

Family support mitigates negative aspects of self-efficacy during deployments

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This study investigates the interactive effects of military self-efficacy and family support before deployment with threat exposure on work engagement during deployment. Based on the Job-Demands Resources Model, we hypothesized that in high threat situations low self-efficacy would lead to reduced work engagement and increased burn-out, whereas in low threat situations high self-efficacy would lead to reduced work engagement and increased burn-out. In addition, we hypothesized that the presence of family support would compensate for both of these effects. Subjects were 164 service members of the Royal Netherlands Armed Forces who were deployed in NATO mission ISAF in 2012-2013. Resources were assessed before deployment with a standardized instrument for leadership and mental health support, whereas threat exposure and outcomes were measured during deployment. To test our hypotheses, hierarchical regression analyses were conducted. The results showed the expected three way interactions on work engagement and burn-out during deployment. The presence of both self-efficacy and family support was best regardless of threat exposure. For those with high self-efficacy and low family support, low threat exposure resulted in lower work engagement and increased burn-out. For those with low self-efficacy and low family support, high threat exposure resulted in lower work engagement and increased burn-out. When family support was strong, these negative effects lessened, indicating a compensatory mechanism. These findings contribute to the field of military resilience clarifying the ways in which military self-efficacy and family support interact in buffering the effects of stressful deployment experiences.