



DEVELOPMENT OF INTERVENTION PROGRAM TO HANDLE STRESS DURING DEFENCE TRAINING

KEYWORDS

Stressors, Intervention program, Trainees, Defence Academy, Grit, Resilience, Forgiveness

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ABSTRACT

An attempt was made to develop an intervention program to manage stress during training period in the defence academy. The stressors experienced by the trainees were analysed and were classified into 3 categories. (1) Physical training and its impact (2) Process and systems of training (3) Social and Psychological stressors. Based on the Rational Emotive Behaviour Therapy (REBT), intervention program was developed that consisted of 14 sessions. To handle stressors effectively, six themes were considered for the intervention program. First session was Ice breaker session, and last session was summing up and closing session. The remaining twelve sessions were conducted as per six themes. Two sessions were conducted per theme. The six themes are (1) Meaning and purpose in training and life (2nd and 3rd session) (2) Grit feeling (4th and 5th session) (3) Time management (6th and 7th session) (4) Resilience (8th and 9th session) (5) Forgiveness (10th and 11th session) (6) Bullying by seniors (12th and 13th session). Each session was lasted for 1 ½ hours. Interactive communication, audio-visual clippings dealing with interpersonal conflicts and relationships, role plays, discussions, brain storming sessions, group games, video modelling, reading and analysing of literature, question and answer sessions, introspection of experiences and debriefing sessions were adopted in the intervention program.

INTRODUCTION

Any physiological response that appears inappropriate to any stressor from mild irritation to drastic dysfunction is termed as "stress", this may cause severe health breakdown (Selye, 1950). From the definition, it is clear that any demand upon our body and mind disturbs us leading to changes in body and excitement in mind. In other words, imbalance of body and mind. An individual is forced to act according to his/her capacity to restore the balance of body and mind. When demands from environment exceed the individual's capacity to adapt, an individual feels the "stress". Thus the "stress" is the feeling of pressure from environmental conditions/stimulus. These conditions/stimulus from different corners of the environment are considered as "stressors". There are two important aspects which play role in considering any environmental conditions/stimulus as "stressor". Firstly the individual must perceive it as an occurrence of event and secondly should consider it as undesirable event.

As far as reactions to stressor are concerned, people do react differently to a "stressor" depending on their defence mechanisms at conscious or unconscious level. Lazarus (1978) indicated that a stimulus might be a physiological stressors and stress without being a psychological stressor and stress either physiological or psychological is not necessarily unpleasant. The pleasant kinds of stress are considered as eustress and unpleasant kinds of stress are considered as distress. Kagan (1975) claimed that a given stimulus may be a stressor for one subject but may not for another. Further, another important aspect to note is that the same stressor that has caused a state of stress in a particular subject on a particular occasion may have a stronger or weaker effect on a subsequent occasion.

According to the theory of appraisal and stress (Lazarus and Folkman, 1984), the reaction in a threatening situation depends on the interpretation of the situation (primary appraisal) and the interpretation of the coping possibilities (secondary appraisal), where in the coping methods to handle threat and the outcome of the situations are analysed. It depends on these processes, which constantly interact, how much threat or fear is experienced. Appraisals of the events are carried out to differentiate them as threatening or challenging. When the individual considers an event as posing demands that exceed the person's coping possibilities, people experience a lack of control and the individual considers the situation as threatening. This will lead to negative emotional reactions like fear in an individual. If the events are not appraised as exceeding one's coping possibilities then the individual will consider the event as challenging that will lead to positive emotions, like

eagerness. The appraisal of situation is also an important mediator for physiological reactions. When the event is considered as threatening by the individual then they show more inadequate affective and physiological reactions, like negative emotions and physical over-reactivity, than people who appraise a situation as challenging. Besides the intensity of threat like temporal uncertainty (when the event is going to happen) and ambiguity of the event (lack of situational clarity) may disrupt the individual's expectancies and perceived control over the event. When the event is unpredictable, it will lower the individual's level of perceived control. Other factors like personality and social support will also influence the appraisal. Personal characteristics like sense of coherence, emotional intelligence trait-anxiety and hardiness can affect the influence of stress on performances. Social support can also act as buffering factor in mitigating the negative effects of the stress on performance. Thus, situational and the personal characteristics determines the appraisal of the situation and the severity of the stress reactions.

In threatening situations, stress reactions are triggered, which can impair the individual's performance. The physiological reactions like increased heart rate breathing and muscle tension occur. These reactions lead to over-reactivity like hyperventilation or shaking. This firstly interferes with the mobilization of energy for the task and impairs performance, secondly, evokes negative emotions like, fear, frustration and psychosomatic syndrome.

Coping is defined as comprising efforts, both cognitive and behaviours, to manage environmental and internal demands and the conflicts among them. It is observed that there are two main functions of coping, firstly, alternating the person environments relationship (problem-focused coping) and the controlling stressful emotions or physiological arousal (emotion-focused coping). Thus coping strategies are considered as behaviour directed at modifying the "stressors", redefining the situation or reducing distress (Dean and Lin, 1977), Pearlman and Scholer (1979), Lazarus and Launier (1978), coping behaviours represent stress reduction techniques (Tucker, 1982).

Every individual in any organization faces specific demands and commitments that cause stress to them. In the military set up, some of the stressors are similar to those found in non-military work environment, but some stressors are unique to military environment only; like work overload, unpredictability, role stressors, traumatizing event like threat to one's safety like human suffering or death, inflicting harm on others, austere living conditions, boredom and family separation.

In the process of preparing trainees for these stressors during deployment and work stations, trainees are definitely exposed to these stressors especially threat to one's safety, health, different living conditions, boredom, physical exertion and family separation. Military training focuses on skill acquisition, and the development of technical proficiency, discipline strengths, endurance and teamwork. Need for balancing the stressors during military training becomes utmost important issue. During the military training if the training stress is not sufficient, it can weaken the trainee's adaptation to later experiences at intense combat and deployment, and at the same time, too much training stress (negatively affect), can negatively affect the trainee's mental and physical capacity to cope with combat or deployment stress. Hence stress management becomes basic requirement during the military training period for the efficient performance as defence personnel. Stress management is closely related to resilience. Resilience is the ability of the individual to bounce back to normal functioning in adverse environment sustaining the impact of stressful situation.

In this direction there are several studies conducted to study the effects of different types of intervention programs on military personnel's performance. Majority of these studies have been conducted on already inducted soldiers on combat deployment and very few studies have been carried out on trainees.

The Comprehensive Soldier and Fitness (CSF by Cornum, Matthews and Seligman, 2011) based on the principles of positive psychology. CSF is a historically unique program in a large (1.1 million members) organization. In this program four elements are covered, (a) the assessment of emotional, social, family and spiritual fitness. (b) Individualize learning modules to improve fitness. (c) Formal resilience training and (d) Training of army Master Resilience Trainers (MRTs) to instil better thinking skills and resilience in their subordinates. This CSF programme is a proactive rather than reactive to negative outcomes of the stress and it provides ways of improving resilience for all members of the Army. Reivich and Seligman (2011) conducted MRTs in U.S. Army on 2,200 senior NCOs (Non-Commissioned Officers). Walter Reed Army, institute of research conducted MRTs at United States Military Academy (2006), to present depression among early adolescents in the primary care settings. Later on in late 2010 MRTs were extended to teach family members and army civilian employees.

Routhier (2007) developed Military Resilience Training Program (MRTPs), for the Canadian forces, Adlus, Bliese, Hoge McGurk, Castro (2008) at Walter Reed Army Institute of Research developed structured programs called Battlemind training to build resilience and prevent psychological injuries including PTSD. Stress management techniques of the MRTP was more elaborated when compared to Battlemind training, as it is based on cognitive-behavioural/bio-psychosocial approach and also includes a spiritual dimension.

Stress Inoculation Training an intervention where soldiers are exposed to the kinds of stressors that they will likely face in combat. The aim of this intervention is to make soldiers, get familiar with the stress so they feel more comfortable with it and in control. Stetz, Long, Wiederhold, Turnes (2008), studied the effectiveness of stress inoculation on 63 military volunteers who were attending combat medical class. Stress Inoculation Training (SIT) is a flexible, tailor made to suit individuals, multifaceted form of cognitive-behavioural therapy. SIT consists of three interlocking and overlapping phases. (1) A conceptual educational phase (2) A skills acquisition and skills consolidation phase and (3) An application and follow-through phase. SIT has been proved effective in cases of prolonged exposure to stress and post traumatic stress disorders.

A specific type of stress training that has been developed from clinical practical for normal population is Stress Exposure Training (SET) that has three stages, (a) gaining knowledge of and familiarity with

stress environments (b) training those skills required to maintain effective performance under stress (c) building performance confidence. This training has proved beyond doubt in reducing performance anxiety, state anxiety and effective performance under stress.

Virtual reality-simulation was also used as stress management technique (Stetz et al, 2009), wherein military personnel can practice learned coping strategies in simple situations and progress to more and more stressful events at his/her own pace, to master the required stress management strategies.

Mindfulness bases Mind Fitness Training (MMFT™) and Mindfulness based Stress Reduction (MBSR) are based on the principles of mindfulness, which is the ability to be aware and attentive of the present moment without emotional reactivity of volatility. These training involve integration of mindfulness exercises, like focussing attention on breathing and movement. This MMFT™ aims to cultivate greater psychological resilience or "mental armour" by bolstering mindfulness. This training has proven effectiveness in PTSD and other mental health disturbances suffer by military personnel from war situation. Several studies have used two kinds of resources, i.e., (1) Internal capacities cover, self-confidence, optimism, perceived control, interpersonal skills and physical fitness. And (2) External resources include team aspects, leadership, organizational support and family support to enhance resilience during operational stress and deployment stress.

In Indian army, Sharma (2014) in her study found that Sahaja Yoga meditation was beneficial stress coping strategy for the soldiers, since it helps in purifying the subtle system by cleansing energy central. It was found to be effective in stopping the decline of physical, mental and emotional, well-being. Sahaja Yoga helped in restoring the positivity in the minds of the soldiers especially where the situation was out of their control.

The studies stated above reveals that many studies have been conducted on soldiers in U.S. and other countries. Effectiveness of some stress management programme like stress-inoculation, mindfulness-mind fitness programme resilience training programmes have been tested and have established their effectiveness on soldiers population and army trainees. However, in Indian set up, lack of such studies is evidenced clearly.

Need for the present study:

Extensive research has been conducted on stress in training in different types of organizations and in military training in other countries. However less research has been conducted on stress during training and stress management during initial training in defence in Indian set up. Hence an attempt was made in the study to develop an intervention program to manage stress during training period in the defence academy.

Development of an intervention program to manage stress during defence training. Intervention program was developed in the study that was conducted at two phases. In the first phase randomly selected trainees of 1st semester in defence training academy were administered an inventory of stressors constructed by the author to identify stressors (the sources of stressors) among defence trainees. There were three categories of stressors (1) physical training and its impact (2) process and systems of training (3) social and psychological stressors.

It was noted that the trainees experienced more number of social psychological stressors than the other two categories of stressors. Basic fact of the military training is to train the trainees in physical skill acquisition, discipline, development of strength, endurance and teamwork. Hence the first two categories of stressors were considered as requirement of the training process. Trainees will acquire required skill and strength to handle these two categories of

stressors i.e., physical training and its impact and process and systems of training, as they progress during training in the academy. It was felt that the third category of stressors i.e., social and psychological stressors was required to be managed efficiently to enhance the performance of the trainees.

In order to withstand the military work stress, combat and deployment stress, handling insurgencies, a soldier is required to be mentally tough and robust. Since the stressors at units, combat and deployment have their genesis during the basic military training, development of psychological fitness in terms of personal temperament, character and strength like physical fitness has become a requirement. Mental readiness training has become a focus of concern since psychological injuries amount up to 10-50% of operational casualties (Thompson and McCreary, 2006), and adequate psychological preparation has become vital requirement for deployment. In this current scenario of military environment need was felt to develop appropriate intervention program to enhance trainee's psychological capabilities to manage social and psychological stressors during the training period to prepare them for future requirement. Intervention program was developed based on Rational Emotive Behaviour Therapy (REBT), developed by US Psychologist Albert Ellis (1993). His therapy was formulated on the assumption that psychological problems caused by the interpretation of events in their lives than actual events, and that irrational interpretations, cause psychological problems, therapy involves challenging irrational belief systems in an extremely directive manner by explicit confrontation, suggestion, argument and various specialized procedures. His techniques not only involve cognitive modification but also embrace most of the techniques of behaviour therapy, especially real-life activity assignments, self-management procedures and home work exercises.

Intervention program was directed to enhance the emotional and cognitive strengths of the trainees. This will make the trainees develop resilience, grit feelings, value of forgiveness, mental robustness to tolerate and handle bullying and build up positive attitude towards life. This in turn will inculcate effective coping strategies in trainees to handle stress due to defence training. Intervention program was constituted of 14 sessions of one and a half hours each. The stressors encountered by the trainees were analysed and they were further classified into six themes. 1) Meaning and purpose in training and life (2) Grit feelings (3) Time management (4) Resilience (5) Forgiveness (6) Bullying. First session was devoted to ice breaker session and remaining 12 sessions were conducted as per the themes. The last session was utilised for summing up and closing the intervention program short lecturer, interactive, communication, audio-visual clippings, dealings with interpersonal conflicts, relationships, role plays, discussions, brain storming discussions, group games, introspect and retrospect experiences, video modelling, reading, analysing of literature, sharing experiences with others, questions and answers sessions, debriefing sessions were adopted in the intervention program.

The intervention program was designed for fourteen sessions of one and a half hour each. It was conducted during the midterm vacation. Trainees were free from other training activities. The first session was ice breaker session that aimed at putting the trainees at ease, comfortable and develops conducive emotional state of mind to disclose personal information and develop group cohesion. The group was encouraged to share their personal information and were made to divide themselves in smaller group i.e., three groups. An activity was introduced to enhance the group cohesion and develop attachment towards each other and (comrade ring) most friendly, permissible interaction was developed among the trainees. Detailed information of the methods adopted in future sessions was introduced to the trainees.

I. Meaning and purpose in training and life: was addressed in the 2nd and 3rd sessions. In the second session, an activity was given to the

group, where in they were made to derive meaning find purpose of an ambiguous object. Platform was provided first to express individual opinions about the meaning and purpose of the object and later on there was a group discussion on the meaning and purpose of the object. At the end of the session, the investigator made the trainees realize how ambiguous object can be given meaning and purpose and to relate the meaning and purpose of their training and life. They were also given a piece of literature work to read at home and analyse some facts of life.

In the third sessions, the same theme continued and the trainees were shown video slide shows of an real life episodes where in innocent people were tortured and brutally killed and but still how some individuals survived and maintained optimism about the meaning of life and hope. This slide show was followed by the debriefing questions to which trainees had to give written responses. The investigator had some interaction with the trainees regarding their opinion about the literature work.

II. Grit feeling: This theme was covered in fourth and fifth sessions. In the fourth session, trainees were instructed to read a piece of literature about the struggle in life. They were allowed to think and analyse the implications. Later on instructor debriefed with some questions for which trainees had to give written responses.

In the fifth session, an attempt was made to modify the mindset of the trainees. They were shown video clipping with narration of the results of research on growth and fixed mindset, wherein the research had shown the advantages of having growth mindset. Along with their video, research article was provided to trainees to read and carry with themselves. Towards the end of the session, trainees had interaction with investigator, wherein the effects of growth mindset and fixed mindset in real life limitations were discussed.

III. Time management: This theme was addressed in sixth and seventh sessions. The sixth session was aimed at removing the lethargic feeling and attitude towards routine physical activities and realisation of importance of time. They were shown a part of a movie on trainee at military training academy. Later on, the trainees were asked to write their responses to some questions related to the routine practice.

The seventh session was a brain storming session, where the trainees were asked to write their problems related to routine and time management on piece of paper in the first part of the session. In the second part of the session, a piece of paper was picked; the problem was discussed at length by trainees where they shared the ways in which they handled them. Every trainee was given an opportunity to participate in the discussion. Investigator debriefed at the end of the session the ways by which the time can be utilized rationally.

IV. Resilience: Eighth and ninth sessions were conducted to develop resilience among the trainees. In the eighth session, the trainees were made to understand the habits of the mind, with the help of handouts of slides. Trainees were shown different rational and irrational ways of thinking in different situations and problems of varying complexities. They were briefed about the methods to find the correct and wrong ways of thinking. Trainees were made to practice thinking and analysing the correct and wrong ways of thinking in various adverse and complicated situations. Debriefing was carried out by the investigator at the end of the session.

In the beginning of the ninth session some short videos of mind games were projected and the trainees were asked to analyse the videos. Trainees were made to solve the problems and complicated situations in worksheets. They were also given similar type of worksheets for homework.

V. Forgiveness: This theme was handled in tenth and eleventh sessions. In the tenth session the trainees were shown some slides on

language of emotions. They were trained to comprehend and adaptively manage emotions. They were briefed about the ways to control negative emotions like anxiety, fear and anger in situations and show desirable emotions and behaviour. Trainees were provided with worksheets of different situations of varying complexities and were given practice to analyse the situation and arrive at desirable thinking and behaviour and undesirable thinking and behaviour in each situation. At the end of the situation investigator had interaction period wherein the trainees clarified their doubts.

In the eleventh session also similar type of activities were conducted. At the end of the session, investigator debriefed on the effective ways using the virtue of forgiveness to managing emotions of one's own and other's.

VI. Bullying: The stressor was dealt in twelfth and thirteenth session. In the twelfth session, brain storming was adopted to make trainees express their concern and react out to each other. The trainees were asked to write the problem they faced in their interaction with senior trainees in the academy on a piece of paper. The trainees were later made to pick one paper at a time and read out the problem and discuss the different ways of handling them. At the end of the session, debriefing was done by the investigator on effective ways to handle bullying problem.

In the thirteenth session, with the help of a single game with some rules and regulations, the trainees were made to understand fairness in both rights and responsibilities. They were made to experience, how important it is to be responsible before asking for their rights, and how modest they should be in asking for their rights while honestly shouldering their responsibilities. Trainees were made to realize how their negligence of responsibilities affects negatively others and their rights. Interaction was held between trainees and the investigator at the end of the session.

Fourteenth session was the last session of the intervention program. In this session the trainees were made to realize the qualities they possessed earlier, possess as on today and how they would like to develop in future. Trainees were made to realize the qualities of their nature and goal set for future. Trainee's opinion about the intervention program was collected and final debriefing was done by the investigator to conclude the intervention program.

The following table gives the schedule of the Intervention Program:

Theme	Stressors handled	Focus of the session	Activities involved in the sessions	Trainees activities
I. Meaning and purpose of life.	24. Less social contacts. 27. Comparison with other civilian friends. 34. Communication period reduced	2nd and 3rd session: Meaning and purpose of life	Assigning meaning and purpose of life	1) Individuals opinions 2) Group discussions 3) Responses to debriefing questions

II. Grit feeling	1. Physical activities. 3. Muscle stress. 5. Exhaustive cross-country. 6. No relaxation after physical training. 8. Pain 9. Doing PT after dinner. 10. No holiday. 15. Lack of proper sleep. 18. Hard drill. 19. No liberty. 22. Camps. 25. Irritating routine	4th session: Saliency of struggle 5th session: Growth and fixed mindset	Literature on video on research results	1) Responses to the questions on struggle 2) Reading results of research in mind set
III. Time management	2. Time management problem. 23. Cabin-Cupboard. 26. Getting up early morning. 32. Sudden engagements 33. Unnecessary activities	6th session: Attitude towards routine activities 7th session: Realisation of importance of time	A part of movie on routine of a training, brain storming on problems and its management	1) Required to write, responses to questions related to routine 2) Writing their problem 3) Sharing their ways of handling problems
IV. Resilience	11. No communication with parents. 12. Injuries. 13. No personal time. 17. Fractures. 21. No personal space. 29. Physical exertion. 30. No cell phones. 31. Lack of opportunity to learn new things	8th session: Understanding habits of mind 9th session: Understanding of mind games	Handouts and slides, short video on mind games	1) Proactive right and wrong ways of thinking 2) Solve problems worksheets
V. Forgiveness	20. Disturbance by others. 28. Punishments	10th session: Train to comprehend 11th session: Adaptively manage emotions	Slides on language of emotions	1) Practice analysis of situation and arrive at desirable thinking and behaviour

VI. Bullying	4. Harsh words from instructors and seniors. 7. Made to do funny things by seniors. 16. Continuous check by seniors. 20. Disturbance by others	12th session: Express concern towards others 13th session: Understand fairness in both rights and responsibilities	Brain storming, small group game	1) Problem statement and expressing ways to manage the problems 2) Understanding fairness in rights and responsibilities
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Conclusion:

- 1) Fourteen sessions were conducted successfully without any intervening variable (no other activities other than intervention program).
- 2) Six themes i.e., (i) Meaning and purpose in training and life (ii) Grit feelings (iii) Time management (iv) Resilience (v) Forgiveness (vi) Bullying were covered effectively during 12 sessions.
- 3) These six themes successfully covered most of the stressors experienced by the trainees.
- 4) Two sessions were conducted to cover one theme.
- 5) The trainees reported a huge relief from stress and anxiety of the defence training after the intervention program.
- 6) Noticeable changes in trainee's overt behaviour were observed from first session to last session.

Implications:

- 1) This Intervention program can be adopted by the training academy for the enhancement of their performances.
- 2) This intervention program can be modified to suit trainees in other organisations other than Defence training academy.
- 3) This intervention program can be adopted to deal with defence personnel in home station, combat and deployment.
- 4) This intervention program can be used for further research purpose.

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