



PASTORAL CARE AND OPERATIONAL STRESS AMONG NAVAL PERSONNEL IN EASTERN NAVAL COMMAND, CALABAR, CROSS RIVER STATE, NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

The study investigated pastoral care influence on operational stress control among Combat Troops of Eastern Naval Command, Calabar, Cross River State, Nigeria. Two null hypotheses were formulated to guide the study. A survey research design was used for the study. The population consisted of 2145 Combat Troops in the Eastern Naval Command, as at when the study was carried out. Purposive sampling technique was adopted in selecting a sample size of 322 Combat Troops. Data were generated through a well-structured and validated questionnaire designed to elicit information from the respondents. Cronbach alpha reliability analysis was used to test the reliability of the instrument which range from 0.733 to 0.809. Data collected was analyzed using independent t-test at 0.05 level of significance and 320 degrees of freedom. The result of the analysis showed that, preaching of the word and chaplain's weekly individual and group counselling influenced operational stress control in Eastern Naval Command. Based on the findings, it was recommended among others that, chaplains should seek possible ways to encourage combat troops to be more engage in spiritual exercises and providing holistic pastoral counselling to reduce operational stress.

Keywords: Pastoral care, Operational Stress, preaching of the word, individual counselling, group counselling, Combat Troops

Introduction

It is not unusual for anyone participating in combat or seeing its aftermaths to be filled with complicated and conflicting emotions - including fear, sadness and horror that is all legitimate reactions to the control combat experience. Also, Naval personnel who were not in direct combat, but have been through a life-threatening situation, seeing enemies or civilian casualties, had a friend who died, or been in charge of prisoners of war, can experience the feelings that come together as a result of combat and operational stress.

In view of this, stress reactions vary among individuals, seeing combat for the first time may be at higher risk, but service personnel with past combat experiences may also have stress reactions. Likewise, people with pre-existing psychological problems may be more at risk. Thus, anyone who sees something particularly gruesome or is part of a terrifying situation may also be at high risk. Even the most seasonal Navy Troops can have a severe reaction under certain conditions. Therefore, combat and operational stress reaction is a common response to the mental and emotional effort to active-duty personnel exercised when



facing tough and dangerous situation. Hence, the Veteran Affairs Carnal defines operational stress as any persistent psychological difficulty resulting from operational duties performed while serving. It is also used to describe a broad range of problems which include diagnosed medical conditions such as anxiety disorders, depression and post-traumatic stress disorders as well as other conditions that may be less severe, but still interfere with daily function (Deer Lodge Centre, 2017; Orokpo & Sunday, 2023).

Historically, military operations always entail stressors of various kinds of the troops involved. The extreme stresses of combat and all-out war have received the greatest attention. However, military operations in the post-cold war era brought additional challenges and stressors. The number of peacekeeping, peace-making, humanitarian and other kinds of operations may increase, while military organizations shrink in size, with a shift to all volunteer forces and units are deployed more frequently. Increased deployments entail other stressful changes in military units as well, such as an increased intensity of training exercises, planning sessions and equipment inspections, all of which increase the workload and pace of operations (Castro & Adler, 1999). Thus, more frequent deployments also involved more family separations, a recognized stressor for soldiers (Bell, Bartone, Bartone, Schumin & Gade, 1997).

Furthermore, there is no certain guaranteed way to protect service personnel from the cumulative stress that can cause a stress reaction; there are methods that can be adopted to help others in stressful circumstances. Among these is pastoral care that can be delivered by religious leaders in the military. As religious leaders of the military, chaplains are responsible for tending to the religious and moral well-being of service personnel and their families. The chaplain's responsibilities include everything from performing religious rites and conducting worship services to providing individual counselling services and advises commanders on religious, spiritual and moral matters. Counselling is a systematic and organized educational, vocational and personal social processes, given by a professionally trained counsellor or therapist to a learner or counsellee of any age, within or outside the school walls at appropriate levels. The essence is to assist individual understand self, situation and environment, discover one's interests, potentialities and opportunities in life and learn how best to effectively utilize his or her assets as well as minimize weaknesses, to live a maximum productive life (Nwachuku, 2007). Similarly, Denga (2011) also sees the counsellor as manager of a project called client. He stated that, the counsellor manages the clients' educational, vocational and personal social potentials in a way that the individual becomes useful to himself and the society at large. To effectively manage service personnel, the chaplain employs some professional skills of the counsellor such as listening, responding, empathizing, probing, questioning, interpreting, confronting, restatement, silence, catharsis, assurance, immediacy, encouraging, clarifying, self-disclosing, concretizing, homework and summarizing (Okobiah, 2006).

The field of psychiatry and psychology provide invaluable insight into combat operational stress injury and post-traumatic stress disorder; yet, of necessity, their work is grounded in a medical model ill equipped to address many of the recurring spiritual concerns increasingly identified with trauma. Chaplains, ground in enduring religious traditions and communities of faith, bring in their specialized knowledge in theology and philosophy, distinctive pastoral care training, sacraments and rituals of meaning to the care and healing of operational stress. Additionally, chaplains are visible and available caregivers who offer a sense of continuity to military personnel over the years, a feeling of being a part of something greater than oneself and an established pattern of responding to crisis (Mullen, 2009). To this point, and of necessity, many warriors have buried their feelings and memories in order to survive emotionally. Their sleep is disturbed constantly by grim nightmares, and their



attention and thinking distracted by the intrusion of the grotesque images of war. All these experiences tend to drive them towards isolation and silence. Based on this, the researchers are interested in investigating whether worship (mass) or intercessory prayer session and chaplain's weekly individual counselling influence operational stress control.

Statement of problem

With the current insecurity challenges in Nigeria ranging from Boko Haram terrorism in the Northeast part of the country to Niger Delta militancy in Nigeria's territorial waters, troops from the Nigerian Navy and other personnel of the armed forces are involved in counter operations (operation Tsare, Teku Crocodile, Operation Skolombo among others) to combat these security threats. Observation reveals that upon deployment to be part of a major or minor operation in any part of the country, troops of the Nigeria Navy are prone to develop emotional feelings, these feelings range from detachment from family, low morale, poor self-efficacy, trauma of previous operations, fear of abandonment at operation location front and other related psychological adjustment that go with such operations, previous efforts were made by government, chaplains and other concern groups, on operational stress control but prove abortive. It is against this backdrop that this study is carried out to ascertain the influence of pastoral care on operational stress among Nigerian Navy troops before and after engagement in counter operation activities.

Literature review

The theory of self-efficacy by Bandura (1977) was used as the bedrock to this study. Bandura (1977) postulated that performance and motivation are a part determined by how effective people believe they can be. Bandura (1977) outlined four sources of information that individuals employ to judge their efficacy: performance outcome (performance accomplishment), vicarious experience, verbal persuasion and physiological feedback (emotional arousal). These components help individuals determine their capability to accomplish specific task. Self-efficacy beliefs are important aspect of human motivation and behaviour which influences the actions that can affect one's life. Bandura emphasis that it "refers to beliefs in one's capabilities to organize and execute the courses of action required to manage prospective situations." The basic principle behind self-efficacy theory is that individuals are more likely to engage in activities for which they have high self-efficacy and less likely to engage in those they do not. Thus, self-efficacy functions as a self-fulfilling prophecy.

The implication of this theory to this study is that it gives insight to consider how troops in combat can improve their self-efficacy so as to mitigate operational stress, as well as the chaplain's use of verbal persuasion to boost morale during operations. This is in line with Bandura's believe that, when people are persuaded verbally, they can achieve or master a task.

The literature review was presented based on the variables under study: preaching the word, chaplain weekly individual/group counselling on operational stress.

Preaching the word and operational stress

According to Lentz (2004), the ways of thinking impact us and limit or open up possibilities in all areas of our lives. Beliefs that we hold about self, others and God, also have an impact on the options, whether we recognize these beliefs consciously or not. The assumption made about what is opened or closed affect one's possibilities. Most people have experienced times of sadness or depression. In such circumstances, one's thoughts and feelings are in most cases negative giving way to a more depressed person. The preaching of



the words of God to troops or individuals effect the change of negative thoughts and feelings for healing to take place.

Similarly, the presence of priest or pastor among military personnel is an ancient custom. The Bible has it recorded in several chapters that the Israelites brought their priest with them into battles. The Romans did as well, and had their pagan priest perform ritual, sacrifices and read auguries from animal entrails on the eve of battle. The Middle Ages produces a number of sword-bearing warrior-priests; but by the renaissance, chaplains played chiefly a non-combatant role in the military; which includes preaching the word of God. Today, in the Nigerian Navy, chaplains are considered non-combatants and do not carry weapons. This understanding is quite important in times of war, while functions of preaching remain similar to the civilian parish, preaching in the military is quite distinctive. The military chaplain is essence is a “pastor/priest in uniform”. Therefore, understanding the role of preaching spirituality (the words of God) as a potential coping mechanism for military personnel is important given the growing concern of operational stress among personnel returning from war. Military chaplains not only conduct religious services, but also provide spiritual support to military service personnel, operating as liaisons between soldiers and mental health professionals. In a study by Morgan, Horani, Lane and Tueller (2013) on help-seeking behaviours among active-duty military personnel: utilization of chaplains and other mental health service providers, active-duty soldiers (N = 889) reported help-seeking behaviours and mental health using logistic regressions, the issues for which soldiers reported seeking help, then outline the characteristics of those who are most likely to seek help from a chaplain. Of the soldiers who sought help from a chaplain. Of the soldiers who sought help from a chaplain within the previous year, 29.9% reported high levels of combat exposure. 50.8% screened positive for depression, 39.1% had probable post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and 26.6% screened positive for generalized anxiety disorder.

Chaplains maintain contact with members who are on active duty, by communicating the words of God through e-mails and sending church newsletters, cards, letters and devotional materials to enable service personnel known that they are not forgotten no matter the distance. Another mechanism may be that greater spirituality through preaching the words of God, protects against mental disorders and /or suicide by increasing the ability to cope with stressors, deepening one’s sense of purpose or meaning and/or reducing feelings of hopelessness which have been indicated as a predictor of suicide (Koenig, George & Titus, 2004). In contrast, it has been suggested that religious beliefs may exert a negative influence on mental health especially in the emotionally vulnerable by increasing fears or guilt, reinforcing neurotic tendencies.

Furthermore, in a study by Hourani, Williams, Forman-Hoffman, Lane, Weiner and Bray (2012) on influence of spirituality in terms of hearing the word of God on depression, post-traumatic stress disorder and suicidality in active-duty military personnel. The study was conducted to determine the extent to which spirituality is associated with selected mental health problems as a result of operational stress among active-duty military personnel and whether it moderates the relationship between combat exposure/deployment and (a) depression, (b) post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and (c) suicidality in active-duty military personnel. Data were drawn from the 2008 Department of Defense Survey of Health-Related Behaviours among active-duty military personnel. Over 24,000 randomly selected active-duty personnel worldwide completed an anonymous self-report questionnaire. High spirituality in terms of hearing the word of God being preached by chaplain had a significant protective effect only for depression symptom. Medium, as opposed to high or low levels of spirituality buffered each of the mental health outcomes to some degree. Medium and low spirituality levels predicted depression symptoms but only among those with moderate



combat exposure. Medium spirituality levels also predicated (PTSD) symptoms among those with moderate levels of combat exposure and predicted self-reported suicidal ideation or attempt among those never deployed. These results point to the complex relationship between spirituality and mental health, particularly among military personnel.

As observed, a chaplain in the Nigerian Navy, when preaching to service personnel, either on operation or on return from operations, in order to enhance the preaching moment, must first consider the location and tactical situation of the personnel. Combat troops have a way of being transparent, sharing deepest fears and concerns (fear of war and deployment is never far away). The chaplain is faced with being a priest/pastor to a community that constantly lives in an environment where life is extremely fragile. Hence, the chaplain's sermon is usually simple in its construction and delivery, designed to serve as encouragement to officers and men who are tired and weary. Most of the preaching of the word takes place in field worship setting while deployed in the harshest of situation. It is in this setting the chaplain as a priest or pastor is aware of the daily needs and problems facing troops. When an officer faces imminent threat of death, the proclamation of the (word) gospel is of crucial importance. It is for this reason chaplain, as pastor or priest must undergo the same rigorous training as other service member. Thus, preaching in the field can be one of the most powerful and visible means of reaching out to the spiritual needs vis-a-vis operational stressors.

Chaplain's weekly individual/group counselling and operational stress

Group counselling is the assistance rendered by the counsellor to a group of clients at a given time. A counselling group is usually comprised of six to eight persons or more who meet face to face with the one or two trained counsellor or the therapist and talk about what most concern them. Members listen to each other and openly express thoughts and feelings about what other members do or say. These interactions give members an opportunity to increase understanding of self and others. Try out new ways of being with other and learn more effective ways to interact (Anake, 2017). Hence, from group processes, individual counselling which involve an interaction between client and trained counsellor is organized and strengthened. The reason behind interaction is because client or individual feel free to discuss issues with counsellor after their first meeting in a group counselling session. This explains the same services the chaplain rendered to naval personnel

Similarly, in a study carried out by India's Defense Institute of Psychological Research (DIPR, 2006) on suicide and fratricide among troops deployed in counter-insurgency areas, the study suggested a number of remedial measures to deal with stress related issues in the military. Some of the suggestions was deployment of therapist (professional counsellors) in counter insurgency areas.

More so, Gulab and Mehta (2015) carried out a study to review stress management in India Air Force, the study was aimed at reviewing the stress management techniques adopted by Indian Air Force for airmen and senior non-commissioned officers (SNCO), that is, persons below officers rank (PBOR), based on the recommendation of 31st parliamentary standing committee on Indian Defence Forces in 2008. The comments were taken from both peace and field station. Research technique used was questionnaire. 60 serving air warriors form corporal (with minimum services of 5 years) to sergeant (with minimum services of 13 years) rank were used for the study. Every participant filled the organizational stress questionnaire (OSQ), which covered 10 dimensions of stress and a questionnaire which was prepared, based on the recommendation of the 31st standing committee considering all the parliamentary committee on defence forces in 2008, considering expected situation of stress



that can arise in the forces. The result highlighted that increased in counselling processes, and chaplains' initiatives have been used to control stress.

Purpose of the study

The main purpose of this study was to find out the influence of pastoral care on operational stress among Naval personnel in Eastern Naval Command, Calabar, Cross River State, Nigeria. Specifically, the study sought to find out:

1. The influence of preaching the word on operational stress control among Combat Troops in Eastern Naval Command
2. The influence of Chaplain's weekly individual and group on operational stress control among Combat Troops in Eastern Naval Command

Research questions

The following research questions were raised

1. How does preaching the word influence operational stress control among Combat Troops in Eastern Naval Command?
2. Does Chaplain's weekly individual/group counselling influence on operational stress control among Combat Troops in Eastern Naval Command

Statement of hypotheses

The following hypotheses forms the bedrock for the study.

1. Preaching the word does not significantly influence operational stress control among combat troops in Eastern Naval Command.
2. Chaplain's weekly individual and group counselling does not have significant influence on operational stress control among combat troops.

Methodology

The design adopted for this study was survey research design. The design was chosen because it involved the collection of data to accurately and objectively describe existing phenomena. Also, the study has to do with drawing analysis of data obtained through representative sample. The research area covers the Eastern Naval Command. The Eastern Naval Command has operational base in the following location in the South-South Zone of Nigeria: Calabar, Ikot Abasi, Port Harcourt, Bonny and Ibaka. Calabar is home to the NNS Victory operational base, comprising of Calabar Municipality and Calabar South Local Government Area of Cross River State, while Ikot Abasi is home to NNS Jubilee, and is located in the South West of Akwa Ibom State, it is bounded by Oruk Anam Local Government Area in the north, Mkpato-Enin and Eastern Obolo Local Government Areas in the east and the Atlantic Ocean in the South. Port Harcourt is home to NNS Pathfinder. Port Harcourt is the capital and the largest city in Rivers State, Nigeria. Likewise, Bonny is home to Forward Operational Base (FOB). Bonny is an island town and a local government area in Rivers State in South-South Nigeria, on the Bight of Bonny. Finally, Ibaka is home to the Forward Operational Base (FOB). This is a small cosmopolitan riverine community in Mbo Local Government Area of Akwa Ibom State, Nigerias.

The population of the study consists of all combat troops in Eastern Naval Command, which comprised NNS Victory, Calabar, NNS Jubilee, Ikot Abasi, NNS Pathfinder, Port Harcourt, Forward Operational Base (FOB) Bonny and Forward Operational Base (FOB) Ibaka. These combat troops are categorized into rating and officers (commissioned and non-commissioned personnel). As at the time of this study, the population of the study was about

2,145. However, there may be changes from time to time due to new employment, transfers and retirement of officers from different naval commands.

The sampling technique adopted was purposive sampling technique. The study was subjected to purposive sampling because the population comprises of combat troops, using this sampling technique subjected it to only service personnel who have combat experiences. Approximately 15% of the population was used for the study; with a sample of 322 combat troops, selected from the population which includes officers and rating. The choice of 15% was to have a representative sample from every operation base.

Instrumentation

The instrument used for this study was a 40-item questionnaire. The instrument was validated by two experts in Measurement and evaluation. The reliability test yielded coefficient of internal constituency of 0.89 from reliability estimates of the sub-scales of the instrument.

Presentation of results

The study identified two variables, the independent and dependent variables. Pastoral care is the independent variable, with sub-variables - Preaching the word and Chaplain's weekly individual and group counselling; while the dependent variable was operational stress control among combat troops. Each hypothesis was tested at .05 level of significance and 198 degree of freedom, using independent t-test.

Hypothesis one

Preaching the word does not significantly influence operational stress control among combat troops in Eastern Naval Command. The independent variable is preaching the word of God while the dependent variable is operational stress. The level of combat troops listening to the preaching of the word of God was group into high and low. Combat troops whose listening attention to the preaching of the word was less than or equal to 12 were seen as low listeners, whereas respondents whose score was 13 and above were seen as high listeners. Hence, the hypothesis was tested to verify the influence of preaching of the word of God on operational stress. The independent t-test was employed to test the hypothesis. The result of the analysis is presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Independent t-test analysis of the influence of preaching the word on operational stress control

Variable	Preaching the word	N	Mean	SD	Df	t-value
Operational stress	Low listening to preaching the word	259	29.14	3.06	320	8.90
	High listening to preaching the word	63	17.17	5.01		

P<.05 significance, critical t-vale 1.96

The result on Table 1 revealed that the mean score of the operational stress of combat troops, who were low listeners to preaching of the word was higher than those who were high listeners to preaching of the word ($29.14 > 17.17$), with a calculated t-value of 8.96 which is higher than the critical t-value of 1.96 at 0.05 significance level, with 320 degree of freedom. This implies that Combat Troops listening to the preaching of the word of God has a significant influence on operational stress. In order words, preaching the word has influence

on operational stress control among combat troops of Eastern Naval Command. Therefore, the null hypothesis is rejected and the alternate is upheld.

Hypothesis two

Chaplain's weekly individual and group counselling does not have significant influence on operational stress control among combat troops. The independent variable is chaplain's weekly individual and group counselling while the dependent variable is operational stress. The level of combat troops' participation in the chaplain's weekly individual and group counselling was high and low. Combat troops whose participation in chaplain's weekly Individual and group counselling scores was less than 12 were seen as low participants whereas respondents whose score was above 12 were seen as high participants. The independent t-test was employed to test the hypothesis at .05 significance. The result of the analysis is presented in table 2.

Table 2: Independent t-test analysis of chaplain's weekly individual and group counselling on operational stress control (N = 322)

Variable	Chaplain's individual and group counselling	N	X	SD	Df	t-value
Operational stress	Low participation in counselling	201	25.31	3.06	320	7.77
	High participation in counselling	121	15.34	5.01		

P<.05 significance, critical t-vale 1.96

The result on Table 2 shows that the mean score of operational stress of combat troops who were low participants in chaplain's weekly individual and group counselling was higher than those who had high participation ($25.31 > 15.34$), with a calculated t-value of 7.77 which is higher than the calculated t-value of 1.96 at 0.05 significance level with 320 degree of freedom. This implies that combat troops' participation in chaplain's weekly individual and group counselling has a significant influence on operational stress. Therefore, the null hypothesis was rejected while the alternate is upheld.

Discussion of findings

The discussion of finding was based on the hypotheses under study. The result of the first hypothesis revealed that preaching the word has a significant influence on controlling operational stress among combat troops. The finding affirms the findings of Hourani et al (2012) in their study on influence of spirituality in terms of hearing the word of God on depression, post-traumatic stress disorder and suicidality in active-duty military personnel. Data were drawn from 2008 department of Defense Survey of Health-Related Behaviours among active-duty military personnel. The result is in line with the result of this study which revealed that high spirituality in terms of hearing the word of God being preached by the chaplain had a significant protective effect on depression symptoms. Moderate, as opposed to high or low levels of spirituality buffered each of the mental health outcomes to some degree. Moderate and low spirituality levels predicted depression symptoms but only among those with moderate combat exposure. Likewise, medium spirituality levels also predicted PTSD symptoms among those with moderate levels of combat exposure and predicted self-reported suicidal ideation/attempt. Thus, combat troops have their way of being transparent in sharing their deepest fears and concerns with the chaplain in its simple and constructive delivery, designed to serve as encouragement to officers and men who are tired and weary, thereby reducing their fears of the unknown and stress levels.



On chaplain's weekly individual and group counselling on operational stress control, the data analysis however, revealed that chaplain's weekly individual and group counselling has a significant influence on controlling operational stress among combat troops. This result agrees with the finding of Galab and Mehta (2015) whose study on the review of stress management in Indian Air Force, the result highlighted that increased in counselling interview by superiors, chaplains and other initiatives are very effective in controlling stress. Specially trained professional counsellors among others lead the session which usually focus on normalization of symptoms, group support and provision of psycho-education and information about resources.

Summary/Conclusion

The study established the extent to which pastoral care influence operational stress control among combat troops of Eastern Naval Command. It further ascertained that preaching the word of God and chaplain's weekly individual and group counselling influences operational stress control.

The theory of self-efficacy by Bandura (1977) was used as the main focus of relevance. Two null hypotheses were formulated to guide the study. Relevant literature based on the hypotheses was reviewed. The research designed adopted was survey design. From the population of the study, a sample size of 322 combat troops were selected which includes officers of service personnel in each operation based.

The sampling technique adopted was purposive sampling technique. Questionnaire was used to collect data which were administered by the researcher. Collected data were analysed using Cronbach coefficient reliability method, while the null hypotheses were tested at .05 level of significance using the independent t-test analysis.

The findings revealed that preaching of the word of God and chaplain's weekly individual and group counselling had significant influence on operational stress control among combat troops. Thus, from the findings it was evidently shown that pastoral care (preaching of the word of God and chaplain's weekly individual and group counselling) have significant influence on the operational stress levels among combat troops of Nigerian Navy Eastern Command. It plays a critical role in effective control of operational stress among combat troops. Combat troops are encouraged to engage more in listening to preaching, prayers and chaplain's counselling periods, provided before, during and after operations. It also helps combat troops to attain maximum psychological and emotional adjustment.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, the following counselling recommendations were made:

1. The chaplains leasing with professional counsellors should seek strategized new methods and approaches of engaging combat troops in spiritual exercises and it holistic for combat troops.
2. The Nigerian Navy should intensify more programmes to reduce operational stress among troops to its minimum.
3. Government in collaboration with professional counsellors, through the Defense Headquarters should ensure training and retraining programme for chaplain to enhance their ability to render effective pastoral care.



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