

# Military psychology research paper sample

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## **Evolution and relevance to psychological studies.**

Military psychology is a branch of psychological study that encompasses the understanding, prediction and countering behaviors in the armed forces or the civilian population in response to military activities. It involves research, design and application of psychological theories like any other psychological field and is important in understanding the effects of military operations. It is especially important in identifying potential psychological harm that can be done by these operations. Application of existing psychological tools for military purposes can help military psychologists identify and counter these undesirable effects. A military psychologist takes the role of a counselor, whose role is to help military personnel and/or their families deal with stress and psychological trauma caused during a military operation. Most of the stresses and disorders found in military subjects are similar to subjects found outside the field and therefore, use of methods from outside military psychology is widespread and effective. The difference may lie in the order they face these stresses in, the degree to which they are subjected to these stresses as well as the combinations of these stresses. Military psychologists help soldiers and civilians involved in military operations understand and cope with the stresses and fatigue that come with their involvement. The most common disorders that the military psychologist sees is nightmares and flashbacks, family difficulties, especially when it comes to the relationship of a veteran with his spouse, guilt and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), among others.

Psychology is used in the military for a wide variety of purposes. For instance, equipment like weapons and vehicles are designed keeping

psychological principles in mind and training and orienteering programs are designed with the help of military psychologists. When troops are deployed overseas, military psychologists counsel the deployed troops on how to handle the local customs and cultures and how to deal with the sometimes stark differences between culture at home and abroad.

A lot of major breakthroughs in ideas, processes and methods in psychology have come from military psychology. The military, being a huge employer of psychologists, at least in the United States, has financially supported research and development in the field that has much broader implications and that can be used outside the military. Many psychological thought leaders were employed by the military and have had their research supported by grants from the armed forces. As a matter of fact, a large number of eminent psychologists continue to be employed or supported financially by the military.

The reverse is also true as military projects are so varied that there are people of all fields and doing all sorts of jobs employed by the military. This means that there is hardly an area of psychology that cannot be utilized in the military as Geldard (1953) says. Operations have to be carried out in very different places with weapons and vehicles made using the latest technologies by servicemen who have, often, not been part of the military very long and, therefore, the whole situation is often foreign to them leading to stress and difficulty in adjusting, which military psychology can identify and remedy.

In terms of military psychologists as well, there is a great variation in the kinds of information each psychologist works with, the people and the

illnesses they work with, the problems they are hoping to solve, the arm of the military that needs their help, the relevant psychological theories and methods and the techniques they will employ. This speaks to the vastness of the field and the great amount of work that is done by the psychologists in the military collectively.

#### - History

Although psychology has been used in war and combat setting for a long time, psychological concepts and methods were first extensively applied to military subjects during the First World War and was also used during the Second World War and has been prevalent in military organizations since. It was first used as a way to screen recruits and identify those that would be most suitable for the military and discard those that were completely unsuitable.

According to Ferguson (1962), the president of the American Psychological Association, Robert M. Yerkes was instrumental in forming committees, mostly under the National Research Council, that were involved in examination of recruits and evaluation of acoustic problems, education and special training, incapacity, military training, emotional stability, recreation, motivation, special aptitudes, suitability for aviation, visual problems, and establishing psychological literature, tests for deception, courses in psychology for Student Army training corps and creating propaganda for the military that took into account key psychological concepts.

Yerkes (1921) writes that the Army Alpha test which was administered to all new recruits was used to determine who was unfit for duty and was used to balance out units in aptitude for combat and shows how different the recruits

were mentally. It becomes obvious that it was a great advancement in carrying out psychological tests for a large group and noticing the differences and the using the patterns observed effectively.

Another advancement during World War I was the designing of The Army's personnel system by Walter D. Scott and Walter V. Bingham which was the precursor to the modern personnel system used in the Army today. It involved a rating scale that helped in selecting officers for promotion and retention. This was eventually expanded to a rating system for the employees of the military, including civilian contractors. The questionnaires and forms employed by the system was a great innovation in effective handling of large amounts of data for large groups of people and it was designed in such a way that excessive training was not required for the use of it.

There was a lull in the advancement of research in military psychology between the wars with no large advancements in research but it was psychology was used even more extensively and in varied areas in World War II.

All branches of the military established their own psychology programs in the Second World War as they had learnt that use of concepts and methods from psychology is very beneficial in these circumstances. The army established a program in the Adjutant General's Office, the navy established a bureau for personal evaluations and the air force did the same. Research was contracted out by The Office of Scientific Research and Development (Baxter 1946) to all sort of scientists working in medicine and biology including many psychologists who helped in equipment design and procedure design

including night operations, underwater sound, communications and stereoscopic range finding. Training procedures were also evaluated and designed by many psychologists who could then observe the performance of recruits in training and evaluate the effectiveness of the psychological screening during recruitment. Tests to measure performance during training were established by these teams. Forays were also made into the field of human engineering (Bray 1948) which meant that equipment and controls that were handled by personnel were designed to be more friendly to human interaction and more effective in the situations in which they were used. Life support studies, which are still being carried out today, first started during this era. The army wanted to have the psychologists and sociologists use their research on attitude and opinions to study the topics related to army life from specific problems like why the soldiers in the Pacific were not using their atabrine regularly and their preference for winter clothing to more general studies like research into reactions to the military way of life, the number of possible psychiatric casualties in each unit and the cost of changes like the GI Bill of Rights.

#### - Military Psychology today

Military psychology and its relevance to the field of psychology in general was well established by its extensive use in World War II which meant that it has gained a firm place in military organizations. After World War II, psychologists saw an influx of money from the military in establishing research that would aid the military and in turn, the general population, even in times of peace. Research has been carrying on since the 1960s, when, under Kennedy, as is now, there was great need for establishing means and

methods of communication and diplomacy with other cultures.

There has been a great rise in military laboratories with resources available from military establishments with research being conducted into personnel management and development of units. Funds, facilities, positions for psychologists, technical innovations and access to research subjects have all increased in recent years. Research into engineering equipment for use by military personnel has increased greatly as well. Non profit laboratories have also been set up with contracts from the military. They conduct research into all sorts of fields for military application including training and designing procedures for non-conventional operations. The RAND Corporation, the Human Resources Research Office (HumRRO) of George Washington University and the Special Operations Research Organization (SORO) of American University are just some of the organizations conducting research in military psychology.

#### - Concepts and Theories

As Hill (1955) writes, it is important to note that the field of military psychology is not insulated from the general field of psychology; in fact, most of the theories and concepts used in military psychology are used in psychology in general. This is evident as research conducted in military psychology is not published in specialized military journals or reports but in general scientific journals.

However, the application of these theories may differ in the military. The military, especially in the field of human engineering, would have different needs in the design of its equipment as the situations that they are used in are very high stress and would not be very present in other areas of life.

NASA sometimes uses concepts discovered by military psychologists in its design as its employees face similar stresses in space. Situations such as military aid, guerilla warfare, unconventional warfare and the like are exclusive to the military and as such research into the mental effects of these situations can only be observed and implemented in the military. Studies into terrorism and counterterrorism, information management and psychological warfare is also conducted by psychologists in the military and there are three main areas of psychological research in the military.

Operational psychology concerns the use of principles and skills to help improve military decisions made in combat and combat related situations. Behavioral scientists and psychologists are trying to use their theories in situations specific to national security like developing profiling methods, interrogation methods and incarceration methods. Tactical psychology concerns the immediate use in contact with enemy like research into techniques like flanking an enemy and using suppressive fire. Health, organizational and occupational psychology concerns the mental health and counseling services offered by the military to their employees. Research is conducted into the effects of military life on family relations, selection of recruits, addiction problems etc.

Another difference between some military psychologists and psychologists outside the military is the greater reliance on statistics. Although all research conducts statistical analysis, military psychometricians, in having to deal with a huge number of personnel, rely heavily on statistical models to conduct research in gauging the effects of military operations.

- Impact outside the military



In recent years, with the downsizing of the military, the funds and support given by the military to psychologists have decreased but military psychologists have a long history of contributing to the field of psychology. Military psychology was important in doing research into the natural and biological sciences rather than the social sciences which other psychologists may focus on more. Many human engineering concepts established in the military have made their way into products created for non-military use. Similarly, personnel systems developed in the military are used by corporations to evaluate and promote their employees.

In essence, the field of military psychology is not so different from other fields of psychology. Since the subject is the same, humans, the results are invariably the same. Applications, sometimes, differ due to the combination of stresses that military personnel face differing but major breakthroughs made in the military will transform into important concepts in general psychology.

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