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CANADIAN FORCES COLLEGE / COLLÈGE DES FORCES CANADIENNES
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EXERCISE NEW HORIZONS

**INVISIBLE CRACKS: OCCUPATIONAL STRESS IN THE CANADIAN
FORCES**

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ABSTRACT

Operational stress has been studied since the US Civil War, but there has been a limited study on occupational stress in the military. The differences between operational and occupational stress will be examined, as well as the differences between the civilian workplace and military culture. The paper considers the nature of stress, the causes, and the levels of stress experienced by Canadian Forces (CF) personnel in their Canadian workplace. It will review how workload, recognition, personnel tempo (PERSTEMPO) and perceptions, contribute to the overall level of occupational stress. The argument is that although occupational stress is high in the CF, it receives little attention, while operational stress has received more attention due to its high visibility to the Canadian public. The paper will demonstrate that more study on the subject of occupational stress in the military is required to effectively mitigate the impact felt by CF personnel. It will also prove that many of the stressors experienced can be reduced by effective leadership.

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INVISIBLE CRACKS: OCCUPATIONAL STRESS IN THE CANADIAN FORCES

“When the Army starts losing good soldiers, something is wrong with the Army not the individual”

Pte 031 as quoted by Maj Cotton, “Military Attitudes of the Army in Canada”¹

INTRODUCTION

Stress and the soldier are as old as time. In his book, *No More Heroes*, Richard Gabriel provided staggering statistics on the impact stress has had on military personnel’s effectiveness throughout history. In World War I, 106 000 combatants were treated for psychiatric issues and in World War II, over 1.393 million. During the Korean conflict, the United States lost 32 of every 1000 to mental illness.² Today, Afghanistan is Canada’s flagship operation and although the majority of Canadian Forces (CF) personnel that have returned from theatre without physical or mental harm, there have been several reported cases of operational stress injuries (OSI).

OSI has received much attention throughout history, but an often unseen aspect of the military is occupational stress (OS). Many personnel have not deployed for various reasons and have remained in Canada to handle the work of two people. They also have the challenges of balancing work and family responsibilities. They too are experiencing stress, occupational stress. While little research has been completed on military occupational stress levels, the CF leadership is aware of the levels of operational stress

¹ Major C. Cotton, “Military Attitudes and Values of the Army in Canada,” (Willowdale, Canada: Canadian Forces Personnel Applied Research Unit, Report 79-5, December 1979), 93.

² Richard A. Gabriel, *No More Heroes: Madness and Psychiatry in War*. (New York, USA: Hill and Wang 1987), 72-77.

injuries, the concern is that occupational stress injuries are invisible as a result of the lack of study.

It is important that military leadership take notice of personnel suffering from all types of stress. Of course, the system will ensure clinically that individuals receive treatment; however, leadership must ensure socially there is equal distribution of medical treatment. By failing to do so they are unintentionally isolating personnel under their command. This paper will look at some of the root causes of stress and consider the stresses of military life both operationally and occupationally in order to prove that CF leadership must take a more active role in identifying and addressing with OS.

BACK TO BASICS

*A wonderful concept is “stress”-
What it means is anyone’s guess.
Though it is fun to be clinical
and rude to be cynical,
operationally it is a mess!*

- Parsons cited in *Stress and Human Performance*.³

According to the Oxford Dictionary, stress is “a state of mental or emotional strain.”⁴ The term stress has been defined in various ways as it relates to the soldier. The CF Personnel Applied Research Unit (CFPARU) has defined stress as “the result of cognitive processes that an individual uses to assign psychological meaning to the

³ James E. Driskell, and Eduardo Salas *Stress and Human Performance*. (Mahwah, New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 1996), 1.

⁴ C. Soanes, “Stress,” *Pocket Oxford English Dictionary* Ninth edition, Oxford University Press 2002.

external demand, as well as determine what to do with it.”⁵ When demands exceed resources, one experiences stress. Psychiatrist Sigmund Freud posited that stress was of a sexual nature and later determined that this resulted in a mental conflict within the human mind.⁶ During the US Civil War, stress reactions were known as “nostalgia” and in WWI as “shell shock.”⁷ In 1942, Dr Gillespie, a physician practicing psychological medicine, never used the word stress. Instead, he talked about the physiological effects of war on the soldier and the notion that some people have a deficit of energy resulting in nervous exhaustion or neuroses.⁸ For Dr. Gillespie this condition only manifested itself in the soldier during war.⁹ Truly this cannot be the case, a soldier can and does experience stress both at home and abroad. The sources and effects are many and these will be discussed further in the paper.

STRESS AND THE MILITARY

The *Journal of Occupation Health* published a study in 2005 that discussed the change in the US military and the transformation from the Cold War era through 9/11, focusing on the declining resources and the increasing demands of personnel. When

⁵ Joseph C.H. Trinh, and Captain J.M. Uchiyama, “Stress in the Workplace: A research proposal,” (Willowdale, Canada: Canadian Forces Personnel Applied Research Unit, Technical Note 15/93, May 1993), 11.

⁶ R.D. Gillespie, *Psychological Effects of War on Citizen and Soldier* (New York, USA: W.W. Norton & Company 1942), 16

⁷ Colonel J.G.J.C. Barabé, “The Invisible Scars of the Peace field: The Operational Commander’s Impact” (Toronto: Canadian Forces College, December 1999), 7.

⁸ Gillespie, *Psychological Effects of War on Citizen and Soldier...*, 15.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 22.

reviewing the person-level effects of military stressors the research was focused on five stressors: “number of hours worked, work-load, schedule predictability, work-family conflict and interpersonal conflict.”¹⁰ This was an extensive study that identified that increases in individual workloads and decreases in work predictability would cause a direct increase in family conflict and an increase interpersonal conflict. It also noted that where the workloads were balanced this was not as prevalent.¹¹ In the recommendations, it identified the responsibility of leadership to assess the workplaces stressors and to effectively deal with them. If left unchecked, undesirable workplace stressors may be considered the norm.

A 2008 comparison between military personnel and the civilian working population by Jungwee Park, an analyst with Statistics Canada, found that military personnel experienced higher rates of work related stress and job strain than the civilian workforce. This included job dissatisfaction, job strain, major depression and self-perceived mental health.¹² Due to cultural differences, perceptions and expectations, military personnel, and the civilian society they serve, have different stress levels. The Centre for Operational Research and Analysis reported that “[w]ork and life conflict may be an important aspect of military service since unlike most organizations the member’s

¹⁰ Jennifer S. Tucker, Robert R. Sinclair and Jeffrey L. Thomas. “The Multilevel Effects of Occupational Stressors on Soldiers’ Well-being, Organizational Attachment and Readiness,” *Journal of Occupational Health Psychology*, vol. 10, no. 3, (2005): 278.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 276-299.

¹² Jungwee Park . “A profile of the Canadian Forces,” *Perspectives on Labour and Income*, vol. 20, iss. 3 (Autumn 2008): 39.

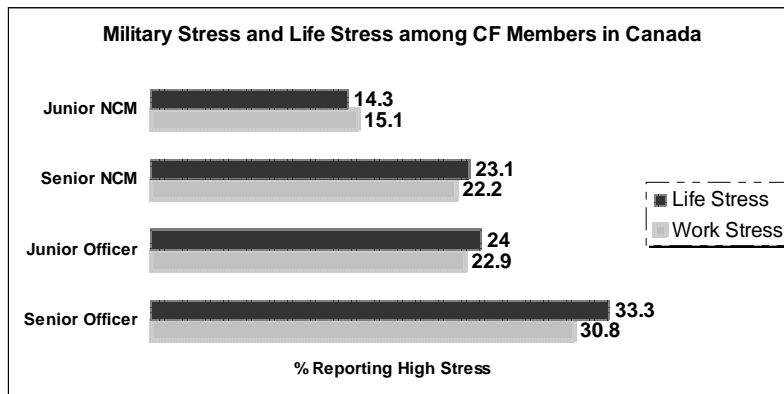
family is generally highly involved in the culture and organization of the military.”¹³ In⁷
1993, a research proposal for a study of stress in the CF workplace determined that the
culture, roles, career and factors intrinsic to the military are the major differences
between civilian society and military work environments.¹⁴

Focusing solely on military personnel, Defence R&D Canada completed a
comparative study on military work and life stress across the ranks of CF personnel in
Canada and those deployed in Afghanistan, revealing that at home, all but senior officers
reported a higher level of work and life stress (see Tables 1 and 2). During the same
period the stress levels reported by a senior officer and a junior NCO in Canada were
significantly different.¹⁵ Although the report did not give an explanation for this, the
levels of stress increased as the study progressed up the ranks. From this, one can
determine that levels of stress are directly linked to an individuals increased
responsibility and accountability.

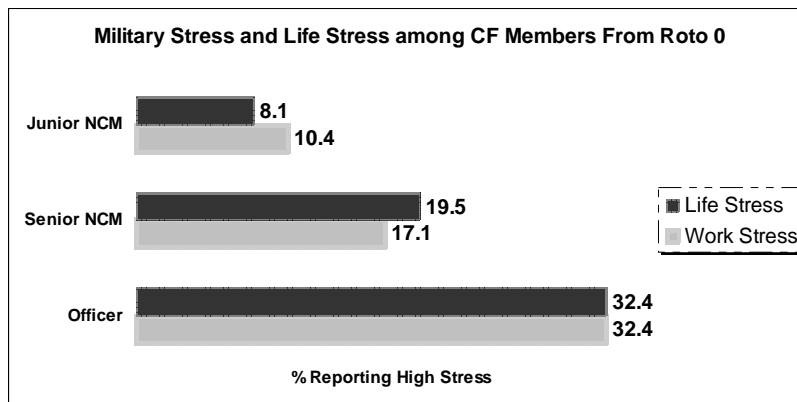
¹³ Kerry Sudom, and Sanela Dursun, “Perstempo in the Canadian Forces” (Ottawa: Centre for Operational Research and Analysis, November 2007), 70.

¹⁴ Trinh and Uchiyama, “Stress in the Workplace: A research proposal”..., 3-7.

¹⁵ Sudom and Dursun. “Perstempo in the Canadian Forces,”..., 55.

Table 1

Data extracted from: Kerry Sudom, and Sanela Dursun. "Perstempo in the Canadian Forces",¹⁶

Table 2

Data extracted from: Kerry Sudom, and Sanela Dursun. "Perstempo in the Canadian Forces",¹⁷

One would expect that individuals deployed away from their families in a theatre of combat operations would experience higher levels of stress; however, the PERSTEMPO studies have indicated this is not the case. There may be several reasons for this; however, the primary reason is the fact on while on deployment a soldier is far away from the stress of home and is singularly focussed on work.

¹⁶ Ibid., 55.

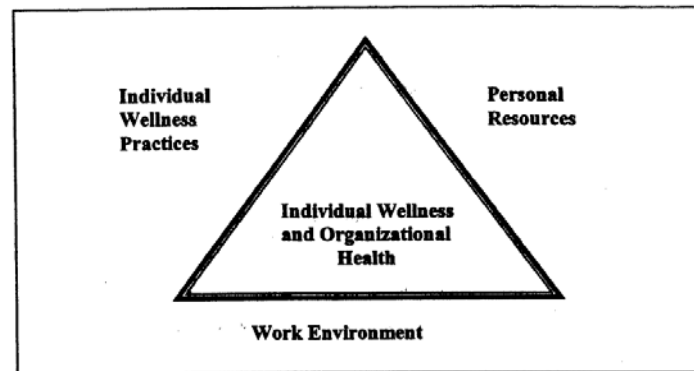
¹⁷ Ibid., 55.

During the research for this paper, it was discovered that not much has changed since Dr Gillespie wrote on the subject in 1942. In his writings he identified three main reasons that a soldier would be affected by neuroses (stress): their constitutional predisposition, environmental stress, and their inner psychological factors.¹⁸ Dr. Gillespie's theories are supported by a 1981 report from the United Kingdom, which studied stress and combat efficiency, categorizing the causes as internal and external factors, referring to the same sources of stress in the soldier.¹⁹ The challenge is that these theories all relate to a soldier in combat. The question raised by this theory is how is stress evaluated for a soldier who is not deployed on operations?

In 2004, Major Evans assessed the individual and organizational well-being of the CF. In his report he identified three distinct contributing factors to organizational health. (Figure 1) Comparing Major Evans' and Dr. Gillespie's studies, there are no differences between their explanation of what affects a soldier's stress levels. A soldier will experience stress at home and abroad if any of the three contributing factors are negatively impacted, no matter where he or she executes their duty.

¹⁸ R.D. Gillespie, *Psychological Effects of War on Citizen and Soldier...*, 166.

¹⁹ S. Labuc, "Psychological Stress and Combat Efficiency: A review of the Literature," (Farnborough United Kingdom: Army Personnel Research Establishment Ministry of Defence, Report 81R005, September 1981), 1-3.

Figure 1

Framework for individual wellness and organizational health as presented by Major C. Evans, "Assessing the Well-being of the Canadian Forces"²⁰

There is definitely a difference between the causes of stress in the military and the civilian workforce. The research has not clearly identified the difference between occupational and operational stress in a military environment is not as evident. What is not different is that "[o]rganizations are becoming increasingly aware of the consequences of mental health problems."²¹ Stress can lead to a loss of productivity, poor relationships, diminished capacity, errors, and accidents.

OCCUPATIONAL (OS) VERSUS OPERATIONAL STRESS (OSI)

Increased complexity in military work environments has given rise to higher levels of job-related stress experiences. Is there a difference in the uncomfortable, undesirable feeling experienced by an individual who is under stress during deployment

²⁰ Major C. Evans, "Assessing the Well-being of the Canadian Forces," (Ottawa: Director Strategic Human Resources Research, Note RN 07/04, March 2004), 2.

²¹ Karine Pepin, Kerry A. Sudom and Jason Dunn, "Your Say: Quality of Life 2005 Findings," (Ottawa: Centre for Operational Research, DRDC CORA TM 2006-41, December 2006), 25.

any different to an individual who has the same feelings at work in Canada? The answer is a resounding NO.

The US joint doctrine and US Health Service Support doctrine recognized the term operational stress, and defined it as "...service members who have been exposed to stressful events in war or military operations other than war."²² For the first time operational stress injuries were defined as something other than combat-related.

As highlighted by Ms Tzvetanka, the human dimension of war, and more specifically, OSI, has been studied by many organizations.²³ According to the Operational Stress Injury Social Support Project (OSISS), a peer support network endorsed by Armed Forces Council (AFC) in 2001, OSI is defined as, "...any persistence of psychological difficulty resulting from operational duties performed by a Canadian Forces member."²⁴ Still, a 2004 study by the Director Human Research Committee (DHRC) states that the confidence of CF personnel in leadership has been shaken, thus threatening the effectiveness of the Forces.²⁵ This report, completed prior to the CF deployment to Kandahar, Afghanistan in 2005 had already begun to identify that,

²² J. Don Richardson, Kathy Darte, Stephane Grenier, Allan English and Joe Sharpe, "Operational Stress Injury Social Support: A Canadian Innovation in Professional Peer Support" *Canadian Military Journal*, vol. 9, no 1 (Fall 2008), 62.

²³ Tzvetanka, Dobрева-Marinova, *Occupational Role Stress in the Canadian Forces: Its association with individual and organizational well-being* (Ottawa: Department of Psychology Charlton University 2002), 34-35.

²⁴ L.N. L'Heureux, and C. Rochon. "Canadian Forces and Operational Stress Injuries Efforts and Progress in Addressing the Issues," (Ottawa: Director of Human Resources Research and Evaluation, Contractor's Report 2004-02, April 2004), 23.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, vi.

PERSTEMPO, job complexity and danger were causing increased levels of stress on the soldiers.²⁶ In 1999, Colonel J.G.J.C. Barabé further referred to a soldiers' stress as "[t]he invisible Scars of the Peace field..."²⁷ These reports indicates that CF personnel were infact experiencing OSI prior to Canada's mission in Afghanistan.

OS in the military was studied in the CF in 1986, which found that 15% of military personnel reported some form of work related stress.²⁸ Again, the correlation between effective and supportive leadership was identified as a key factor in causes and moderators of work-place stress. The report implied that OSI may be considered a specialized form of OS for military personnel.

The occupational stress evaluation grid developed by the United States Department of Health and Human services, identified military crisis as one of many stressors for the socio-cultural level of occupational stress.²⁹ There is no mention of operational stress in the grid and one can extrapolate that military crisis is actually combat.

Is there a difference between operational and occupational stress? I contend there is none, as both relate to the impact the work environment and workload has on an

²⁶ Ibid., 16.

²⁷ Colonel J.G.J.C. Barabé, "The Invisible Scars of the Peace field: The Operational Commander's Impact,"..., 1.

²⁸ S. Truscott, and S. Flemming, "Occupational Stress Among Married and Single-Parent Canadian Forces Personnel" (Ottawa: Operational Research and Analysis Establishment, September 1986), 33.

²⁹ Lawrence R. Murphy, and Theodore F. Schoenborn. "Stress Management in Work Settings," *National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health Publication*, (May 1987), 93.

individual. Perhaps the term ‘operational’ is an attempt to differentiate between deployed and non-deployed stressors. Without knowledgeable leadership, the danger is that one will receive more attention than the other.

PERSTEMPO, RECOGNITION, AND PERCEPTION

PERSTEMPO: This has been studied in the CF since since 1998 when Lt Gen Romeo Dallaire, ADM (PER), requested research be conducted to better understand the stresses of contemporary operations.³⁰ Since that time, CF operations have changed significantly from peace support to full combat operations. This early study defined PERSTEMPO only as time away from home, limiting the research and value of the data. In 2005 the Directorate Strategic Human Resource Coordination (DSHRC) gathered data from a CF Focus Group on PERSTEMPO. The study described PERSTEMPO as the sum of all demands made on military personnel, broadening the definition to capture full military service requirements. It included deployment load, defined as time away on deployment (OPTEMPO), time away for reasons other than deployment and garrison/home station load.³¹ This is articulated in the formula below.

$$\mathbf{PERSTEMPO = OPTEMPO + Time Away + Home Station Load}$$

³⁰ Jason Dunn, Jason and Steve Flemming. “Managing PERSTEMPO: A critical imperative for Defence in Canada,” (Ottawa: Directorate of Strategic Human Resource Coordination COS ADM HR, July 2001), 1.

³¹ J. Dunn, K. Ford and S. Flemming. “PERSTEMPO Qualitative Data: CF Member Focus Group Findings,” (Ottawa: Directorate of Strategic Human Resource Coordination, COS ADM HR, ORD Technical Report TR 2005/09, February 2005), 4.

Throughout the report individuals cited many reasons for OS such as: home station load (work-life balance); sentiments of more with less; training take time; and the dissatisfaction of having to do jobs outside the primary task. These have led to burnout and fatigue, both of which are products of stress, and have led to some personnel releasing from the CF.³²

Another sentiment expressed in the report was that the participants lacked a sense of accomplishment and lack of purpose despite the heavy workloads. When soldiers are asked about what motivates them to deploy, the first response was financial. Secondary reasons were adventure and meaningful work. However, after the first tour the secondary reasons diminished and the primary reason dominated as financial benefits increase with the number of deployments.³³

In this same report, mental health was investigated, which found that the respondents' mental health issues centred on stress, often indicating that that there was no downtime with the current PERSTEMPO and CF members, it was found, had to resort to taking sick/stress leave in order to get downtime.³⁴ While some took off, many others tried to work through it. One respondent was reported to say, "We don't have time to take 30 days stress leave."³⁵ According to the report, this now has put into question the

³² Ibid., 12.

³³ Ibid., 21.

³⁴ Ibid., 30.

³⁵ Ibid., 32.

legitimacy of colleagues' illnesses, further supporting a theory of social isolation and an increase in OS.

DSHRC identified that the management of PERSTEMPO was a problematic. Task prioritization and efficient personnel management were the two main failings of CF leadership identified by the DSHRC report. Respondents to the report also indicated that the leadership was out of touch with the soldiers and indecisive in their actions relating to policy and command responsibilities. Additionally, the respondents did not feel that leaders encouraged personnel to find a work-life balance. This is supported by the findings that leadership failed to lead by example and often had their personnel working long hours. There was a feeling that personnel were unable to say no because it would impact on their Personnel Evaluation Report (PER). The long work hours and the can-do attitude were having a negative impact on an individual's mental health and the levels of OS were obvious in some of the sample comments.³⁶

Although DSHRC drew from a large sample population to illustrate the effects of PERSTEMPO on CF personnel, they felt it necessary to point out that they would not apply their findings to the entire CF population. The mandate of the report was to identify a range of personnel issues that could be further studied.³⁷

In February 2006, the PERSTEMPO and Human Dimensions Deployment Study (HDDS) was published, articulating how the culture has changed in the military. By

³⁶ Ibid., 43-47.

³⁷ Ibid., v.

studying service providers they were able to determine the stressors of military life. One of the respondents to the study stated, “Before you had camaraderie. Today you have the mighty PER. It’s a rat race.”³⁸ This indicates that in order to have a career, military personnel need to be recognized for the work that is being done. Many statements in these reports related to the lack of resources, specifically personnel resources that cause strain. There is an expression often heard in the halls of CF installations, along the lines of “Oh, it’s only a half day job, 12 hours is half day”³⁹. This is no joke, and clearly counters the intent of the CF to offer a healthy balance between the work and life to personnel in order to reduce stress. Individuals left behind are tasked to do the work of many, while others are completing multiple deployments.⁴⁰ As the workload increases so does the stress. It is important to change military culture so that the consequence of PERTEMPO is understood across the CF. The HDDS study has demonstrated a significant increase in workload primarily as a result in a reduction of staff since 1996.⁴¹

Maj Evans in his paper on work-life balance in the CF talked about lifestyle changes or “revolution.” The increase in work hours and responsibilities within the family have led to a work-life conflict and increased OS.⁴² He found that only 43% of military personnel were satisfied with their workload. Another third stated they would

³⁸ Jason Dunn, Kim Ford and Steve Flemming. “PERSTEMPO and HDDS,” (Ottawa: Centre for Operational Research and Analysis, DRDC CORA TM 2006-04, February 2006), 11.

³⁹ Unknown author. This is a generic comment used by many CF personnel and cannot be related to a specific individual.

⁴⁰Ibid., 13.

⁴¹ Ibid., 13.

⁴² Major C. Evans, “Work-life Balance in the Canadian Forces and Department of National Defence,” (Ottawa: Director of Strategic Human Resources, Report PR 01/2004, February 2004), 6.

consider leaving the CF due to unrealistic expectations, reporting that there was too much to do and too little time to complete the assigned tasks. Additionally, many of the participants in the focus groups acknowledged burnout, and pressure to choose between family and the CF.⁴³ This group was composed not of personnel deployed outside of Canada, but of only those who remained in garrison.

The study confirmed increased levels of OS stemmed from the increased PERSTEMPO. Most significantly, nearly 55% of CF personnel felt that it was not acceptable to say no to additional work, and again 55% felt that there would be negative career implications if they did not work long hours. It is no surprise that only 30% of CF personnel perceived that the CF supported a work-life balance.⁴⁴ A respondent to the 2006 PERSTEMPO and HDDS survey made the following statement, “Many people work at home [evenings and weekends] under the umbrage that the Canadian military is a vocation. There is stress because there is always work to be done.” Times have not changed as “there are way too many demands placed on everybody in the CF. Who catches the overflow is the problem.”⁴⁵

Recognition: The only CF report that included recognition as it related to OS in its research was in 1993, which studied married and single military parents. The report covered the full range of occupational stressors from role overload to inadequacy of

⁴³ Ibid., 26.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 32.

⁴⁵ Ford and Flemming. “PERSTEMPO and HDDS” ..., 7.

recognition.⁴⁶ The separation from their families and long hours were not appreciated within the garrison work environment.⁴⁷ Not only did those deployed appear to have received a monetary incentive, they also got the glory. This perceived unfair treatment established a rift amongst the soldiers and contributed to increases in levels of OS within a unit.

Society in general has long reflected on the nature of fairness. The Handbook of Work Stress breaks organizational justice, or fairness, into three broad categories: distributive justice – an individual’s subjective assessment of the fairness of the outcome distribution; procedural justice – as the perceived fairness of the process used to determine the outcomes; and, interactional justice – respect and dignity by which people are treated, as well as adequacy and completeness of information provided to workers.⁴⁸ Any lack of fairness in these areas is a perceived inequity. In the handbook, leadership was clearly linked to stress in the workplace, and leadership plays a large role in moderating any type of organizational injustice through task distribution, job recognition and social integration within the workspace.

OS caused by an increased workload and lack of recognition is one thing, but the fact that others get to deploy also has a great impact on OS. It is comparable to winning the lottery, not only for career progression, but also financially. Many personnel view

⁴⁶ Truscott, and Flemming, “Occupational Stress Among Married and Single-Parent Canadian Forces Personnel”..., 13.

⁴⁷ Sudom and Dursun. “Perstempo in the Canadian Forces”..., 55.

⁴⁸ Julian Barling, E. Kevin Kelloway and Michael R. Frone, *Handbook of Work Stress* (Thousand Oaks California: Sage Publications, 2005), 64-67.

deployments as a way get promoted quicker, and make extra cash: the more you go the more you get. This is a further cause of dissatisfaction and a factor in OS for those who do not get the opportunity to go.

Perception: Perception is a dangerous thing as it can have a serious negative impact on any organization. The *Journal of Organizational Behavior* states it simply: “[j]ob related stress is often a function of an individual’s perception of organizational events and the meaning attached to these events.”⁴⁹ Individuals who have deployed several times and work alongside someone who has not, cannot help but ask why have they not deployed?

With the PERSTEMPO as high as it is, certainly the opportunity is there and has not been taken. There are many reasons a CF member has not gone on deployment: supervisor denial, medical, family circumstances, or simply that the essential military skills are required in Canada. Human nature will cause the combat seasoned soldier to think avoidance, therefore placing a stigma on the other individual. Yet, respondents in a 2005 CF focus group expressed that they were dissatisfied with the fact they, due to their trade or supervisor intervention, were not given the same deployment opportunities as others.⁵⁰ This was supported by the 2007 Defence Research Canada report that verified

⁴⁹ John J. Sosik, and Veronica M. Godshalk, “Leadership Styles, Mentoring Functions Received, and Job Related Stress: A Conceptual Model and Preliminary Study,” *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, vol. 21, no. 4, (June 2000), 372.

⁵⁰ Dunn, Ford and Flemming. “PERSTEMPO Qualitative Data: CF Member Focus Group Findings”..., 60.

that across the rank spectrum 85 – 92% of those who were surveyed would deploy if given the opportunity.⁵¹

The *Journal of Organizational Behavior* states that “[p]erceived justice is an evaluative judgment about the rightness of a person’s treatment by others.”⁵² Is the CF treating our personnel right, and has the leadership unwittingly created a class system? Although there are no hard facts to support this idea, the CF may have done exactly this. The social dimension of the workplace is very important and “[a] long-standing hypothesis asserts that social isolation presents a risk to the well-being of individuals,” thus increasing OS.⁵³ Within a unit there may be individuals who have deployed to Afghanistan, some of these individuals will have seen combat whereas others will have been in a supporting role. There are also individuals who have never been deployed to any theatre of operations. These individuals are perceived to be avoiding deployment and are considered to be lacking credibility.

Deployed individuals at all rank levels and in all trades may consider themselves superior to those who have not deployed, socially isolating others because of limited operational experience. This would understandably be a cause of dissatisfaction, especially if they are not being recognized for the long hours worked to cover for the vacancies left by deployed personnel. This not only layers the organization, it also puts

⁵¹ Sudom, and Dursun. “Perstempo in the Canadian Forces”..., 47.

⁵² Dov Zohar, “The Justice Perspective of Job Stress,” *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, vol. 16, no. 5, (Sep 2005): 487.

⁵³ Kawachi H. Achat, S Levine, C Berkley, E Coakley, and G Colditz. “Stress and Health related Quality of Life,” *Quality of Life Research*, vol. 7, no. 8 (Dec 1998), 735.

considerable internal strain on the unit. A 1979 report issued by the CFPARU stated: “this[social isolation] is indicative of an Army undergoing stress, in which the clash of expectations and assumptions is a daily social phenomenon as individuals with different socialization tracks collide in the performance of their duties.”⁵⁴ Although this study referred to the difference between Officers, Senior Non-commissioned officers, and Junior Non-commissioned officers, it can be equally related to the above scenario, whereas two individuals of the same rank and trade may have very different socialization tracks as a result of deployments. A high degree of social support within a unit, which includes supportiveness and trust, is essential to moderating stress and removing any perceptions of social isolation. The payoff for this will be lower incidents of OS and contribute to maintaining a higher state of readiness in the CF.

THE ROLE OF LEADERSHIP

A perceived lack of support to individuals work-life balance by leadership will have a negative impact in any organization. “Occupational role stress is a perception indicated by ambiguity, conflict and overload and arising from both the characteristics of the individual and the work environment.”⁵⁵ Published studies that delve into OS stress in the military are rare.⁵⁶ Tzetanka Debreva-Martinova took a detailed look at the individual and well being in the CF, contending that appropriate leadership practices are important to positive work behaviours. She also reported that there is a significant

⁵⁴ Cotton, “Military Attitudes and Values of the Army in Canada”..., 75.

⁵⁵ Dobreva-Marinova, *Occupational Role Stress in the Canadian Forces...*, 5.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 34.

relationship between OS and leadership. Although military leadership has been explored at length as to its effectiveness, Ms Debreva-Martinova highlights a series of studies that reaffirms the impact perceptions of leadership have on organizational conflict and OS.⁵⁷ Respondents reported that, “[even] if I did the best job possible, the organization would fail to notice.”⁵⁸ Ms Tsvetanka concluded that in order to moderate negative impacts, a leader must show consideration, trust and address the needs of the subordinate in order to understand their need for work-life balance and recognition.

In a report completed by Harvard University on social networks, stress, and health related quality of life amongst nurses, a social network was defined as, “structural aspects of social relationships...through which pragmatic help as well as emotional and psychological support can be exchanged between individuals.”⁵⁹ This study can provide some insight into the impact of social isolation within a high functioning professional group despite not being a CF study. The results over a 30 year period indicated, 5.2% of nurses felt isolated within their profession.⁶⁰ In broad terms, the isolation was a result of mental health, physical health and lifestyle caused by the occupational stress levels of the profession.

It is difficult to compare the conditions of work in the military to other professions or organizations. Comparisons to police forces have been undertaken in the

⁵⁷ Ibid., 27.

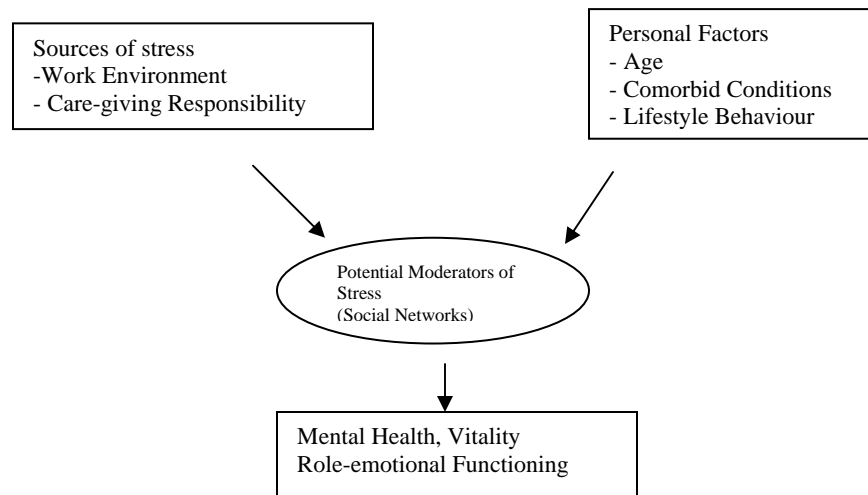
⁵⁸ Ibid., 125.

⁵⁹ Achat et al. “*Stress and Health related Quality of Life*,” Social networks, stress and health related issues..., 2.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 739.

past.⁶¹ The military is still significantly different; a sub-culture of society and in itself has become a large social network. Using the Harvard model (see Figure 2) to consider what happens when the source of the stress – the work environment – and the moderator of stress – the social network – are one in the same or in conflict. There have been reports that individuals have felt isolated in the CF and not “part of the family.”⁶² This isolation is a contributor to workplace stress and it is leadership’s task to ensure that it is moderated.

Figure 2



Kawachi H, Achat, S Levine, C Berkley, E Coakley, and G Colditz, “Stress and Health related Quality of Life.”⁶³

As the mental health and well-being of personnel is a factor in OS, leadership has a responsibility to take an active role in order to reduce OS. The CF has addressed this in its Military HR Strategy 2020, by stating that, “by addressing the issues impacting the

⁶¹ Dobрева-Marinova. *Occupational Stress in the Canadian Forces...*, 5.

⁶² Ibid., 120-121.

⁶³ Ibid., 736.

well-being of [members] and their families, including an optimum balance of work and personnel life, is fundamental...to the positioning of the CF as a career choice.”⁶⁴ The CF understands that this is an issue, not only for the individual, but also for the health of the CF itself.

The “Your Say” Quality of Life (QoL) 2005 findings show the impacts of various work indicators on an individual’s QoL. The domain that caused the greatest dissatisfaction was leisure, where the study showed that all military personnel reported hours of work between 42-49 hours per week.⁶⁵ It stated that, “in time, the effects of personnel tempo on family, friends, loved ones and military members themselves will become more evident.”⁶⁶ A leader is responsible to manage personnel expectations so that a work-life balance is achieved thus reducing the levels of OS in the workplace.

There are many programs available to personnel who are experiencing stress. The CF leadership is taking an active role by creating opportunities for individuals to spend time with their families such as the PERSTEMPO, and leave policies. There are also programs in place to allow members to self-improve. Nonetheless, the programs are only good if there is time in the day to take advantage of them. Therefore the leaderships must also ensure there is effective use of these programs. Thus ensuring a reduction in the OS felt by all CF personnel.

⁶⁴ Department of National Defence. *Military HR Strategy 2020* (Ottawa: Canada Communications Group, 2002), 17.

⁶⁵ Pepin, Sodom and Dunn. “Your Say: Quality of Life 2005 Findings” ..., 28.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 35.

What can be done to make changes to reduce OS? Realistically, the issue of lack of personnel is not going away in the near future. The CF leadership needs to ensure policies are followed that allow for work-life balance and proper recognition of the efforts of all personnel both deployed and, especially, at home. Improvements to the demands of the job, the quality and workplace support would most likely produce higher levels of satisfaction and, in turn, produce positive results for the individual and the organization.⁶⁷

The *Journal of Military Medicine* confirmed Ms Dobрева-Marinova's assertion that "little research had been conducted in the stress of the routine, peacetime military work environment."⁶⁸ Major Steven Pflanz, the author of the article, did report that 26% of US military personnel identified significant work related stress, and, in this study of USAF personnel 27.4% reported from significant job stress. Another study, which considered both occupational and family related stress in their analysis, found that 32.3% of personnel reported high levels of stress at work.⁶⁹ In the first study, the main complaints from non-deployed personnel were closely associated with work responsibilities, work hours and difficulties with leadership. Although the results must be considered carefully due to the fact it was a self-reporting survey, it did make some significant recommendations. It was suggested that OS might be a significant health risk

⁶⁷ Major C. Evans, "Work-life Balance in the Canadian Forces and Department of National Defence," (Ottawa: Director of Strategic Human Resources, Report PR 01/2004, February 2004), 56.

⁶⁸ Major Steven Pflanz, "Job Stress, Depression, Work Performance, and Perceptions of Supervisors in Military Personnel," *Military Medicine*, vol. 171 (September 2006): 861.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 853.

in the US military. The explanation was not attributed to hostilities but to culture, force strength, and the quality of the leader. The recommendation was to further study all sources of work stress and develop ways to reduce the impact on the organization, therefore, improving military effectiveness.

CONCLUSION

Due to the complex nature of the topic of this paper, the paper has raised as many questions as it has answers. Occupational stress is unavoidable in some form or another within the CF. Strong leadership that recognizes the symptoms of stress in the workplace and effectively deals with them will have a positive impact on the organization.

Stress is a culmination of many factors in one's life. Although there are different aspects to the root cause, the end result is the same, whether it is occupationally or operationally induced. In other words, the symptoms and their impact on an individual may vary, but the end result does not change. Since the beginning of this century, the CF has come a long way with the support programs provided to assist in the mental health and well being of its troops. But, these programs have been largely necessitated by the operational stress injuries suffered by soldiers returning from Canada's flagship conflict. PERSTEMPO does not allow for their effective application to military personnel who are suffering from occupational stress. CF personnel who suffer occupational stress injuries caused by work-life issues while in Canada deserve the same treatment as those returning from an overseas deployment.

CF leadership must acknowledge that OSI is a subset of OS, and that leaders have a key role in reducing the stressors soldiers are exposed to in all work environments. A leader's decision and actions may be all that is required to tip the balance of an individual's mental health, which may result in lost time or even release from the CF.

One might ask the question: If there was such a problem with OS as indicated in the paper then why do we not see a mass exodus of personnel? I submit that the strong level of commitment that CF personnel possess falsely reinforces retention rates and may mask serious levels of stress. Ultimately, it is the job of leadership to recognize this fact. If not, there will be increased burnout, medical leave, or release. We owe it to all men and women of the CF who serve their country in peace or in times of conflict, to get this right.

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