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OPTIMIZING THE CANADIAN ARMED FORCES THROUGH THE LEVERAGING OF PSYCHOLOGICAL HARDINESS WITHIN MILITARY PERSONNEL COMMAND

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Service Paper

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AIM

1. The following service paper will identify the importance of psychological hardiness to Military Personnel Command (MILPERSCOM) in the optimization of recruiting, training, preparing and supporting Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) personnel. Typically, research shows psychologically hardy people are confident, committed to their organization, and thrive when challenged.¹ Further, hardy people have also been found to be less susceptible to the effects of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder², further driving the need to inculcate this valuable characteristic within the defense team. Although generally a character trait found within one's personality, hardiness can be measured to assist in personnel selection, and trained, to increase one's capacity. A focus on increasing psychological hardiness within the CAF will result in a more capable force ready to anticipate, adapt, and act in the face of future operating challenges described within Strong, Secure, Engaged (SSE).³

INTRODUCTION

2. As identified in Military Personnel Command Doctrine, "The personnel of the Canadian Forces are the most valuable component of national defence and are, in fact, a defence capability – the key capability in defence mission success."⁴ With unemployment at an all-time low, finding and selecting people who will strengthen the CAF and remain dedicated to it has never been more important. Further, it is now more critical than ever to invest in people to insure they remain a part of the team despite their requirement to work in physically and mentally challenging environments. People demonstrating the characteristic of psychological hardiness are described by Scandinavian researchers Thomassen, Hystad, Johnsen, Johnsen, Laberg, and Eid as excellent candidates to meet these challenges:

Individuals high in hardiness tend to have a belief in their own ability to control or influence the course of events, they perceive challenges and new events as potential opportunities for personal growth and learning, and they perceive the world as meaningful and interesting, and are actively engaged in what is going on around them. Hardiness can be regarded as an individual personality style – influencing positive coping strategies and maintaining good health under stress.⁵

¹ Alla Skomorovsky and Sonya Stevens, "Testing a Resilience Model Among Canadian Forces Recruits." *Military Medicine*, no. 178 (2013): 834.

² Paul Bartone, "Hardiness Protects Against War-Related Stress in Army Reserve Forces." *Consulting Psychology Journal: Practice and Research*, (Spring 1999): 79.

³ Department of National Defence, *Strong, Secure, Engaged, Canada's Defence Policy* (Ottawa : DND Canada, 2017), 15-16.

⁴ Department of National Defence, *CFJPI.0 Military Personnel Management Doctrine* (Ottawa : DND Canada, 2008), 5.

⁵ Adne Thomassen, Sigurd Hystad, Bjorn Johnsen, Grethe Johnsen, Jon Laberg and Jarle Eid, "The Combined Influence of Hardiness and Cohesion on Mental Health in a Military Peacekeeping Mission: A Prospective Study." *Scandinavian Journal of Psychology*, no. 56 (2015): 560.

These qualities can be measured, can be taught, and can be increased over time through training.⁶ Hardy people are highly adaptable, believing they can turn adversity into opportunity and are naturally hardened against the effects of PTSD.⁷

3. The following discussion will apply current research in psychological hardiness to four of the five pillars of CAF Military Personnel Management: *recruit, train and educate, prepare*, and *support* (the fifth pillar, *honour and recognize* was not included due to its lack of applicability). Finally, specific recommendations will be offered to immediately introduce a hardiness approach to personnel within the CAF.

DISCUSSION

4. *Recruit* is the first of the five pillars of Military Personnel Management (MPM), and includes the attraction, recruitment, and selection of personnel for careers within the CAF.⁸ Current defence policy has directed that personnel numbers within the force grow, further increasing the pressure to find highly adaptive Canadians who are both interested and capable of working within a “global security environment defined by complexity, unpredictability and instability.”⁹ Studies have indicated that psychologically hardy people are highly adaptive in their approach to problem solving, and would be highly successful in meeting the needs of the CAF, regardless of the trade in which they are employed.¹⁰

5. Another challenge for recruiting is to ensure personnel selected will be capable of completing the training of the trade to which they are enrolled. Training institutions have a limited capacity, creating added institutional pressures (compromise of training standards, increased requirement for instructors, increased costs) in order to increase candidate throughput. The identification of the right person *the first time* is extremely important to not waste valuable resources (time and training space). Studies of officer candidates attending the United States Military Academy (West Point)¹¹, and Canadian officers at Royal Military College of Canada¹² exhibited far higher rates of success when possessing hardiness traits. This was further demonstrated by studies of US and Norwegian Special Forces personnel, where it was identified that candidates possessing psychological hardiness were far more successful during selection than those who did not.¹³ It is clear, that if the CAF could identify and select hardy candidates

⁶ Salvatore Maddi, “The Story of Hardiness: Twenty Years of Theorizing, Research, and Practice.” *Consulting Psychology Journal: Practice and Research* (Summer 2002): 174.

⁷ Geoffrey Orme and James Kehoe, “Hardiness as a Predictor of Mental Health and Well-Being of Australian Army Reservists on and After Stability Operations.” *Military Medicine*, no. 179 (2014): 410.

⁸ Department of National Defence, *CFJP1.0...*, 4-1.

⁹ Department of National Defence, *Strong, Secure, Engaged...*, 8.

¹⁰ Salvatore Maddi, “Relevance of Hardiness Assessment and Training to the Military Context.” *Military Psychology*, no. 19-1 (2007): 66.

¹¹ Salvatore Maddi, “The Role of Hardiness and Grit in Predicting Performance and Retention of USMA Cadets.” *Military Psychology*, no. 24 (2012): 25.

¹² Alla Skomorovsky, and Kerry Sodom “Psychological Well-Being of Canadian Forces Officer Candidates: The Unique Roles of Hardiness and Personality.” *Military Medicine*, no. 176 (2011): 394.

¹³ Bjorn Johnsen, Paul Bartone, Asle Sandvik, Rune Gjeldnes, Arne Morken, Sigurd Hystad and Anett Storaes “Psychological Hardiness Predicts Success in a Norwegian Armed Forces Border Patrol Selection Course.” *International Journal of Selection and Assessment* (December 2013): 373.

within the recruiting process, levels of success would improve thereby increasing output without increasing throughput.

6. The second of the five pillars found within MPM, *train and educate*, is focussed on the timely delivery of individual training and education in support of military career requirements.¹⁴ Inclusion of hardiness within training courses and professional development programs could greatly benefit the CAF in preparing personnel for their future employment. Although hardiness is found within a person's character, researchers have proven that it is a learned capacity established through life experience (normally parents).¹⁵ Using this knowledge, researchers have developed training programs to teach hardiness which were used to great effect within civilian organizations to increase hardiness within their workforce. This concept was initially proven in 1975 within the Illinois Bell Telephone (IBT) Research Project, where researches successfully taught hardiness to managers; increasing their engagement, job satisfaction, and decreasing stress.¹⁶ Hardiness training has continued to be developed over time, and can now be delivered through train the trainer programs in order to increase hardiness within organizations.¹⁷ Hardiness training does not just benefit managers, but has also been incorporated into college programming, increasing educational success while decreasing student stress. Studies at the University of California have proven that at-risk students who received training in hardiness had a significant increase in grade point average and overall college success, while also increasing the ability to cope with stress¹⁸.

7. Incorporation of hardiness training into Development Phase One courses would contribute directly to increasing both non-commissioned member (NCM) and officer success during training (increasing output), while at the same time increasing the psychological tools necessary to work within future operational environments. Delivery of hardiness training is simple, requires no special equipment, and would likely have the added benefit of increasing hardiness levels of the staff delivering the training.

8. The third pillar of MPM, *prepare*, speaks specifically to medical and spiritual support to CAF members.¹⁹ Mental health is a complex challenge for the CAF, as it is often responsible for placing members in emotionally challenging circumstances to meet the needs of the Canadian government. Regardless of whether a member is being sent to Afghanistan, or posted to a less than ideal location, members are at constant risk of developing or exacerbating mental health issues. After investing money, time, and experience into its people, hardiness could play an important role in contributing to protecting the CAF's most valuable resource.

9. The characteristic of hardiness has been established to be a hallmark of mentally resilient people. Typically, psychologically hardy people work well in conflict, and develop less stress

¹⁴ Department of National Defence, CFJP1.0..., 4-2.

¹⁵ Maddi, "Relevance of Hardiness...", 66.

¹⁶ Salvatore Maddi, Stephen Kahn, and Karen Maddi "The Effectiveness of Hardiness Training." *Consulting Psychology Journal: Practice and Research* (Spring 1998): 84.

¹⁷ Maddi, "Relevance of Hardiness...", 68.

¹⁸ Salvatore Maddi, Richard Harvey, Deborah Khoshaba, Mostafa Fazel, and Nephthys Resurreccion "Hardiness Training Facilitates Performance in College" *The Journal of Positive Psychology* (November 2009): 574.

¹⁹ Department of National Defence, CFJP1.0..., 4-2.

while working within stressful situations. They recognize what they can change, and understand what they can't, which has resulted in people who are far more resistant to the effects of PTSD.²⁰ Studies of US Army Reserve veterans who deployed in 1991 to the Persian Gulf, and members of the US military deploying to Iraq and Afghanistan²¹ found that high psychological hardiness directly correlated with fewer cases of PTSD.²² A more recent study of Australian Army soldiers deploying on Operation Iraqi Freedom and Operation Enduring Freedom (Afghanistan) supported these results, and also found that hardy people experienced less familial stress due to separation and integrated more easily with their families.²³ Perhaps just as interesting, a study of Scandinavian Army soldiers who deployed to Kosovo found that hardy soldiers thrive under stressful conditions and that these experiences actually contribute to personal growth.²⁴ Study after study demonstrate a direct correlation between mental health and psychological hardiness²⁵, with direct ties to inoculating individuals from the insidious effects of PTSD. It is clear that both selecting hardy people for service in the CAF, and training to increase hardiness levels within the force could have a direct effect on readiness, and thus operational success.

10. Just as important as mental health is the physical health of CAF members. Physically fit soldiers, sailors, and airmen are ready to deploy, and less likely to become injured on the job. Numerous studies have found that psychologically hardy people are healthier, exhibiting lower blood pressure, immune status, fewer general illness symptoms, and less overall stress than those not exhibiting hardiness.²⁶ Psychologically hardy personnel would contribute directly to operational readiness, decreasing the stress experienced by units trying to do more with less people.

11. The final pillar to be discussed within MPM, *support*, refers to casualty support, family support, fitness, sports, insurance and compensation and benefits.²⁷ Providing support to members after they have been injured (both physically and mentally) during training or operations is both ethically right, and protects the investment the CAF has made in its people. Family support through Military Family Resource Centres has proved essential to supporting military families through the challenges and stress often associated with military life. Further, providing physical fitness supports through PSP provides soldiers with the tools they need to remain physically fit to do their jobs both in Canada and abroad. Mental, physical, and familial health of CAF members results in increased operational capacity, and psychological hardiness can contribute to all three.

²⁰ Paul Bartone, "Hardiness Protects Against War-Related Stress in Army Reserve Forces." *Consulting Psychology Journal: Practice and Research*, (Spring 1999): 79.

²¹ Warren Avery "The Dimensions of Hardiness and Resiliency for Combat PTSD." (doctoral thesis, Antioch University, 2014), 41.

²² Bartone, "Hardiness Protects Against War-Related Stress...", 78.

²³ Geoffrey Orme and James Kehoe, "Hardiness as a Predictor of Mental Health and Well-Being of Australian Army Reservists on and After Stability Operations." *Military Medicine*, no. 179 (2014): 410.

²⁴ Adne Thomassen, Sigurd Hystadt, Bjorn Johnsen, Grethe Johnsen, Jon Laberg and Jarle Eid "The Combined Influence of Hardiness and Cohesion on Mental Health in a Military Peacekeeping Mission: A Prospective Study." *Scandinavian Journal of Psychology*, no. 56 (2015): 565.

²⁵ Marcus Taylor, Ricardo Pietrobon, John Taverniers, Matthew Leon, Benedict Fern "Relationships of hardiness to physical and mental health status in military men: a test of mediated effects." *Journal of Behavioral Medicine* (November 2011): 6.

²⁶ Taylor, Pietrobon, Taverniers, Leon, Fern "Relationships of hardiness to physical and mental...", 6.

²⁷ Department of National Defence, CFJP1.0..., 4-2.

12. It has already been established that psychologically hardy people are more resistant to mental health issues; however experts are discussing the possibility of using hardiness training to enable treatment of PTSD after the traumatic event as well.²⁸ Analysis of where an individual is strong and weak on the hardiness scale through testing would act as an indicator for where specific treatment regimens could be used to help a suffering member. Also, the training itself has repeatedly demonstrated to reduce stress in those who have successfully completed it²⁹, which may also have a positive effect on members experiencing mental health issues.

13. Another interesting application of hardiness in the treatment of PTSD is the use of a hardiness survey during post-deployment interviews to assist in the identification of those who may be susceptible to the disorder. This could prove to be exceptionally important, as research in the United States has found that few returning veterans from Afghanistan and Iraq were identified as needing help during post-deployment screening.³⁰ In many individuals, stress is then compounded by time, with the longer members take in seeking help resulting in the more likely the disorder itself will develop.³¹ Incorporating hardiness surveys into the post-deployment PTSD screening process would assist mental health professionals in the identification of at-risk populations who might require additional levels of screening, assisting in the identification of those who do not self-identify.

14. Support to families has become an important focus of MPM, as strong and supportive families assist in military members remaining operationally focussed and deployable. That said stresses on military families have been increasing. In an article written in 2003, Family Life Education specialists Drummet, Coleman and Cable described the greatest stresses on the family as relocation, separation, and reunion.³² Although written 15 years ago, these stressors still ring true today. Increasing capacity to deal with the stresses of military life would benefit the family as well as the member. Hardiness training offered to spouses through Military Family Resource Centres would result in an increased capacity to deal with stress and thus increased family resiliency. This resiliency, working in concert with existing family support strategies, could significantly contribute to overall family well-being. Not only would this be an outstanding outcome for the families themselves, but would assist in maximizing personnel availability for training and deployments.

15. Finally, hardiness training has also been found to result in an increased level of physical well-being and fitness. After receiving training, people tend to be more physically fit and healthy. The incorporation of hardiness training into PSP healthy living and physical training regimens could contribute to increased health and fitness within the CAF, again contributing to increased operational capacity within the CAF.

²⁸ Avery "The Dimensions of Hardiness and Resiliency...", 7.

²⁹ Maddi, "The Story of Hardiness...", 177.

³⁰ Christopher Erbes, Joseph Westermeyer, Brian Engdahl, and Erica Johnsen "Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder and Service Utilization in a Sample of Service Members From Iraq and Afghanistan." *Military Medicine*, no. 172 (2007): 359.

³¹ Avery "The Dimensions of Hardiness...", 8.

³² Amy Drummet, Marilyn Coleman, and Susan Cable "Military Families Under Stress: Implications for Family Life Education." *Family Relations* (July 2003): 279.

CONCLUSION

16. MILPERSCOM is operating within a challenging space. Recruiting from a population experiencing extremely low unemployment is challenging enough, but the difficulty of reaching personnel requirements delineated within current defense policy is increased through limited resources and throughput. Once trainees have reached OFP, it is essential that members are capable, and robust enough to meet the competing needs of an often demanding workplace. The incorporation of psychological hardiness into the pursuit of MILPERSCOM goals will have an immediate positive effect on manning pressures within the CAF. Including the identification of hardiness within the recruiting process will result in trainees more likely to complete training. Including hardiness training within development phase training will further contribute to the development of member's interpersonal skills, as well as increase their capacity to solve problems and deal with stress. Finally, focusing on increased hardiness across the force will harden it against the effects of stress and PTSD. Although not the panacea for personnel issues within the CAF, it is clear that an increased focus on psychological hardiness could work within the existing structures to result in soldiers, sailors, and airmen better prepared for future operations in the service of Canada.

RECOMMENDATION

17. Based upon the previous discussion, this service paper makes the following recommendations:

- a. Canadian Forces Recruiting Group examines the incorporation of a hardiness survey into the selection process for all NCM and officers hires. Minimum baselines for hardiness should be established, and offers of employment prioritized based on level of hardiness displayed. Hardiness levels should be available within files forwarded to training institutions to inform priorities for hardiness training.
- b. Canadian Defence Academy review current individual training processes, and seek opportunities to incorporate hardiness training into individual training programs. The possibility to conduct protracted training from arrival at Canadian Forces Leadership and Recruit School to OFP should be analyzed to maximize individual growth.
- c. Professional Development Council within MILPERSCOM analyze the inclusion of hardiness training within development phases beyond development phase one (DP1) to ensure skills gained during DP1 are maintained. Further, it is also recommended that the inclusion of hardiness training into road to high readiness training also be analyzed.
- d. Canadian Forces Spectrum of Care Committee analyzes the development of measures of performance and effectiveness for hardiness inclusion specifically within DP1 training and the CAF population at large.
- e. Canadian Forces Spectrum of Care Committee analyzes the inclusion of hardiness surveys into post-deployment screening to assist in the identification and treatment of member stress and PTSD.

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