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The Effectiveness of Resilience Training on Reducing Occupational Stress of Military Personnel

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A B S T R A C T

Military personnel, as the largest group of service providers, experience high level of occupational stress. The aim of this study was to evaluate the effect of resilience training on military personnel occupational stress in Iran. This quasi-experimental study was conducted on 40 military personnel who were randomly divided into two experimental and control groups (20 subjects in experimental group and 20 subjects in control group). The participants of experimental group received 9 sessions of resilience-enhancing skills over a period of 1 hour per week. Connor and Davidson Resilience Scale and Mosadeghrad Occupational Stress Questionnaire were used to collect the data. The results were analyzed through SPSS17 software. The mean occupational stress in the experimental group decreased from 3.1 to 2.3. Hence, it can be stated that by training resilience skills, the level of military occupational stress decreased significantly. However, the mean occupational stress in the control group remained unchanged.

Keywords: Resilience Skills, Occupational Stress, Military Personnel, Military Centers.

INTRODUCTION

One of the most important sources of stress in any person's life is his or her occupation. Nowadays, occupational stress has become a common and costly issue in the workplace, so that United Nations has called it as the 20th century disease(Chan, Chan, & Kee, 2012). In fact, stress is a nonspecific reaction that is created by various stressors in the organism and threatens one's physical and psychological well-being(Jones, Hocine, Salomon, Dab, & Temime, 2015). Bad stress or distress stimulates negative responses and disrupts one's physiological and psychological activities and can lead to disease and disability(Sveinsdottir, Biering, & Ramel, 2006).

One source of stress in any person life can be his or her occupation, which is called occupational stress. In this regard, the results of a study conducted by the Princeton Research Association in 2007 showed that 75% of employees believe that they have experienced higher occupational stress than the previous generation(Kakemam et al., 2019). In fact, occupational stress is a kind of emotional, cognitive, behavioral, and psychological response to the harmful aspects of work and the workplace(Chan et al., 2012). It happens when there is an imbalance

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between the expectations of the workplace and one's ability to cope with these expectations(Sveinsdottir et al., 2006). Research suggests that inappropriate workplace conditions, such as high occupational needs, low levels of occupational control, and low social support in the workplace, increase occupational stress, resulting in negative consequences(Wheeler & Riding, 1994).

The five factors of stress in the military personnel include personal reactions, personal concerns, work concerns, fulfillment of role, and work-related concerns. Studies have indicated that in addition to the internal stressors, organizational and management factors in work-related stress are involved in occupational stress in military personnel(Stagman-Tyrer, 2014).

Resilience is a phenomenon that results from one's natural adaptive responses and empowers him or her to overcome the threats. Resilience is not merely a passive resistance to harm or threatening conditions, but a resilient person is an active and constructive participant in his or her surroundings. Resilience is one's ability in creating a biological, psychological and spiritual balance against the threatening and risky conditions(Gillespie, Chaboyer, & Wallis, 2009).

As military personnel are nowadays considered as an important member of the health care team, they are faced with increasing responsibilities, high levels of accountability, and multiple persistent stressors that can have a harmful effect on the military personnel ability to succeed(Labrague et al., 2018; Ali Mohammad Mosadeghrad, 2013). Occupational stress of military personnel reduces their quality of life and results in mental illness. It may also cause and increase the effects of mild or severe mental illness in the military personnel, leading to occupational burnout syndrome (Alavi Arjmand, Kashaninia, Hosseini, & Rezasoltani, 2013; Kim, 2016; Lee & Crockett, 1994). Thus, in response to these challenges, the military personnel should develop and maintain a significant capacity of resilience to achieve a progress and success in the military profession(Villani et al., 2012).

METHODOLOGY

This quasi-experimental study was carried out with the participation of 60 military personnel with associate degree or higher level of education in Iran. The military personnel were randomly divided into two groups of experimental (n = 20) and control (n = 20). Demographic Information Questionnaire and Ali Mohamad. Mosadeghrad (2004), Occupational Stress Questionnaire were used to collect data before and after the intervention. The Mosadeghrad Occupational Stress Questionnaire consists of 30 items (with 5 options) that are scored on a Likert scale ranging from 30 to 150. It includes five dimensions of task-related stress (9 items), role-related stress (3 items), work-related stress (3 items), organizational policy stress (10 items), and interpersonal relationship stress (5 items). In this study, a score of less than 1.8 indicates very low occupational stress, a score between 1.81 and 2.6 indicates low occupational stress, a score between 2.61 and 3.4 indicates moderate occupational stress, a score between 3.41 and 4.2 indicates high occupational stress, and a score higher than 4.21 indicates very high occupational stress. In the training sessions, the causes of occupational stress after the presentations of the professors were discussed by the participants. Then, the participants received resilience-enhancing skills theoretically and practically during three sessions of 1 hour per week. During the training, the researcher coordinated with hospital authorities to reduce stressful factors and conditions such as task-related stress and organizational policy stress. After extracting of data, they were analyzed using descriptive and parametric T-tests.

RESULTS

In this study, majority of the subjects (56.7%) were in the age range of below 30 years in the experimental group and majority of them (53.3%) were under the age range of 30-50 years in the control group. Majority of the subjects in this study in both experimental and control groups were female (66.7% and 73.3%, respectively), married (63.13% and 54.7%, respectively), and had a bachelor's degree (96.7 and 86.7%, respectively). Majority of them had a management experience of less than 5 years (83.3%), contractual type of employment (86.7% and 90%, respectively) and monthly income between 10 to 15 million Rials (70% and 53.3%, respectively). Most subjects in both experimental and control groups had less than 5 years of employment history (80% and 66.6%, respectively).

Also, 23.3% of the subjects in the experimental group were working in the general surgery unit and the 16.7% of the subjects in control group were working in the ICU unit. Research results suggest that occupational stress has no relationship with any of the demographic variables, including gender, marital status, education, age, employment history, management experience, type of employment, monthly income, workplace department, history of sick leave, and having the second job. The mean of military personnel occupational stress in the experimental group decreased from 3.1 to 2.3 after intervention. Paired t-test showed a statistically significant difference between the mean scores before and after the intervention ($p = 0$). It means that the effect of interventional training program in this study on these dimensions of occupational stress including task-related stress, workplace stress, organizational policy stress, and interpersonal relationship stress was positive and significant, but its effect on the role-related was not significant ($p = 0.26$) (Table 1). The effect of this intervention on dimensions of organizational policy stress and the interpersonal relationship stress among the individuals seems to be more significant.

According to the results of Table 1 in the control group, there was no statistically significant difference between occupational stress levels before and after training ($p = 0.41$). Among the occupational stress dimensions, role-related stress did not show statistically significant difference before and after the intervention ($p = 0.26$) and other dimensions changed after the intervention and statistically significant differences were seen in task-related stress, work-related stress, organizational policy stress, and interpersonal relationship stress before and after the intervention ($p = 0$). Based on the results in the control group, before intervention, the level of stress was moderate in 36.7% of the subjects, the level of stress was high in 23.3% of military personnel, the level of stress was very high in 20% of military personnel, the level of stress was low in 16.7% of the military personnel, and the level of stress was very low in 3.3% of the military personnel. In the same group, after the intervention, the level of stress was moderate in 36.7% of the subjects, the level of stress was high in 26.7% of military personnel, the level of stress was very high in 16.7% of military personnel, the level of stress was low in 16.7% of the military personnel, and the level of stress was very low in 3.3% of the military personnel. According to the results of Table 1, in the experimental group, before the intervention, the level of stress was moderate to high in 86.7% of the military personnel. However, after intervention, the results changed completely in this group, so that the level of stress in 83.3% of the military personnel was at the low level after the intervention.

Table 1. Mean and Std. Deviation of occupational stress and its dimensions in both control and experimental groups

Occupational stress dimensions	Experimental group						Control group					
	Before		After		Paired-t test		Before		After		Paired-t test	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	r	P	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	r	P
Task-related stress	3	7.3	6.2	3.8	-0.04	01>0.0	4.3	7	6.3	7.1	0.8	1
Role-related stress	3	9.6	5.2	7.3	-0.1	01>0.0	1.3	1	3	9.3	0.7	7.8

Workplace stress		7.7	2.2	7.7	01>0.0	01>0.0	3.3	1.8	3	1.6	0.8	5.7
Organizational policy stress	3	7.1	2.2	4.9	0.12	01>0.0	3.3	9.4	3	9.2	0.9	8.4
Interpersonal relationships stress		8.1		4.8	0.7	01>0.0	5.3	2.2	3	1.1	6.9	3.7
Occupational stress	3	6.4	0.2	3.1	0.06	01>0.0	4.3	9	6	3.3	0.5	4.1

Table 2. Percentage and frequency of occupational stress in the experimental group before and after the intervention

Level	Before intervention					After intervention				
	Very low	Low	Moderate	High	Very high	Very low	Low	Moderate	High	Very high
Stress dimensions	F (%)	F (%)	F (%)	F (%)	F (%)	F (%)	F (%)	F (%)	F (%)	F (%)
Task-related stress	1(3.3)	5(16.7)	11(36.7)	10(33.3)	3(10)	2(6.7)	20(66.6)	8(26.7)	0	0
Role-related stress	6(20)	5(16.7)	30(90)	8(26.7)	2(6.7)	6(20)	9(30)	13(43.3)	2(6.7)	0
Workplace stress	1(3.3)	8(26.7)	4(13.3)	3(10)	4(13.3)	8(26.7)	12(40)	8(26.7)	2(6.7)	0
Organizational policy stress	1(3.3)	4(13.3)	13(43.3)	9(30)	3(10)	3(10)	18(60)	8(26.7)	1(3.3)	0
Interpersonal relationships stress	2(6.7)	5(16.7)	5(16.7)	5(16.7)	2(6.7)	10(33.3)	16(53.3)	4(13.3)	0	0
Occupational stress	1(3.3)	3(10)	3(10)	8(26.7)	1(3.3)	0	25(83.3)	5(16.7)	0	0

CONCLUSION

In the present study, the effect of training resilience-enhancing skills on the level of occupational stress among military personnel in 2018 was investigated and analyzed according to research objectives and hypotheses. According to the results, these trainings reduced the level of occupational stress after the intervention. These results are in line with those of the studies conducted by Alavi Arjmand et al. (2013). Accordingly, in a study conducted in 2006, examined 48 military personnel who received communication skills in the form of a workshop or group discussion over a period of 7 hours in a day. Using Job Content Questionnaire and assessing the communication skill, they found that occupational stress decreased significantly among military personnel after communication skills training(Jones et al., 2015).

In their research, Russler (1991), showed that training of communicative skills strongly reduced the level of stress among military personnel. Alavi Arjmand et al. (2013), conducted a two-group quasi-experimental study to assess the occupational stress of 44 military personnel using demographic, life-work conflict, and work stress questionnaires. In their research, experimental group subjects participated in two-day stress management training workshop and completed the questionnaires before and one month after the intervention. Results showed that training of stress management skills significantly reduced the mean work stress and work-life conflict stress among the military personnel. Therefore, it can be stated that the use of stress management skills in work and family life by the military personnel can be helpful in better management of time, work and personal stresses, proper diet adjustment, proper ways of treatment and conduct in family and work environments, and establishing work-life balance.

However, Eslami, Rabiei, Afzali, Hamidizadeh, and Masoudi (2016), did not observe a significant difference between students' anxiety after teaching stress prevention and

assertiveness methods. His research results are not in line with those of the present study. It can be stated that as students are exposed to multiple stressors over a longer period of time and due to lack of experience and knowledge on the effective coping strategies, they experience higher level of stress. Also, as they are not aware of the stressor that causes the highest level of stress for them, it will be very difficult for them to cope with all types of stresses simultaneously. Moreover, due to high level of academic concerns and intellectual involvement to plan for their future, they do not have sufficient strength and desire to use educational materials properly to reduce stress, so plans have not been effective enough to reduce their stress.

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