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“SCREENING FOR RESILIENCY”

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JCSP 45

Exercise Solo Flight

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EXERCISE *SOLO FLIGHT* – EXERCICE *SOLO FLIGHT*

“Screening for Resiliency”

Major Stuart Evans

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“Screening for Resiliency” SOLO FLIGHT

Often when considering a career in the military, some may be drawn to the privilege of serving their country but may not necessarily take the time to consider their own personal capacity for resiliency. To be a member of the Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) is a demanding occupation that puts significant stresses on the members and their families. Having a resilient frame of mind and a home system of supports is essential to a member’s successful and rewarding career and mental health. Resilience as defined by Webster’s is: “the capability of a strained body to recover its size and shape after deformation caused especially by compressive stress, or an ability to recover from or adjust easily to misfortune or change.”¹ When applying the definition of resilience to a typical military career which consists of long deployments away from friends and family in difficult and likely stressful circumstances. It’s easy to see that resilience or the ability to recover from stressful situations is one of the factors that will contribute to a healthy and long career. The thesis of this paper is an argument for the need to conduct resiliency screening during the initial recruiting process prior to a successful applicants start on basic training in St. Jean, Quebec. This paper will define the problem; provide a definition of resilience in a military context; describe how this screening could be conducted efficiently and effectively; and the advantages of this screening for the CAF.

When reviewing the publication Strong, Secure and Engaged (SSE), it is important to note the difficulties that members of the CAF experience in their profession is clearly described and acknowledged in that publication.

¹ Merriam-Webster Dictionary. Definition of Resilience. <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/resilience>.

Compared to the Canadian population, military personnel experience higher rates of depression and post-traumatic stress disorder. Suicide rates over recent years have also shown a worrying upward trend. Suicide usually includes an element of mental illness and other stressors that can be aggravated by the rigours of military service, particularly if appropriate supports and services are not sought or in place.²

This is significant in that SSE appreciates the difficulty that military service has on its members and has detailed some initiatives that will be done to assist its members. In order to mitigate the increase in mental health issues and suicide rates of members, it is clearly stated that one of the objectives is to create and implement projects and initiatives in order to provide support to members: “Effective support and services will help the Canadian Armed Forces be more resilient in the face of challenges and enhance operational readiness.”³ Through SSE, it is acknowledged by the leadership of the CAF that military service is unique from other professions with “stresses that can have a profound impact on health, from psychological trauma that can be experienced on deployment to the strain that frequent relocation puts on families, relationships, and finances.”⁴

This is an acknowledgement from the CAF leadership and the government of Canada that a career in the CAF is a stressful one with higher than average Canadian rates of depression and PTSD. SSE notes that there is currently a problem with the level of treatment of mental health for the members of the CAF. Coupled with that, it is common for members struggling with issues of mental health to not want to acknowledge

² National Defence and the Canadian Armed Forces. *Strong, Secure and Engaged Canada's Defence Policy*. Government of Canada. 2017, 26.

³ *Ibid*, 26.

⁴ *Ibid*, 26.

that they are struggling or do not want to go and get they help that they need. To that end, SSE is making the following changes:

Augment the Canadian Armed Forces Health System to ensure it meets the unique needs of our personnel with efficient and effective care, anywhere they serve in Canada or abroad. This includes growing the Medical Services Branch by 200 personnel.

Implement a joint National Defence and Veterans Affairs Suicide Prevention Strategy that hires additional mental health professionals and implements a joint framework focused on preventing suicide across the entire military and Veteran community.

Remove barriers to care, including creating an environment free from stigma where military members are encouraged to raise health concerns of any nature and seek appropriate help when they need it.⁵

These initiatives above will help more members to get the treatment that they need which is a very good thing. When visiting the government of Canada website under Canadian Armed Forces Mental Health Services, this page describes a different program called the *The Road to Mental Readiness (R2MR) program* which “offers resilience and mental health training to CAF members throughout their careers. This is offered by qualified trainers, clinicians and operators to meet the needs of members and their families.”⁶ Described below, are the particulars of the R2MR training program which is divided into three key areas.

Career training: For new recruits, the career training provides the building blocks to maximize performance and enhance resilience. As CAF

⁵ *Ibid*, 26.

⁶ Defence, National. “*Road to Mental Readiness Program*.” Canadian Armed Forces Mental Health Services. <https://www.canada.ca/en/department-national-defence/programs/caf-mental-health-services.html#rmp>.

members progress through the ranks and take on leadership responsibilities, training continues to build with the focus on:

- well-being and performance
- maintenance of health in ones' subordinates
- institutional policy and processes
- additional performance training for jobs in Search and Rescue, military policing and sniper training.

Deployment training: Training is offered before and after deployment. The pre-deployment training helps prepare CAF members for the new environment; while the post-deployment training is focused on preparing them make the necessary adjustments when returning home.

Family training: The program also helps family members manage the stress of military life, including deployment. The family training is available at all Military Family Resource Centres across the country and online through the web applications.⁷

It should be noted, that all the programs described above are for current and future serving members of the CAF. The commonality between all these programs and initiatives, is that the mental health services and resilience training is to be done for those members that are already serving and have made it past the recruitment phase. The problem that has been identified is that there currently is no screening for the mental resiliency of those Canadian citizens who entered the recruiting offices and wish to join the CAF. To put it another way, you need to be a member before accessing the above mentioned programs and services. There is currently no such vehicle to determine a potential recruits mental resiliency or ability to live a resilient life style suited to serving in the CAF. To further understand why this is an issue to be addressed, the importance of resiliency must be explained.

⁷ *Ibid*, 1.

The earlier definition of resiliency from Webster's dictionary provides an initial appreciation but it must be further defined within a military context. From a panel in the *Journal of Science and Medicine in Sport*, military resilience was defined as the capacity to overcome "the negative effects of setbacks and associated stress on military performance and combat effectiveness. Stress in many forms via the singular or combined effects of physical exertion, emotional and psychological stress."⁸ Sleep restriction, and cognitive overload, were also challenges that need to be considered according to the panel. There is a CAF definition of mental resilience found in an operation order for the Canadian Army Integrated Performance Strategy (CAIPS) Op O 01, it was defined as:

the capacity of a soldier to adapt, resist, and thrive in the face of the stress imposed by Army life in garrison, training and operational environments. Resilience is not about coping with a singular event but rather adapting to the overall culture and lifestyle that accompanies Army life as an enduring profession.⁹

These definitions all are compelling examples of the rigors that can be expected of a career in the CAF. While many of the examples of stressors written in the definitions above are not unique to the CAF, what is unique is the expectation of unlimited liability. To be clear, unlimited liability is: "Military members are routinely asked to perform tasks that other members of the civilian population are not expected. They are exposed to significant physical and mental risk, and can even be required to sacrifice their life for the

⁸ Bradley C. Nindl, *et al*, "Perspectives on resilience for military readiness and preparedness: Report of an international military physiology roundtable." *Journal of Science and Medicine in Sport*. Volume 21, Issue 11, November 2018, 1116.

⁹ Canada, Dept. of National Defence, (*4500-1 Canadian Army Integrated Performance Strategy (CAIPS) Op O 01*. 2015), 1.

benefit of others.”¹⁰ These are actions that go above what is expected for non-military employees or civilians in the workplace. In a typical workplace in Canada, there is absolutely no expectation that an employee will engage in an act or activity that would put their life or future in jeopardy. This is where unlimited liability in the CAF allows for just that sort of thing as an example; it makes it legal for the government of Canada, to send naval ships into harm’s way to achieve Canadian strategic objectives. This is one of the reasons why mental resilience in the CAF and the promotion of mental resilience is so important. The screening of recruits to see if they have the resilience to thrive in a career with unlimited liability is important. Due to the demands of long hours, lack of sleep, in dangerous environments under mental and physical stress, it is those with mental resilience that are able to cope well with these demands in order to achieve mission success.

Having mental resilience is not the only key successful factor to thriving in a stressful environment like those experienced by CAF members. It is with appropriate training both individual and collective while gaining experience, those are factors key to thriving in demanding situations or times. This paper will assume that the excellent training that a CAF member receives during all phases of their training will continue in the future. A way to improve the likelihood of a potential member’s successful completion of basic training, and trade training for their MOC is through the addition of screening for mental resilience during the recruitment phase.

¹⁰ Nikki Coleman. “*Unlimited Liability*.” Encyclopedia of Military Ethics. Added Mon, 14 Oct 2013 07:36. Last accessed 4 April, 2019, 1. <https://www.militaryethics.org/Unlimited-Liability/15/>.

It is critical to explore when it would be appropriate during the recruiting phase to conduct resiliency screening. The recruitment phase can be a long and sometimes demanding process which according to the recruiting website consists of the following:

- (1) Aptitude Testing – tests verbal skills, spatial ability and problem solving to help determine specific military occupations for which candidates are best suited;
- (2) Medical Examination – ensures candidates are medically fit to a standard sufficient to complete basic training and be prepared for service with the CF;
- (3) Enhanced Reliability Check – confirms reliability and trustworthiness in the performance of duties and in the protection of assets and interests of the CF and its personnel; and
- (4) Personal Interview – basically a job interview that gives the recruiters a better idea about the candidate, his or her background, strengths, weaknesses and where the candidate would best fit in as a member of the CF.¹¹

As seen above, getting a member into the CAF is a demanding but necessary process. There are two portions of the recruiting phase that appear to be opportunities to conduct resiliency screening. The first is when the applicant comes in for the aptitude test. As stated above, this is a scored individual test that an applicant can complete by themselves. Also, there is the personal interview where the applicant is interviewed one on one with a CAF member working in the recruiting office. In order to determine between the aptitude test and the personal interview, which would be the best or most appropriate time to conduct the screening, it's necessary to describe the different types of mental resiliency screening that are available for consideration.

¹¹ Canada, Dept. of National Defence. *Joining the Canadian Forces: The Recruiting Process*. <http://www.forces.gc.ca/en/news/article.page?doc=joining-the-canadian-forces-the-recruiting-process/hnps1u03#archived>.

There are many different types of resiliency screening out there, a big decision would be in what part of the recruitment process is best suited to conduct an initial screening of applicants for their mental resiliency. In order for the resiliency screen to occur during the aptitude test, the screen would have to be a type that is able to be done by the applicant individually via computer or complete with pencil and paper. There have been many different types of models developed that could be completed by the applicants during the aptitude phase. According to the author Robert Scoloveno, “Several models have been developed to explain resilience and to operationalize the construct. Some use multiple indicators to study resilience, measures of self-esteem and a sense of coherence. Others use instruments that specifically measure resilience.”¹²

One type of screening that could be conducted during the aptitude phase is called the Resilience Scale for Adults (RSA). This RSA scale made for adults was developed because of the perceived shortcomings of the other instruments in addressing social factor constructs, such as social support and social competence.¹³ According to Scoloveno, the RSA “measures interpersonal and intrapersonal protective resources that facilitate adaptation to adverse life events.” Simply put, the RSA takes a more holistic look at the adult, their personal attitudes, general morale, participation in the community and familial ties. Depending on the answers given, a determination is made as to the adults’ level of resiliency or ability to handle major stresses in life and continue on in a healthy manner.

¹² Scoloveno, Robert. “Measures of Resilience and an Evaluation of the Resilience Scale (RS).” Research Article. *International Journal of Emergency Mental Health and Human Resilience*. 2017, Vol 19(4): 380. Rutgers University. <https://www.omicsonline.org/open-access/measures-of-resilience-and-an-evaluation-of-the-resilience-scale-rs-1522-4821-1000380-96863.html>

¹³ *Ibid.*

To better appreciate the RSA, according to the International Journal of Testing, “the aim in developing the RSA was to identify influential protective factors based on resiliency research. Studies using exploratory and confirmatory factor analyses generated a six-factor structure. Higher scores mean higher levels of protective resiliency factors.”¹⁴

The six factors that are currently used in the RSA are: (1) Perception of Self; (2) Planned Future; (3) Social Competence; (4) Structured Style; (5) Family cohesion; and (6) Social Resources.”¹⁵ As illustrated by these types of factors, the RSA has a look at the adult as a whole from their perception of self to the social resources that are available to them. It is determined through this scale that these are the factors required in order to gain a solid grasp of an adult’s capacity for resiliency. The RSA factors are explained below:

(1) Perception of self contains items that measure confidence in their own abilities and judgments, self-efficacy and realistic expectations;

(2) Planned future measures the ability to plan ahead, have a positive outlook, and be goal oriented;

(3) Social competence contains items measuring levels of social warmth and flexibility, ability to establish friendships, and the positive use of humor;

(4) Structured style measures the preference of having and following routines, being organized, and the preference of clear goals and plans before undertaking activities;

(5) Family cohesion measures whether values are shared or discordant in the family and whether family members enjoy spending time with each other, have an optimistic view of the future, have loyalty toward each other, and have the feeling of mutual appreciation and support; and

(6) Social resources measure availability of social support, whether they have a confidante outside the family (such as friends or other

¹⁴ Odin Hjemdal *et al*, “The Resilience Scale for Adults: Construct Validity and Measurement in a Belgian Sample.” *International Journal of Testing*. 55.

¹⁵ *Ibid*, 55.

family members that appreciate and encourage them), and whether they may turn to someone outside the family for help if needed.¹⁶

These factors cover the RSA's overarching categories of protective factors associated with resilience. To be clear, it would be during the aptitude testing, that the applicant would be required to complete the Resilience Scale for Adults (RSA). The scoring would then be compared to a yet to be determined baseline or cheat sheet that would give the recruiting centre members an idea of the adult applicants score on the RSA. Scoring for the RSA: "is a 33-item, 5-point Likert scale, with response options ranging from 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree."¹⁷ Likely when applied to the aptitude testing phase, as per the RSA, a higher score is a better score. The RSA is "comprised of three intrapersonal factors: Social Competence, Personal Competence, Structured Style; and two interpersonal factors: Social Resource and Family Cohesion."¹⁸ Taking the scoring and factors into consideration, a higher score means that the applicant has the qualities that make him/her more resilient and likely has a support system for them to draw upon in times of stress.

The personal interview during the recruiting phase is a chance for a one-on-one interview between the applicant and a member of the recruiting centre to gain an idea of the applicant's suitability for military service. This is also an opportunity to ask questions of the applicant to gain a sense of their resilience and their ability to handle stresses that are likely to come from a career in the CAF. There are many different types of questions that could be asked of an applicant applying to the CAF. Such as:

¹⁶ *Ibid*, 59.

¹⁷ Liesl M., Farnsworth. "An Assessment of Intrapersonal and Interpersonal Resilience Factors Among Trans People: A Literature Review and Quantitative Investigation." Oregon State University. 2013, 3. https://ir.library.oregonstate.edu/concern/graduate_thesis_or_dissertations/5712m999n

¹⁸ *Ibid*, 3.

1. What is your greatest failure? How did you move on from it?
2. Can you remember a recent stressful situation at work? How did you deal with this?
3. Have you ever been in a situation where you were close to giving up? How did you overcome this?
4. Can you describe a difficult team situation you have been in? How did you react to this?
5. Have you ever turned a dream into a reality?¹⁹

As seen above, many of these questions are likely already being asked by the interviewer right now. Questions that ask about past experiences and tricky or challenging situations show the applicants ability to deal with challenging or difficult situations. These questions and the answers given by the applicant, are a good view into how determined the applicant is to see a goal to successful completion, do they show grit, determination, how did they react in a stressful situation are all solid indicators that will help the interviewer to assess whether the applicant is a resilient individual suited for service with the CAF.

A counter argument to the proposal to introduce resiliency screening during the recruiting process into the CAF could be based on the general age demographic of the applicants. Consider that most young adults are still developing and maturing. The brain of a young male is still developing up to age 25, and according to Dr. Sandra Aamodt, the brains of young adults at 18 years old are “about halfway through that process. Their prefrontal cortex is not yet fully developed. That's the part of the brain that helps you to

¹⁹ Wordpress.com, Claireaydogan. “*Interview Questions on Resilience and how to answer them.*” 7 July, 2017. <https://claireaydogan.wordpress.com/2017/07/07/interview-questions-on-resilience-and-how-to-answer-them/>

inhibit impulses and to plan and organize your behavior to reach a goal.”²⁰ This applies to both males and females, according to Dr. Aamodt, female brains mature generally 2 years before male brains.²¹

While the maturity of brains and brain development is an important factor, this counter argument is not sufficient enough to dissuade from resiliency screening. It should be noted that a common tombstone age marker in Canada is 19 years old. According to the Government of Canada website: “In Canada, the definition of a minor child varies according to province, with 18 years to 19 years old being the age Canadians are considered adults.”²² At that age, most of the responsibilities and privileges of adulthood are granted. People can drink alcohol, vote, and most importantly in the eyes of the law, are considered to be adults and tried and convicted as adults as of 18 years of age. At this time, brain maturity of young adults is not a factor in considering whether the person is an adult or not. It truly is their actual age that is the determinant. This also holds true when young adults are applying to the CAF, once 18 or 19; they are considered to be adults and treated as such. This may have an effect on their aptitude scoring and ability to interview, but it would be a common issue to all the testing and not solely the resiliency screening. This means that brain maturity should be a consideration but not a reason to discount this new step in the recruitment process.

²⁰ National Public Radio (NPR). “*Brain Maturity Extends Well Beyond Teen Years.*” NPR Science Section. 10 October, 2011. 1. <https://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=141164708>

²¹ *Ibid*, 1.

²² Government of Canada Website. “*Provincial definitions of a minor.*” Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Section. <https://www.canada.ca/en/immigration-refugees-citizenship/corporate/publications-manuals/operational-bulletins-manuals/refugee-protection/canada/processing-provincial-definitions-minor.html>

The third aspect of the argument for the introduction of screening during the recruitment phase is the advantage that resiliency screening will bring to the institution and its members. According to authors Lukey and Tepe in the book *Biobehavioural Resilience to Stress*: “science related to stress resilience offers practical applications in areas such as human performance optimization, health protection and readiness, operational risk management, and reduction in first term attrition.”²³ Also, that “research that supports a preventative strategy, tools or methods to improve personal resilience will reduce the human, organizational, and financial costs associated with military psychiatric casualties, mental health intervention and need for long term care.”²⁴

As described earlier, under SSE, there is a tremendous cost associated with providing mental health support and the projects and initiatives described within SSE. The screening for resilience in the recruiting process would have an initial cost in contracting psychologists and professionals to find the correct questions to determine an applicant’s level of resiliency. Also, there would be a cost in personnel hours in the development and conduct of resiliency screening as part of the recruitment process. It is assessed that when comparing the start-up costs to implementing the resiliency screening with the costs associated with the mental health support of members of the CAF. That these initial start-up costs would be considerably less than the overall costs associated with the mental health support of a member in the CAF who was not screened.

²³ Brian J. Lukey and Victoria Tepe. “*Biobehavioral Resilience to Stress*.”CRC Press, Taylor and Francis Group. 2008.
https://books.google.ca/books?hl=en&lr=&id=jslncD9_GNkC&oi=fnd&pg=PP1&dq=screening+for+resilience&ots=JrWDrkUhVJ&sig=bpDJaJTWfLyI7xtbNrR-cjphkfY#v=onepage&q=screening%20for%20resilience&f=false

²⁴ *Ibid*, 2.

It is with a better understanding of mental resiliency that the recruiting group can gain an appreciation of the applicant's potential to succeed down the road. Over time and with enough data, perhaps it will eventually become another indicator of whether or not an applicant will thrive in a particular trade. Or conceivably the trade selected might not be in the best interests of the institution or the applicant when CAF recruiters consider the requirement that some trades have for more mentally resilient members than other trades. Without question, this is not intended to create different categories of trades or have members distributed or re-distributed due to their resiliency. The old adage that everyone is a soldier first must always remain and for however long it lasts, that universality of service must be respected and upheld.

CONCLUSION

Upon consideration of the two options, the first being a questionnaire for resiliency screening at the same time as the aptitude test (or immediately after). The second option would be to include resilience focused questions within the personal interview. The choice that is believed to be the most effective would be to have the applicants complete the questionnaire during the aptitude test. The reasoning behind this is that a hard copy or computer generated copy of the resiliency questionnaire would exist. This data could then be held and analyzed after a period of time and this would be concrete data for future CAF researchers to leverage when studying resiliency and resiliency training in the CAF. The questionnaire would act as tombstone data or a start state indicating the beginning of the member's career. Then the researchers could take how they scored in resiliency in the beginning and compare that data to any future mid-career surveys. This data along with medical info could be used to see if the screening at

the start was effective and if there was a savings on the mental health side later in their career. That would be a tangible benefit for the CAF in the future. This makes it superior to the second option of adding questions in a personal interview where the risk of miscommunication or interviewer and interviewee fatigue may play a role in misunderstanding and misrepresenting the applicant's level of resilience. As written in SSE, "The first step in ensuring that our women and men in uniform are prepared and equipped to succeed on operations and that they are fully supported from recruitment through retirement and beyond, is to give them the resources they need to do their job."²⁵ It is with screening for resilience at the recruiting level, during the recruitment process that the CAF can continue to embrace the spirit of SSE and be seen to work to provide that necessary support.

²⁵ National Defence and the Canadian Armed Forces. *Strong, Secure and Engaged Canada's Defence Policy...*, 11.

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