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Peacekeeping operations and adjustment of soldiers in Sudan

Peace in the hearts and minds of soldiers?

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Abstract

United Nations (UN) peacekeeping missions have become a reality for soldiers in Africa, specifically for members of the South African National Defence Forces (SANDF). In Sudan, SANDF members have to deal with severe challenges. On the one hand, Sudan is a vast, sun-baked desert land. Temperatures are extremely high, making the heat unbearable for foreigners. On the other hand, the nature of the conflict includes dealing with death, mutilated bodies, rape and aggrieved communities. These factors can be very traumatic and require tremendous adjustment skills from members in peacekeeping operations from foreign countries like South Africa.

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The article discusses the circumstances in Sudan which contribute to the adjustment challenges of members. The researchers interviewed five members (Capt to Lt. Col.) of the SANDF on their experiences in Sudan. The article focuses on the stress reactions of members during the adjustment process, and makes recommendations on the selection of members of peacekeeping operations, their training and preparation, their support by leaders during the operation, and by their families after the operation. These recommendations are relevant for international peacekeeping forces and specifically for the SANDF.

1. Introduction

United Nations (UN) peacekeeping missions have become a reality for soldiers in Africa. Many countries, from all over the world, are involved in peacekeeping operations. Although peacekeeping operations are frequently associated with a lower stressor intensity than combat situations, peacekeepers are still subjected to stressful situations. During deployment, soldiers may be exposed to life-threatening situations like shootings, being taken hostage or the possibility of being killed. In addition to this, peacekeepers are increasingly providing humanitarian aid and may very likely witness human distress, such as starving, sick or wounded people. Meanwhile, the principle of non-use of force except for self-defence is central to the concept of UN peacekeeping; therefore it is of utmost importance that personnel involved in peacekeeping operations must be able to restrain their reactions and control their impulses, even while being exposed to threatening situations. Thus, peacekeeping operations may make great demands upon peacekeepers and may saddle them with new stressors. Exposure to threatening situations can also result in psychological and physical adjustment problems.

Therefore the aim of this paper is to discuss the stressors experienced by soldiers during peacekeeping operations in Sudan, and their adjustment process. In order to achieve this, it is necessary to know what peacekeeping operations are and entail, what the appropriate profile of a peacekeeper would be and how we could go about training these peacekeepers. The paper focuses on an evaluation of the stressors in the operational environment in Sudan, on the relevant adjustment processes, and on necessary life skills for coping in Sudan.

2. Peacekeeping operations in Sudan

According to Van Dyk (2009:115) peacekeeping is described as the deployment of military and sometimes civilian personnel under international command and control, usually after a cease-fire has been achieved and with the consent of the parties. The aim of peacekeeping operations is to restore and maintain peace between conflicting parties without the use of force other than in the case of self-defence (Neethling 2000:1–5). Peacekeeping is also necessary to reduce the effect of threat and violence that exist between conflicting parties or states.

3. Characteristics of Sudan that may affect adjustment

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It is very important to know the characteristics of the country where the peacekeeping mission is being conducted in order to understand the conditions under which the peacekeepers have to perform. Apart from the stressors that are already existent in any operational environment, there may be added stressors that are prevalent in the country concerned. These added stressors contribute even further to the stress levels of the soldiers and impact on their well being.

With regard to Sudan, the following information was taken from Peterson (1999:1–5). Sudan is a vast, sun-baked dessert land with frequent dust storms. Temperatures are extremely high, making the heat unbearable especially for those who are not used to it. The heat makes one thirsty; but the water in Sudan is subjected to contamination through its distribution system. This means that the peacekeeping soldiers should take extra measures when it comes to drinking water, because it can affect their health and hygiene. The soldiers' hygiene and health are not only affected by the water, but also by the state of hygiene in the country. Due to the extreme heat that occurs nine out of the twelve months of the year, uncollected garbage dumped on vacant land quickly becomes fermented. Some of the sewage pumps are very old and not working at all. Lack of toilet facilities, inadequate refrigeration, and poor hygiene facilities make it necessary to use extreme care in preparing food and selecting where to socialise.

The latter can hamper the soldiers' leisure time, because everyone wants to enjoy a good meal now and again. Alcohol consumption is also prohibited by the Government of Sudan due to religious beliefs. This means that soldiers are restricted, and this can lead to frustration. Further frustration is caused by the language barrier between them and the local Arabic-speaking population of whom not many understand English. The communication and interaction with the local population is therefore limited. Most of the local population is Islamic and have their own belief system especially when it comes to gender issues. In the SANDF there are females who are in leadership positions, such as platoon commanders, and this can result in conflict when they are deployed in Sudan, due to the fact that in Sudan the male is still seen as being superior. There is also a lack of infrastructure in Sudan, making the operation difficult and posing safety threats on the peacekeeping soldier.

The research shows there are many added stressors, making things even worse for the peacekeeper who is used to different circumstances. He/she is totally unfamiliar with the surroundings and needs to find the best way to adjust to the situation.

4. Field research in Sudan

The researchers used five members of the SANDF, ranging from Captain to Lieutenant-Colonel, to evaluate their adjustment process and stressors experienced in Sudan during peacekeeping operations. The researchers used open-ended questions with a structured interview to develop an indication of the five members' experiences. The researchers wanted to enrich existing theoretical discussions with the results

of field research in order to develop a more realistic perception of the adjustment process of members in Sudan. Table 1 shows the typical questions used in the structured interviews with the five members deployed in Sudan, and representative examples of their responses.

Table 1: Questions and summary of sample responses

1. How did you feel when you found out you are going on deployment?

- *Excited, the deployment will influence my life/career positively.*
- *Excited, I did the military observer's course and want to deploy to use this knowledge.*
- *I volunteered for the deployment.*

2. How did this news impact your wife or family?

- *Negative, my family complains and this was stressful for me.*
- *Positive, good money, good experience.*
- *Uncertain.*
- *My family needs to adjust without me.*

3. What changes in your life took place prior to the deployment?

- *Needed to take out a lot of debit orders.*
- *My wife took over my responsibilities.*
- *I had to develop my own computer and tech skills.*

4. What planning took place prior to the deployment from the SANDF side to prepare you?

- *We did SANDF and African Union modified tests.*
- *Administration of last will.*
- *I did the military observer course.*

5. What expectations did you have before leaving on deployment?

- *Harsh living conditions, no support from SANDF, work in isolation as military observer.*
- *I anticipated a sense of urgency [on the part of the SANDF] to deploy members as soon as possible.*

6. Were your expectations met after you arrived at your deployment area?

- *I was part of a professional, well-trained and disciplined force.*
- *The military observers were left on their own in isolation.*
- *No, there was a ten days transit delay for Sudan in Addis Ababa, because the AU structures were insufficiently staffed to address the admin burden.*
- *At the force headquarters things happened very slowly, with insufficient ablution facilities, poor communication with a three week delay in deployment.*

7. Mention or explain the typical stressors or challenges you experienced in the operational environment.



- Physical stressors: *extreme weather conditions, insufficient resources, overcrowded bases*
- Cognitive stressors: *ambiguity of mandate, not getting involved with population*
- Emotional stressors: *feeling powerless, dealing with death, mutilated bodies, rape, grieving communities, poverty*
- Social stressors: *lack of support system of families, boredom, smoked a lot, foreign foods*

8. How did being away from your family affect you and your work?

- *After a while you don't concentrate on the mission, you just think of your family in South Africa.*
- *Even in a group you feel lonely.*
- *I packed the loneliness in a 'box' to survive.*

9. What did you do to keep you busy during your deployment period?

- *Did patrols at high risk routes.*
- *Reading, played games on laptop, socialising with group.*
- *Exercise.*

10. What support did you receive from the SANDF side while being on deployment?

- *Visit from Chief SANDF.*
- *Satellite phones were used by members.*
- *Regular email updates from Joint Ops.*

11. What support did you receive from your family side while being on deployment?

- *Telephonic contact.*
- *Parcels.*

12. After the completion of your deployment period, did you receive any debriefing session? If so, what did it entail?

- *Some were not debriefed.*
- *Others do SWOT analysis of operation.*

13. Explain the different psychological adjustment phases you went through during deployment.

- *Endure the different cultures, attitudes, habits, lifestyle of Sudanese.*
- *Lack of admin and support.*

14. What adjustment processes did you have to go through after deployment?

- *Routine at home, adjusting to family, sort out roles at home.*

15. Mention the themes that are necessary to prepare people for such deployments.

- *Explain the Sudan-related challenges that need to be managed.*
- *Mandate with 'teeth' is difficult to implement.*
- *Mentally well prepared.*
- *Good admin support.*
- *How to deal with disappointment.*
- *Independent functioning, cultural openness, tolerance, patience.*

5. Stressors and adjustment in Sudan

Soldiers' bodies and minds are conditioned to deal with and handle stress. Sometimes, though, the level of stress soldiers face overwhelms their defences. When this happens, they start to feel vulnerable and can experience adjustment problems. Whether these stressors are mild or serious and whether they last for a short time (dust storms) or a long time (dessert) depends on the nature of the stress and the strength of our defences at the time the stress occurs. Keep in mind, though, that the strength of everyone's defence mechanisms varies over time – based on what else is going on in their lives and their overall health (Bruwer 2003:25). Table 1 illustrates that the weather, trauma of dead bodies and the frustrations to cope with, were challenging for members involved.

5.1 The demands of operational life

Psychologically demanding experiences can involve a range of events which individuals may interpret differently. What is stressful to one person may not be stressful to another. The impact of various stressors may also not be the same. Some stressors may affect an individual's ability to concentrate; another stressor may affect an individual's mood. According to NATO Task Group (2007:10), however, there are certain basic characteristics associated with high-stress events. These include events that are:

- Threatening: being shot at during a fire fight.
- Overwhelming: being confronted with the death of a unit member.
- Unexpected: being surprised by bad news from home while deployed.
- Uncertain: being on a mission with an unclear return date.
- Ambiguous: having to respond to an incident when rules of engagement seem unclear.

When an event has these characteristics it is likely to be considered demanding. Members may experience many different types of demands. According to Bartone (1998:115), demands in operational life may be categorised into two groups:

- Daily hassles: deployed life stressors include missing family and friends and living unfamiliar, culturally strange surroundings.
- Chronic stress

associated with deployed life can vary widely across operations, but include lack of privacy, sexual deprivation, maintaining hygiene and exposure to extreme weather conditions. Daily hassles may be tolerable, but the cumulative effect of exposure to hassles potentially takes a toll on deployed personnel.

- Operational stressors: the duties performed on operations can expose military personnel to stressful and traumatic events. This topic will be discussed later in this article. It is important to know what the demands are in the operational environment because these demands bring about stressful situations.

The results of the interviews (Table 1) state clearly that the terrain (sandy, and muddy when it rains), the heat and the witnessing of dead men, women, children, mutilated corpses and severed limbs are very stressful in Sudan.

6. Stress defined

Stress is a term that means many things to many people. Stress has been so conflated that it can mean almost anything (Joy 1996:56). According to Statt (1998:515), stress is described as physical and psychological strain that usually lasts for a period of time and which threatens the ability of a person to go on coping with a given situation. Bartone (1998:120) says that stress is frequently used to describe two very different kinds of phenomena: the first is the stimuli in the environment (both physical and psychological) that impinge upon the organism, and secondly, the physical and psychological responses of the organism itself to such forces.

6.1 Stress in the military context

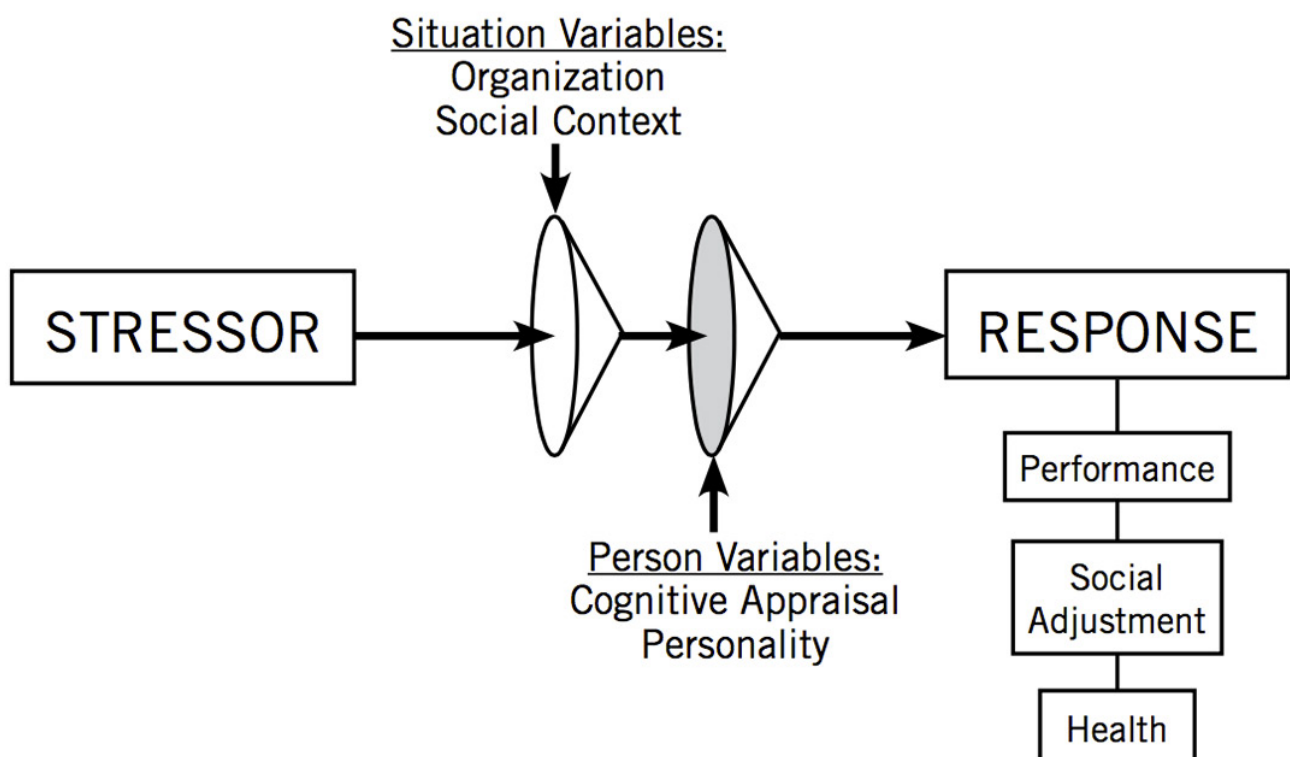
Therefore when looking at stress in the military context, Bartone (1998:114) says: 'In considering stress in the military context, it is best to preserve the term stress to refer to events or forces in the environment, outside the person, as opposed to subjective, internal responses. The application to environmental stimuli is emphasized by the stressor or stressors instead of just stress'. By looking at what Bartone is saying, one can make a deduction that he is describing stress within the military context as originating from forces in the environment. These forces impact upon the individual, which results in a response. The members reported 'boredom' in the interviews (Table 1), which causes a lot of smoking, drinking and loneliness where members withdrew from their groups.

Figure 1 clearly illustrates what Bartone's views are. It depicts the pathway of stressors in the environment (stimuli) to responses of the organism. Stressors are filtered through situation variables and person variables. The three principle classes of response are performance, social adjustment and health. They are also known as the outcome variables. The stressors represent forces in the environment that impinge on the person. These forces can be physical or psychological, and sometimes both at once. Experiencing fire power is very much a physical threat to the soldier, resulting in physical injuries, bodily wounds or even death.

At the same time, such physical events for most people also carry the psychological threat of one's own possible death or injury, or of friends and family. But the stress on outcomes is rarely direct and immediate; usually, it is processed or filtered through both organisational, social context variables, and personal variables. Examples of social context variables that might influence how stressors get processed in the military environment are unit cohesion and leadership climate. Person variables that could influence the stress-outcome relation include past experience, pre-existing psychopathology, and personality characteristics (Bruwer 2003:35–37). Personality characteristics include strong ego-power, good interpersonal skills, coping skills and healthy defence mechanisms (Lloyd, Van Dyk and De Kock 2009:57).

The ability to perform physical and mental tasks quickly and accurately in the military is essential. Likewise, the capacity to sustain effective performance over an extended period of time under adverse conditions is also important. Performance in the military context includes both individual and group tasks and functions. Stress in the military can also contribute to a range of social adjustment problems, for example, high consumption of alcohol and substance abuse. Stress can also have a profound influence on the soldier's physical and mental health in a peacekeeping operation. The health of the force is a concern to the organisation because health in turn influences performance and achievement of organisational goals (Bartone 1998:130).

Figure 1. The pathway of stressors in the environment (stimuli) to responses of the organism



Source: Bartone 1998:116

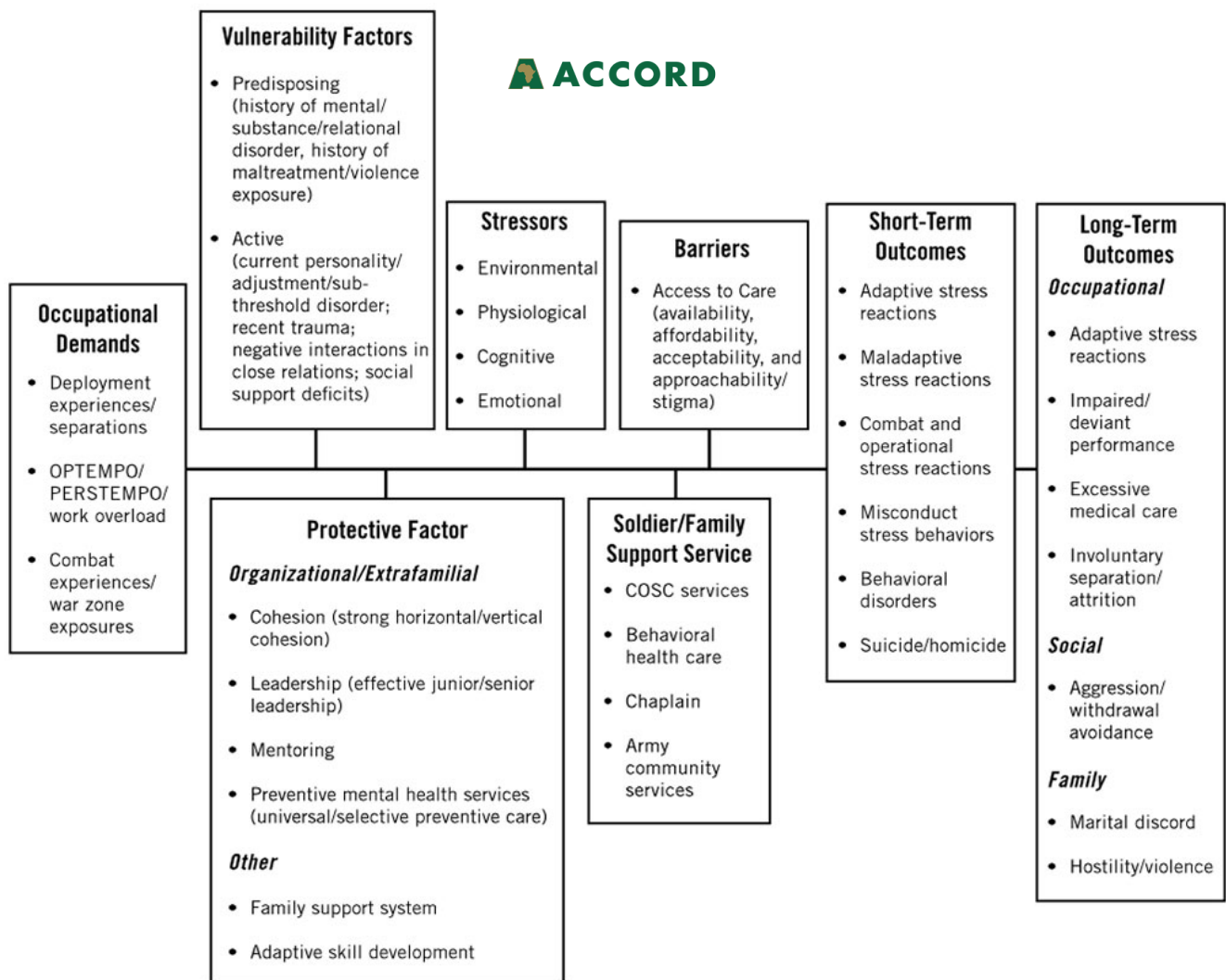
6.2 Effects of stress and adjustment of soldiers in Sudan

Focused stress is vital to survival and mission accomplishment. However, stress that is too intense, or prolonged, results in stress reactions that impair the ability of soldiers to function effectively (Van Dyk 2009:116). High levels of stress over a long period of time cause impairment of concentration and memory, wrong decision making, conflict in interpersonal relations and the break-up of good cohesion or esprit de corps (Dhladhla and Van Dyk 2009:29). Some stressors contribute to misconduct that requires disciplinary action and may take the soldier from duty for legal action. In a broader context stress may cause battle and non-battle injuries through inattention, clumsiness, and reckless behaviour. These resultant injuries can include equipment losses and friendly fire incidents. Stress may increase disease rates by disrupting hygiene and protective measures, and impairing the body's immune defences (Bruwer 2003:45). It is clear from the interviews (Table 1) that the members experience high levels of stress at the beginning of their operations in their adjustment process with the climate, culture, food and routine. Some started to smoke more, while others ran and exercised more.

6.3 Model for stress control interventions

Figure 2 below is a conceptual model of stress, its mitigating and aggravating factors and its potential outcomes for soldiers and families. This model can be helpful when designing stress control interventions to improve short-term and long-term outcomes.


Figure 2. Model of stress and its potential soldier and family outcome



Source: USA 2006 (Field Manual on Combat and Operational Stress Control):1–3

Figure 2 outlines a process that starts with the demands of a peacekeeping operation, includes the vulnerable and protective factors in the operation, the stressors that may contribute to high levels of stress, the frames and support available, and ends with possible short and long term outcomes of the operation.

Figure 3. Examples of operational stressors

PHYSICAL STRESSORS 	MENTAL STRESSORS
<p>ENVIRONMENTAL</p> <p>Heat, cold, wetness, dust Vibration, noise, blast Noxious odors (fumes, poisons, chemicals) Directed-energy weapons/devices Ionizing radiation Infectious agents Physical work Poor visibility (bright lights, darkness, haze) Difficult or arduous terrain High altitude</p> <p>PHYSIOLOGICAL</p> <p>Sleep deprivation Dehydration Malnutrition Poor hygiene Muscular and aerobic fatigue Overuse or underuse of muscles Impaired immune system Illness or injury Sexual frustration Substance use (smoking, caffeine, alcohol) Obesity Poor physical condition</p>	<p>COGNITIVE</p> <p>Information (too much or too little) Sensory overload or deprivation Ambiguity, uncertainty, unpredictability Time pressure or waiting Difficult decision (rules of engagement) Organizational dynamics and changes Hard choices versus no choice Recognition of impaired functioning Working beyond skill level Previous failures</p> <p>EMOTIONAL</p> <p>Being new in unit, isolated, lonely Fear and anxiety-producing threats (of death, injury, failure, or loss) Grief-producing losses (bereavement) Resentment, anger, and rage-producing frustration and guilt Inactivity producing boredom Conflicting/divided motives and loyalties Spiritual confrontation or temptation causing loss of faith Interpersonal conflict (unit, buddy) Home-front worries, homesickness Loss of privacy Victimization/harassment Exposure to combat/dead bodies Having to kill</p>

Source: USA 2006 (Field Manual on Combat and Operational Stress Control):1–4

Figure 3 provides a list of different types of stressors and different levels that may help commanders to be sensitive to the stress reactions of their members coping with such stressors. The results of the interviews (Table 1) give evidence of physical stressors (weather, overcrowded basis), cognitive stressors (ambiguity of mandate), emotional stressors (powerlessness, dealing with rape, poverty, death), and social stressors (cultural, lack of support from home) encountered during the peacekeeping operation in Sudan.

7. Selection and training of peacekeepers to prevent adjustment problems



According to Langholtz and Leetjies (2001:15–20), United Nations (UN) peacekeeping was established to contain and limit violence by applying the techniques of conflict resolution, and the tools of persuasion and trust to limit fighting. This statement confirms that deployed soldiers need to be equipped for the mission in order for it to be a success. In this regard some soldiers will have a more competent profile to adjust to peacekeeping operations than others.

7.1 Profile of a peacekeeping soldier

A special kind of soldier is needed in the peacekeeping environment – one that is capable of meeting challenges that arise and of doing the job most effectively. Such a soldier needs to possess certain qualities and characteristics in order to contribute to the success of the mission. According to Hundt (1996:37–38) the following requirements are important to have:

- **Adaptation:** The peacekeeping soldier is expected to adapt and respond well to change. Adjustment to a different and challenging geographical area as well as to emotional and conflict situations is also very important. The results show the members' struggles with the climate and terrain in Sudan.
- **Professionalism:** □ The peacekeeping soldier should display professional behaviour like discipline, punctuality, etc, at all times when they are executing peacekeeping tasks. According to Langholtz (1998:45–50), however, this professional appearance can have a clear psychological impact on the individual like for example, focusing too much energy in one direction while overlooking other issues, especially when they place too much emphasis on being perfect.
- **Stability:** Stability refers to emotional stability (not allowing emotions to control a person) as well as relationship stability (not allowing relationship-related issues to distract a person). This will enable the peacekeeping soldier to endure lengthy periods away from his home and family. It will also enable the soldier to cope with long hours of working, stressful situations, setbacks and feelings of isolation, anger and fear. Some of the members in Sudan experienced high levels of loneliness, lack of support and emotional challenges.
- **Self-discipline:** Professionalism and self-discipline go hand in hand. Self-discipline is unconcealed behaviour based on an acceptable code of conduct. For example, going out, drinking and having sexual encounters with the locals is unacceptable. This should be a prominent characteristic especially when it comes to interacting with the local population.

A peacekeeper should be able to understand the ethnic, language, religious and cultural systems of the local population (Bruwer 2003:39). This will enable them to understand the local population and act as a mediator in order to meet their needs. Once a peacekeeping soldier is selected that has the appropriate profile as stated above, then this soldier can and should be trained to execute his/her tasks with diligence. The results in Table 1 show that forging links to the population with their culture, food, language and habits was quite a challenge!

8. Training and preparation in necessary skills required for a peacekeeping soldier

Today, training of military and civilian personnel for peacekeeping is widely recognised as a necessary factor in the effectiveness of peacekeeping missions on the ground. Training is also essential for the improvement or the development of the characteristics or competencies that a peacekeeping soldier should possess. Unlike the civilian employees, who are recruited individually for a specific professional speciality, military personnel almost always come to peacekeeping missions as part of a national contingent. These are soldiers who have already been trained in the basic soldiering skills of survival on the battlefield, organisation, and communication (Hundt 1996:37–38). But because of the new complexity of peacekeeping missions and the challenges encountered by peacekeepers on the ground, there have been a number of additional requirements to training needs.

These include, but are not limited to, gender issues, children's rights and child protection, sexual exploitation and abuse, human trafficking, civil-military cooperation, and cultural awareness and sensitivity (United Nations Association in Canada 2007). Cultural awareness training, as well as human rights and gender training, contributes significantly to the peacekeeper's adjustment to the local environment. Indeed, there have been many arguments that there needs to be greater understanding of the contextual framework of peacekeeping. Language barriers among peacekeepers themselves, differing rules of engagement, and different backgrounds have also made it much more difficult to bring different contingents together in the field, which emphasises the need for a level of commonality in training across contingents (Langholtz 1998:95).

Pre-deployment training is seen as an essential part of preparing the peacekeeping soldier for deployment. The purpose of this training is to prepare personnel to perform peacekeeping functions. Another purpose is to assist the individual to cope with and adjust to the new environment. During pre-deployment training peacekeeping soldiers need to learn about the geographical environment – its circumstances, dangers and threatening factors – so that the unknown can become more known to them. It will be helpful to empower them with stress management skills and conflict management skills to facilitate higher levels of adjustment for them in Sudan.

In some cases, military personnel view family concerns in terms of the conflict between meeting their family's needs and meeting work demands (Bartone, Adler and Viatkus 1998:590). Interestingly, results also showed that thinking about family was considered by the overwhelming majority of deployed soldiers to be a positive way of coping with the other stressors of the mission. However, difficulties in establishing communication with family members at home can be significant sources of frustration (McCreary et al. 2003:35–37).

Stress due to family separation is greater for soldiers who are married, as well as for personnel who have been deployed multiple times. Deployed single parents may have special issues regarding child care. They are forced to make alternative child care arrangements for an extended period of time. These arrangements may mean relocating children for the duration of the deployment, causing further upheaval in the lives of these families (Thomas and Gignac 2001:237). This also causes instability for the children and can have an effect on their personality and learning. Family issues become an overriding consideration well before soldiers leave on deployment. Prior to deploying, soldiers and their families report anticipatory anxiety and feelings of bereavement. Family conflict also may increase at this point as families deal with financial, spousal, and parental role changes (Blount, Curry and Lubin 1992:77). Therefore it is important that pre-deployment should be a crucial time when coping strategies are put into place and tested out by soon-to-be deployed members and their families. In this regard Van Dyk and Kalamdien (2009:285) developed a psychological support programme for peacekeeping soldiers and their families with actions on communication and support for families with special needs to keep the force combat-ready. Table 1 shows that members experience most of these factors as relevant challenges (money, family, ambiguity etc.) to deal with, during their operation in Sudan.

9. Leadership and adjustment in peacekeeping

Military leaders handle a range of problems affecting unit readiness. Military leaders at all levels have a key role in sustaining the mental readiness of service members under their command. They also play an important part in maintaining morale on the home front for military families (United States of America 2006). Whilst most military personnel do well on deployment, it is the leader's responsibility to manage psychological support and better adjustment when individuals are affected by operational stressors. The unit leader may facilitate solutions when faced with crises or issues such as conflict within the deployed unit. The way in which leaders address these challenges has a profound impact on unit readiness and performance (NATO Task Group 2007:37–39).

9.1 Leader influence on mental hardiness

Very hardy people typically interpret life experience as interesting and worthwhile overall, something they can exert control over, and challenging, that is, presenting opportunities to learn to grow (Bartone, Adler and Viatkus 1998:1–9).

In organised work groups such as military units, this meaning-making process is something that can very likely be influenced by leaders' actions and policies. Leaders are frequently put in a position to exercise substantial control and influence subordinates. By the policies and priorities they establish, the directives they provide, the advice and counsel they offer, the stories they tell, the amount of accurate and timely information they disseminate, and perhaps most importantly the examples they set, leaders can alter the manner in which their subordinates adjust in peacekeeping operations in Sudan.

Leaders who are very hardy and understand the value of the kinds of frames they use for making sense of experience can encourage those around them to process stressful experiences in ways characteristic of hardy persons. Leaders of this kind are likely to have a greater impact on their groups under high-stress conditions, when by their example, as well as with the explanations they provide, they encourage others to interpret stressful events as interesting challenges that can be met and offer opportunities in adjusting to the unknown. This process itself could be expected to also generate an increased sense of shared values, mutual respect, and cohesion (NATO Task Group 2007:49).

9.2 Adjustment and coping to bring peace in soldiers in Sudan

It is very important to keep track of everything that has been said thus far. The researchers spoke about different stressors, threats, demands and challenges that can be experienced by a peacekeeping soldier during peacekeeping missions. It is very important that the soldier possesses the characteristics that Hundt (1996:37) mentioned. If the soldier does not have the necessary characteristics or competencies it is unlikely that he or she will survive – and it may even lead to an adjustment disorder.

According to Gal and Mangelsdorff (1991:38–45), adjustment is the dynamic process by which a person, by means of mature, effective and healthy responses, strives to satisfy internal needs and at the same time to successfully cope with demands posed by the environment in order to achieve a harmonious relationship between the self and the environment.

As soon as the harmonious relationship between the self and the environment does not exist, adjustment disorder sets in. Adjustment disorder occurs when an individual is exposed to stress, causing a reaction that results in significant distress or impairment.

This reaction can involve depression, anxiety, disturbance of conduct, or any combination of these. In general, adjustment disorder does not last for extended periods of time (Britt and Adler 2003:65–68). But while present, it can destroy the ability of soldiers to cope in peacekeeping operations and make them vulnerable to high risk behaviour – leading to vehicle and shooting accidents, for example.

Coping, on the other hand, is defined as the cognitive and behavioural effort to manage specific external and/or internal demands that are appraised as taxing or exceeding the resources of a person (Dirkzwag Bramsen and Van der Ploeg 2003:1549). In general, according to McCreary et al. (2003:38), coping has

three major functions:



- **Problem-focused coping:** Dealing with the problem that is causing the distress.
- **Emotion-focused coping:** Strategies to manage or reduce the emotional distress associated with a stressful or traumatising event.
- **Avoidance coping:** Behaviours aimed at denial of, or distraction from, the stressful or traumatising event or at suppressing the emotions associated with the event – for example, consuming alcohol, pretending that the event did not really happen or focusing on other, unrelated matters. These functions are very necessary for peacekeeping soldiers to adjust well in peacekeeping operations. The members reported many challenges concerning food and recreation facilities which needed solutions. The death of men, women and children in Sudan asked coping skills on an emotional level, and some members became so lonely that they started to avoid their fellow members.

9.3 Post deployment adjustment

Everyone who went through deployment and experienced stress has to find a way of coming around, redefining and establishing his/her position in society. Their adjustment depends on intact social support, active coping, and a positive homecoming reception (Bolton et al. 2002:244). These adjustment processes determine the re-integration of peacekeepers into society and back to their loved ones:

9.3.1 Homecoming reception

The type of homecoming reception the peacekeepers receive from friends, family and society will determine the extent of their adjustment. A negative homecoming is normally associated with psychological distress, whereas a positive homecoming reception is mostly associated with positive adjustment. Studies showed that the response of the family and community at home has a significant restorative role in the adjustment of soldiers (Bolton et al. 2002:246). The study also showed that soldiers with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) were more likely to report negative homecoming experiences from families, friends and society than those without PTSD.

Bolton et al. (2002:250) states that a hostile homecoming reception can discourage the soldier from expressing his/her thoughts and feelings associated with the trauma and may foster the maladaptive pattern of avoidance that may maintain the stress reaction. It also creates social isolation which makes them unable to talk, and thus fully process the potentially traumatic aspects of their experience. This has an impact on their psychological well-being. Members coming back from Sudan made it clear that during the integration phase with their families it was difficult to share, to synchronise with home routine and to talk about their experiences.

9.3.2 Self disclosure/active coping



Verbalising feelings and thoughts about the experience and stressful events helps the soldiers to adjust and deal with their feelings. The members from Sudan said that it was difficult to share experiences with their families. Experiences with death and mutilated bodies were traumatic. Members mentioned they needed expertise to manage trauma and care for their mental health (Table 1).

9.3.3 Social support

Assistance and comfort supplied by a network of caring, and interested people are good to those who live under stressful circumstances (Feldman 2001:49). Family and community support plays an important part in the soldier's adjustment during and after peacekeeping deployments. Social support tends to restore individuals, physically and psychologically. In this regard Ambaum and Horstman (2006:220) wrote that in the Royal Netherlands Army they have an Aftercare Section to care for military members after operations.

10. Recommendations

This article recommends that all countries need to give attention to proper selection of members (Hundt 1996:37–38), specific training for specific operations and countries (Van Dyk 2009:115), psychological support (Bartone 1998:113–114) and support with families (Van Dyk and Kalamdien 2009:285) for peacekeeping operations to facilitate healthy adjustment of members.

Recommendations to the SANDF for future operations in Sudan include the above mentioned, but also focus on the following:

- Sensitising members with a video on the weather conditions to make the unknown more known.
- Educating them on the culture, language, religion and rituals.
- Empowering them with sports equipment like volley ball, soccer, etc.
- Giving them specific training, as in a military observers course.
- Developing a checklist to prepare during the pre-deployment phase.
- Applying a support programme for the families.
- Equipping them to 'manage stress yourself'.
- Providing them with proper psychological debriefing and rehabilitation programmes to integrate with families.

11. Conclusion

The military is a high-risk, high stress occupation. Stress experienced during peacekeeping operations may result in detrimental consequences for both the individual and the organisation. Although during peacekeeping operations, peacekeepers are not usually engaged in active combat, the possibility still exists that peacekeeping soldiers might be exposed to distressing and potentially traumatising events.

Because of the various stressors the peacekeeper is exposed to during peacekeeping operations, it is important that the soldier is psychologically, physically and emotionally ready for the mission. It is the leaders'/commanders' duty to see that the peacekeeper is ready and gets support throughout the mission. If the peacekeeper is not prepared for what lies ahead, adjustment disorder will set in and this could affect mission success as well as the psychological well-being of the soldier.

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