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Predeployment coping diversity predicts military self-efficacy during deployment.

Introduction

Military self-efficacy, defined as service members' beliefs about the ability to perform military tasks under different circumstances, is an important predictor of resilience of service members during deployment. Pre-deployment training cannot fully simulate deployment circumstances (e.g. threat, insecurity, harsh living conditions) and therefore military self-efficacy can only partly be enhanced in this period. During deployment service members will further develop their military self-efficacy. However, individual differences between service members going on deployment can predict military self-efficacy during deployment. We hypothesize that pre-deployment optimism and a broad positive coping repertoire (i.e. coping diversity) positively affects self-efficacy during deployment. Both can induce a positive cycle in which mastery experiences are more likely and self-efficacy is enhanced.

Method & Results

A longitudinal study was conducted involving service members (N=122) before and during the Dutch police training mission in Kunduz, Afghanistan (measures were four months apart). Autoregression was used to control for the pre-deployment military self-efficacy. The results of the regression analysis showed that pre-deployment coping diversity positively predicted military self-efficacy during deployment. Contrary to our expectation, pre-deployment optimism did not predict military self-efficacy during deployment above coping diversity.

Conclusion

The findings indicate that when service members have a more broad positive coping repertoire pre-deployment they will more likely have mastery experiences when encountering stressful situations during deployment and their military self-efficacy is enhanced. Optimism, a positive outlook on life, did not contribute to this process besides coping diversity. The results can inform the military on how to improve service members resilience.