects of social support, a meta analysis was conducted to demonstrate that social support had beneficial effects on stress via three ways such as reducing experienced strain, altering employee's perception of stressful situations². Research studies have revealed that having increased control over employee's work results in significant mental health benefits and reduces absenteeism³. Work stress is related to negative organizational effects such as increased employees turnover and absenteeism while concurrently lowering the performance⁴. Schaufeli and Peters⁵ found that while stress levels and burnout are high the situation could be solved by improving human resources management and the

social work environment. Prominently both of these strategies are more likely with relational and transformational leadership styles.

OBJECTIVES AND RESEARCH METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY

The present study aims to study the stress level among military personnel in the Indian Army and in order to achieve the objective and come up with the best result; the researcher has used the survey questionnaire as the quantitative method. A standardized questionnaire has been used in order to collect data from respondents. All the scales and questions have been selected in a logical way and are compulsory because they are essential for the data analysis. The questionnaire which has been used in this study is constructed based on the previous studies. Occupational Role Stress Scale (ORS-S) has been applied developed by UdaiPareek (1983). This tool is selected based on its vast applicability for studying stress and it will be sufficient to cover all aspects of this research. Stratified random sampling technique has been used to arrive at the final sample. The 611 respondents are only PBOR ie. JCOs and Other Ranks (OR), which are picked from various battalions, ranging from fighting arms (like infantry, armored and mechanized infantry), supporting arms (like artillery , engineers, electrical and mechanical engineers, signals and air defense), to services (like army supply corps and ordnance corps) in almost equal measure/representation with varying degrees of service and age profiles, varied experience/exposure to peace and field conditions, service in operational and non-operational areas and exposure to varied terrains (like mountains, glacier, jungle, plains, deserts etc).

DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

When an individual occupies more than one role, there are bound to be conflicts between them. For example, a female executive often faces a conflict between her organizational role as an executive and her familial role as a wife and mother. The demands on her time by husband and children may be incompatible with organizational demands. Such inter-role conflicts are quite frequent in a modern society, where an individual is increasingly occupying multiple roles in various organizations and groups.

Table 1: Role Ambiguity

Sr. No	Statement	Never or rarely	Occasionally	Some times	Frequently	Very frequently	Mean	Median	Standard deviation
9	I am not clear on the scope and responsibilities of my role (job).	205	102	102	116	86	2.63	2.00	1.46
19	I do not know what the people I work with expect of me.	161	127	123	123	77	2.72	3.00	1.37
29	Several aspects of my role are vague and unclear.	135	102	154	116	104	2.92	3.00	1.38
39	My role has not been defined clearly and in detail.	114	128	137	148	84	2.93	3.00	1.32
49	I am not clear what the priorities are in my role.	141	106	137	136	91	2.89	3.00	1.38
Average		151.2	113	130.6	127.8	88.4	2.82	2.8	1.38

The Table 1 amplifies mean of dimension ‘Role Ambiguity (RA)’. The mean of five statements of RA is 2.82, which indicates that RA level of Army Personal Below Officer Rank (PBOR) is below average. Amongst RA, the average level of the statement “My role has not been defined clearly and in detail” is highest i.e. 2.93, followed by the statement “Several aspects of my role are vague and unclear” i.e. 2.92. The RA level is least in the statement “I am not clear on the scope and responsibilities of my role (job)” i.e. 2.63.

The standard deviation falls between 1.46 to 1.32 and is the highest in the statement “I am not clear on the scope and responsibilities of my role (job)” i.e. 1.46 and least in the statement “my role has not been defined clearly and in detail” i.e. 1.32.

The results highlight that the RA level is highest in the statement “My role has not been defined clearly and in detail”. Although within limits, but by having more clarity and giving defined role to an individual can greatly impact his performance. PBOR are often given additional and vague tasks over and above their specific role, and wear a number of hats simultaneously, due to peculiar nature of the Army and its requirements. Standing Operating Procedures (SOPs), well defined and detailed job profile and clear cut orders and detailed instructions/briefing will assist in reducing role ambiguity.

Table 2: Resource Inadequacy

Sr. No	Statement	Never or rarely	Occasionally	Some times	Frequently	Very frequently	Mean	Median	Standard deviation
10	Do not get the information needed to carry out responsibilities assigned to me.	127	109	136	140	99	2.96	3.00	1.37
20	I do not get enough resources to be effective in my role.	115	115	138	138	105	3.00	3.00	1.36
30	I do not have enough people to work with me in my role.	131	110	120	136	114	2.99	3.00	1.41
40	I am rather worried that I lack the necessary facilities needed in my role.	121	96	144	162	88	3.00	3.00	1.33
50	I wish I had more financial resources for the work assigned to me.	88	123	142	128	130	3.15	3.00	1.34
Average		116.4	110.6	136	140.8	107.2	3.02	3.00	1.36

The Table 2 reflects the mean of dimension 'Resource Inadequacy' (RI). The mean of five statements of RI is 3.02, which indicates that RI level of Army personal below officer Rank (PBOR) is little more than average. Amongst RI, the average RI level of the statement "I wish I had more financial resources for the work assigned to me" is highest i.e. 3.15, followed by statement "I do not get enough resources to be effective in my role" i.e. 3.00 and "I am rather worried that I lack the necessary facilities needed in my role" i.e. 3.00. The RI is least in the statement "do not get the information needed to carry out responsibilities assigned to me" i.e. 2.96.

The standard deviation fall between 1.41 to 1.33 and is the highest in the statement "I do not have enough people to work with me in my role" i.e. 1.41 and least in the statement "I am rather worried that I lack the necessary facilities needed in my role" i.e. 1.33.

The results reveal that the RI level is highest in the statement "I wish I had more financial resources for the work assigned to me" because whenever PBOR is assigned a task he is generally not assigned adequate resources and funds and has to follow tedious funding procedures, long chain of command

and the hierarchical structure of the organization, who control the funds and resources. Leaders must ensure adequate and timely availability of resources and funds to subordinates, which could be decentralized, for speedy completion of task systems. The Army has now been revamped and the loop shortened to a large extent by decentralization and reviewing of procedures.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The results express that the Role Ambiguity (RA) level is highest in the statement “My role has not been defined clearly and in detail”. PBOR are often given additional and vague tasks over and above their generic role, and wear a number of hats simultaneously, due to the peculiar and uncertain nature of the Army and its requirements. The results show that the Resource Inadequacy (RI) level is highest in the statement “I wish I had more financial resources for the work assigned to me” because whenever PBOR are assigned a task he is generally not upfront assigned adequate resources and funds. He has to follow a tedious funding procedure, long chain of command and the hierarchical structure of the organization, who control the funds and resources.

The study recommends that work culture and environment in the Army needs to be reviewed de-nova, as PBOR avoid meeting their bosses if they have not been able to work as per their expectations. Superiors should also assign tasks to their subordinates depending on their capability, aptitude and experience. An informal and interactive approach, time permitting, will help in aligning the bosses view, his own understanding of the issue and the organizational requirement. Adherence to SOPs, clear orders/instructions/briefings, awareness of standards of behavior in any organization is a must and needs to be strengthened in the Army too.

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