

Withstanding the Challenges on Infantry Operational Courses: The Case of Military Women in the Division Training School in Cotabato City

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ABSTRACT

Withstanding military training by women is the phenomenon of this research; hence, the study explores and presents women's coping mechanisms in dealing with challenges. The study was conducted through the lens of psychological resilience theory. The study aimed to gain insights into the experiences of military women on how they withstood the challenges during their training under the Infantry Operational Courses. Specifically, this study answered the questions on how do they describe their challenges and how they cope with the challenges in the training using a Qualitative Case Study approach. The participants were the 5 chosen military women who withstood and passed the Infantry Operational Course in the Military Training School in Cotabato City whose names and identity were kept confidential. As a result, the challenges encountered by the participants are represented by the following themes: (1) discipline and self-control, (2) obedience, (3) personal feminine hygiene deficiency, (4) stringent physical, mental, & psychological training, (5) mental stress, (6) social stress, (7) missing one's family, (8) longing for personal wants and feminine lifestyle, (9) reproductive system problems and diseases. Five themes emerged from the analysis of the significant statements of the participants of the study; These themes on coping mechanisms are the following: (1) Praying and having faith in God; (2) Internal motivation; (3) Drive; (4) Submissiveness; and (5) Social Support.

INTRODUCTION

Living as a woman in the military means juggling multiple identities at odds with traditional gender roles. For military soldiers, it is to live with authority while feeling isolated, invisible, and misunderstood by the institution one serves and by the society whose Constitution one is sworn to protect. For this reason, many women who leave the military refuse to identify as veterans (Goldstein, 2018). According to Silva (2008), as cited in the study of Ferguson (2021), the foundation of military culture training is soldiering, which is considered a masculine activity. Moreover, in learning to operate in a male-dominated culture, female service members face a culture that encourages influence and power gained by dominance over one's peers rather than power from knowledge, skills, and abilities (Demers, 2013; Lorber & Garcia, 2010). Fortunately, in today's climate of modern warfare, as reported by Philippine Army (2019) women are proudly serving as platoon leaders, intelligence personnel, company commanders, pilots, civil-military operations practitioners, and even as members of special operations units. The women of the Philippine Army are victoriously breaking the barriers of gender stereotypes.

This study explored the insights of military women on their experiences of withstanding the challenges faced in the demands of the course, their coping strategies, and their physiological, psychological, and emotional well-being during their training in the Infantry Operational Courses. Moreover, this study culled out the narratives regarding the military women's viewpoints and descriptions of their experiences, challenges, and coping strategies in military training in the Philippine context. The study shall be a source of rich information about young female Filipino Military trainees considering that there is a dearth of research with this focus as most related studies are on male military soldiers who are in-service and combatants.

In addition, the study of a Filipino researcher, Dela Cruz-Fajarito (2017), shows that the risk factors for nonmilitary experiences revealed that soldiers were civilians, they had prior exposures to trauma that were not processed when they entered the military. It also revealed that considering the beginning of military training, soldiers trained to strip off everything civilian-related – attitude, encounters, conventions, and customs. The imprinted warrior ethos on soldiers helped them become resilient to the high exposures of traumatic stressors they encountered on the battlefield. Moreover, the present study's researchers culled out and gained insights into the experiences of military women on how they withstood the challenges during their training under the Infantry Operational Courses.

THEORETICAL REVIEW

"Withstanding military training by women" is the phenomenon of this research; hence, the study explores and presents women's coping mechanisms in dealing with challenges. The study was conducted through the lens of psychological resilience theory. Psychological resilience refers to the ability to use personal qualities to withstand pressure (Fletcher & Sarkar, 2016). "Survival, recovery, and thriving are concepts associated with resilience and

describe the stage at which a person may be during or after facing adversity. The concept of 'thriving' refers to a person's ability to go beyond his or her original level of functioning and to grow and function despite repeated exposure to stressful experiences" (O'Leary, 1998, cited in Ledesma, 2014). It is seen as a protective factor in the military context. In previous studies cited by Sefidan, et al. (2021), resilience is seen as a factor that protects the military personnel exposed to life-threatening situations in combat and prevents degradation of psychological and physical health.

The military women in this study have shown resilience in the face of challenges, stress, and difficulties. The training they underwent is draining not only physically but also mentally and psychologically; this fact strengthens their resolve to complete the training despite the adversity they have to go through. Their coping mechanisms show personal qualities that helped them grow and function despite repeated exposure to mental and social stress. They can withstand the challenges by praying and having faith in God, through internal motivation, drive, submissiveness, and social support from fellow trainees. These are also critical in the development of greater resilience to prepare them for the more challenging life and work of a military soldier.

As biological differences between men and women are often cited as a limiting factor for women in the military, biological differences cannot be ignored. However, the findings in the study of Mikkola (2008) ascertain the belief that gender is largely socially constructed because men and women can have what are considered to be socially constructed masculine and feminine characteristics. This is in line with the equal-rights-based feminist argument that gender characteristics are not inherently natural but are due to how gender is socialized (Miller 1998). Women are in the minority of the soldiers deployed, and many believe they must adapt to the masculine identity of the military culture they are in and of those who surround them. Integrating into the male-dominated military culture makes some women feel that, to be equal, they must be masculine, not feminine (Herbert, 1998). This feeling is often amplified for women in combat zones.

Past studies of female fighters and soldiers have shown that many of them who join the military conform to the masculine culture instead of transforming it to change conceptions of women, war, and the military (Carreiras, 2006). Moreover, the present study has already explored how military women withstand challenges in training that used to be male-dominated in the past.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

A holistic simple case study research design was employed in the study since it enables researchers to closely examine the data within a specific context. The case study research method is an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context; when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not evident; and when multiple sources of evidence are used. The study was conducted in Cotabato City, Bangsamoro

Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao, distinctly in the 6th Infantry Kampilan Division military boot camps in the locality where the participants of the study are from. The participants were from the 6th Infantry (Kampilan) Division, Philippine Army. The Division Training Unit, 6th Infantry (Kampilan) Division, Philippine Army was activated on November 1, 1988, under General Order NR 497, HPA, dated November 2, 1988. The unit was tasked with conducting in-service training as well as other specialized training tailored to the division's operational requirements. The location of the study was chosen based on the performance of the military women who graduated as the top performing trainees from their batch, and where the batch leader was also a notable female military trainee.

Participants

They are military women who withstood and passed the Infantry Operational Course. The participants disclosed their names to the researchers. However, the researchers used pseudonyms to conceal their identities. **Bea:** She is a Bachelor's Degree graduate of BA Psychology from Notre Dame of Marbel University who was a former office personnel at St. Alexius College. **Celeste:** She is a former government agency office woman who gave up her luxuries and feminine lifestyle to pursue her dream career as a military woman. **Pia:** She is the president of her batch. Participant 3 is a pursuer of her lifelong dream of a military officer. Her family expects her to follow in their footsteps as a service member of the country. She was deemed a good leader to her fellow cadet members. **Venus:** A military woman who followed the footsteps of her father and siblings as service members. During the course of training, she managed to be resilient as she suffered from reproductive issues such as uterine prolapse, severe abdominal pain, and other vaginal infections. **Catriona:** She is the top-performing cadet in her batch. She was placed first in academic performance, physical fitness tests, and other activities in the infantry military courses.

Instrument

The researchers used an in-depth interview guide to elicit the experiences and coping strategies of the female military trainee participants. The interview guide focuses on two overarching questions based on the problem statement. The researchers used probing questions to elicit additional information and clarify unclear statements.

Data Gathering Procedure

The researchers obtained a letter of permission from the Professor of Research Psychology I and the Personnel in Cotabato's Division Training School for the collection of the necessary data. Furthermore, the research instrument, preliminary preparations, fieldwork, and quality control are all part of the data collection procedures. To answer the statements of the problem, the researchers created and used an interview guide questionnaire. The research adviser, panel members, and the Ethics review board evaluated and approved the questionnaire.

Data Analysis

The study used modified thematic analysis in analyzing and processing the data collected from the in-depth interview. The goal of the modified thematic analysis is to understand patterns of meanings from data on the experiences and coping strategies of the participants. The analysis begins with the data that need to be textual and aims to organize meanings found in the data into patterns and, finally, themes. Modified thematic analysis is the best fit to analyze the data since the research study used a holistic single-case study approach as its research design. Modified thematic analysis is a data analysis method that helps researchers identify themes and meanings across data about a part of the question(s). By employing this data analysis method, the researcher could capture complex, messy, and contradictory relationships that prevail in the real world, such as in the military setting. This data analysis method enables researchers to identify commonly recognized patterns and relationships to answer the research questions of the study meaningfully.

Ethical Considerations

The purpose of the research was to explore the insights of the military women on their experiences of withstanding the challenges faced in the demands of the course, their coping strategies, and their physiological, psychological, and emotional well-being during their training in the Infantry Operational Course. The study is a source of rich information about young female Filipino military trainees considering that there is a dearth of research with this focus considering that most related studies are on male military soldiers who are in-service and combatants. Moreover, the research intervention was conducted through an in-depth interview wherein the procedure was an open-ended, discovery-oriented method to obtain detailed information about the topic presented by the researchers. The nature of the research intervention was a qualitative research method; the goal was to explore in-depth a participant's point of view, experiences, feelings, and perspectives on military women withstanding the challenges of infantry operational courses.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the results of the study *Withstanding the Challenges on Infantry Operational Courses: The Case of Military Women in the Division Training School in Cotabato City*. It answers the questions on how military women describe the challenges they experienced while in the training and how they coped with them; a conceptual model was designed based on the results.

The challenges encountered by the participants are represented by the following themes: (1) discipline and self-control, (2) obedience, (3) personal feminine hygiene deficiency, (4) stringent physical, mental, & psychological training, (5) mental stress, (6) social stress, (7) missing one's family, (8) longing for personal wants and feminine lifestyle, (9) reproductive system problems and diseases.

Discipline and Self-control

Discipline in the military context is a state of order and obedience within a command. Discipline entails willingly submitting one's will for the good of the group. Consequently, it is an extension and specialized application of the discipline that demands habitual but reasoned obedience. It preserves initiative in military women and functions invariably, even in the absence of their subordinates (Law Aspect, 2020). In this regard, military trainees spend their time at initial training immersed in the military lifestyle and culture, regardless of how they enter the service. During this phase, according to Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (2010), trainees learn about their service's history, military customs and courtesies, how to properly uniforms, military bearing, military values and ethics, and other information critical to their success in the service, such as how to listen to and follow orders and how to function within the military chain of command. Discipline, focus, and control are all taught during initial training. However, to be transformed into an official military soldier, one must learn to be disciplined. The participants experienced difficulties in their experiences of submitting to authority. This is as said by Bea and Pia:

"bakit ganito sobrang hirap iba talaga yung civilian ka kasi pagala-gala ka lang doon sa labas yung parang freedom ka talaga wala naga hawak sayo sa leeg,"

"sisigawan kami grabe ko ka- madali ako maiyak, parang nachallenge ako to be strong."

The participants encountered the challenges of how it is to be disciplined in their actions and words, as well as to maintain emotional and physical control at all times. Inasmuch, the transition from civilian to military life is not undemanding because it requires giving up one's civil lifestyle and personal time as it demands the totality of their time.

Obedience

This table presents an emergent theme: Total Obedience. As expressed by the participants, they had a hard time during the military training as they had no choice but to adhere to the directions of their commanding officers as to when they could and could not speak, to move, and finally relax. They also experienced bacterial infections in their reproductive organs due to the frequent and random submersion in the filthy water canal (lubluban) as they were instructed, and being deprived of baths which results in wearing the same filthy clothes over the week as ordered. The participants had no choice but to lose their freedom and submit their total obedience to authority.

As expressed by Venus:

"hindi ka sanay na hindi pwedeng mag salita kapag hindi ka in-authorized, hindi ka pwedeng kumain pag hindi ka in authorize hindi ka pwede gumalaw lalo na pag first day sa training school."

Personal Feminine Hygiene Deficiency

The participants had a hard time during the military trainee taking care of their hygiene as they had no choice but adhere to the orders of their

commanding officers, whether they had to take a bath with only one water-filled dipper, experience bacterial infections in their reproductive organ due to the frequent and random submersion in the filthy water canal (lubluban), and deprived of baths which resulted to having to wear the same filthy clothes over the week.

As expressed by Pia:

"ilublub kayo na hanggang umaga, na hindi kayo nakabihis ng damit niyo. Lalong lalo na sa babae, lalo na yun mga cases sakit sa babae, bacteria sa vagina."

Consistent with the study of Sweetman and Medland (2017) as mentioned by World Bank Org. (2022), the lack of means for hygienic management of menstruation can cause discomfort and psychological stress and adds to the shame and sometimes depression that women and girls experience. Further, the findings of the study conducted by a military veteran, Czerwinski et al. (2001), as cited in the study of Trego (2012), show that military women will better adapt in deployed in the field on circumstances with ongoing instruction about safe feminine hygiene practices.

Stringent Physical, Mental, & Psychological Training

The military culture is gradually entrenched in military trainees upon the start of their careers. It entails many stringent pieces of training for physical, mental, and psychological well-being. The participants encountered challenges in their mental and psychological health.

As expressed by Celeste:

"dito sa loob parang mawalan ka ng gana, isispin mo pagkatapos ng klase mo isipin mo exercise naman, masi masi nanaman, takbo takbo nanaman"

Furthermore, the participants also executed strenuous physical exercises and training while almost half-asleep due to exhaustion which is the same as the men. In addition, they were challenged by tiredness, hunger, and sleepiness while keeping up with the physical training. The military women stated:

"Naranasan naming malublob 10 counts lang sa nakabihis ka na from wet to dry na damit. As in nagkakaubusan na yung mga damit na minsan kailangan mong suotin yung mga marurumi"

"Yung pagod common na talaga kasi nga pag nandito ka, yung kalaban mo always is pagod, gutom and antok."

The participants uncovered their experiences during the training stating that they experienced harsh physical training as they described how they are being treated. Being poked on the head to inflict pain, and being told to hang on a pull-up bar as a punishment caused one to almost give up. Some would say that the topic of women's physical capacity is a non-issue that intersects with the topic of military sexual assault vulnerability (Weitz, 2016). The participants stated:

“mga tusok ulo”

“Mas lala gid didto as in hindi ka gid makahambal nga, nag take life gid ko nag tawag ko sa mama ko na “ma, gusto ko na gid mag uli hindi ko na kaya ano man ning Philippine army ginapasakitan man ko, daw patayon man ko diri” naka try man gud ko i lambitay, tali tali.”

On the other hand, the female class president was punished after she accepted the favor of the officer to write down the needs of her classmates. The participant felt distressed and humiliated because of the punishment that she was ordered to remove her clothes in front of her female classmates, and she had to do it alone. As Pia stated:

“May isang close ko na officer na pinasulat niya sa akin kung anong kailangan ko, naka sulat doon underwear mga bra tapos ganun nahuli siya. Bawal kasi kami tulungan kasi training nahuli ako pero hindi man yun sa akin lang sinabay ko na yung ibang babae ba sinabi ko kung anong kailangan niyo nalang dito, hindi na porket ako lang makatanggap ng benefits lahat nalang kayo tapos sinulat ko lahat sa pagdating ng laglagan nahuli na, na may punishment na, ako nalang nag accept sabi ko sabi ko tingin ako sa mga kaklase ko maawa man ako sa mga mukha nila, pero mas malalaki pa katawan nila kesa sa saakin sa katawan ko ah hindi niyo man lang ako sinamahan.”

“Pagkagabi talaga nun maam, pinahubad talaga ako pero babae yung nag ano sa akin kasi bawal yung lalaki talaga na mag ano sa kwarto namin mga babae, bakit gaun pinahubad niya ako tinanong niya ako kung may frat ba daw ako, kahit ganito akong tao maam hindi talaga ako naga pasok ng mga ganyan ganyan ma’am ba sabi ko sa kanya, so ilang palo ba gusto mo? Sabi ko maam yung isa tinatnong nya na kasama ko kasi may frat yun tapos sinabi niya 100 plus sabi ko maam, tapos yung hawak ni maam kalaki laki tapos sabi ko maam parang mabali man ako neto tapos sabi ko parang mas malaki pa naman yung hawak mong pamalo kesa sa katawan ko maam, sabi ko sakanya dalawa lang pumasok ka sa phil army dalawa lang gusto mo sabi maam kalaki laki kasi yang pamalo mo sinagot ko na siya kasi diko man talaga makaya, kasi diko talaga makaya yan kung ipalo mo sa akin tapos tinakot kumbaga binaliktad niya sa isip ko para ma low morale ako ba, para paalisin niya ako”

These experiences were necessary to withstand obstacles that are important to a successful mission in the future. Also, these experiences teach young recruits how to focus in a challenging situation though they lack sleep, are physically exhausted, or are unaccustomed to extreme stress. Learning to stay focused, in control, and disciplined in all situations are skills that service members will use throughout their military careers as they will be faced with uncertain and often dangerous situations after the training as they become official military combatants.

Mental Stress

Even when one can cope with the physical activities, the feeling of being undermined of one’s pride, and being challenged of one’s patience bring about the thoughts of giving up are still apparent to military women. This was expressed by Celeste:

“Yung pinaka-challenge talaga siguro is yung sarili. Kung paano mo iha-handle mentally.”

Stress is an inevitable part of military life. Although combat is often the first stressor that comes to mind when thinking of military stressors, service members may face a variety of other stressors, such as high work demands and family separations due to deployment (Bartone, 2006). The most challenging part according to the participants is how to handle oneself mentally.

The women trainees felt extremely stressed and almost wanted to give up. Even when one can cope with physical activities, the feeling of being undermined of one's pride and being challenged of one's patience bring about thoughts of giving up.

Social Stress

Peer influence is a two-step method that involves an influencer's behavior that prompts a target's conformity. The target's context, operationalized as variables reflecting impermanent individual diversity, produces conformity. Furthermore, personal traits that are different from the partner or group, the perceived advantages of impression management, unmet social demands, and social referents and ideas about their behavior are state-like situations linked to peer influence sensitivity. Even though there may be overt motivations for conformity, such as the desire to please or appease agents of influence, the belief is that many times, responses that strengthen or preserve similarity are the result of unconnected motivations. Change may not have been motivated by conformity, but the outcome is more resemblance. Some conformity reactions do not show thoughtful behavior.

“ peer pressure mo kasi yung mga kasama mo you have different personalities iba-iba yung ugali niya so you have to deal with it so yun” “ nahuli ako pero hindi man yun sa akin lang sinabay ko na yung ibang babae ba sinabi ko kung anong kailangan niyo nalang dito, hindi na porket ako lang makatanggap ng benefits lahat nalang kayo tapos sinulat ko lahat sa pagdating ng laglagan nahuli na, na may punishment na, ako nalang nag accept sabi ko sabi ko tingin ako sa mga kaklase ko maawa man ako sa mga mukha nila, pero mas malalaki pa katawan nila kesa sa saakin sa katawan ko ah hindi niyo man lang ako sinamahan”.

Missing One's Family

The military women trainees talked about their challenges while in training in the Infantry Operational Courses, and the theme that emerged in their challenges is “missing one's family”. The military women trainees stated that due to the strict policy of the division training school, they were prohibited to meet or communicate with the outside world, including their families. This is part of their training as well as mentioned by Celeste and Pia:

“Kasi siyempre pag nandito ka, mamimiss mo yung family mo, life mo sa labas kasi nga wala kang contact.”

“Yung malalaman mo yung problema sa family mo, nadibdibin mo pa tapos yung pagod.”

Military women take their strength and motivation from their families, and being unaware of what is going on in their life outside can be potentially stressful on their part. Among military families, the services of these military women include the potential for harm to the service member, honorable motivations to protect and serve the family and the nation, and somewhat unpredictable departures and returns (Halvorson, 2010). The longing they have for their family due to their military service makes them miss out on family events, and this longing can be associated with symptoms of anxiety and depression. For military trainees, who experience major life stressors or transitions from civilian life to military life, the family's instrumental and emotional support will likely be deeply missed as military trainees attempt to cope with the challenges they experience in the training (Mmari, et al., 2008).

Longing for Personal wants and a Feminine Lifestyle

Longing for Personal Wants and Feminine Lifestyle. The experience the military women had in their training in the Infantry Operation Courses was stressful due to their longing for personal wants and the feminine lifestyle that they used to have accessed when they were still civilians. A participant stated this:

*“Bawal yung cellphone, bawal mag contact ganyan.”
“marami ka talaga i give up ma’am kagaya ng gusto mo mag damit ganyan pero sa Philippine army hindi dapat ito talaga ang suotin mo ito, gusto mo mag suot ng mga heels pero bawal kasi sa Philippine army meron talagang uniform na gina suot. So yung experience mo din marami sacrifices.”*

Given the obstacles military women face in their military career, the women in the military were unable to conceal the fact that they longed for their wants and non-military feminine lifestyle. Military women hardworkingly pushed themselves to conform to the military starting in basic training. The various roles a soldier has from enlistment, basic training, and deployment, to reintegration following deployment can be fundamentally life-changing for military women. Women who have seen combat have some different emotions than women who serve as non-combatant soldiers. Regardless of their combat status, however, military women face various emotions during their military career and make some sacrifices setting aside the personal desires and lifestyle they had before entering the military. Inasmuch, military women hold on to memories long term, helping shape them post-military. Since soldiering is primarily dominated by men, women need to suppress their emotions to be successful, alter their perceptions of femininity, and reshape their sense of self to be successful in the military (Davis, 2012). Military women are not allowed to express their femininity in bold ways. Women face continuous identity struggle: if they are too 'feminine' they are considered incompetent and weak; if they are too 'masculine', they are labeled a 'dyke' for being strong and independent. Indeed, their training in military life, keeping up with the military protocol of dressing and behavior, strips them of their feminity.

Reproductive System Problems and Diseases

The participants had a hard time during the military trainee taking care of their hygiene as they had no choice but to adhere to the commands of their commanding officers, whether they had to take a bath with only one water-filled dipper, experience bacterial infections in their reproductive organ due to the frequent and random submersion in the filthy water canal (lubluban), and to be deprived of baths causing them to wear the same filthy clothes over the week as expressed by Venus:

"ilublub kayo na hanggang umaga, na hindi kayo nakabihis ng damit niyo. Lalong lalo na sa babae, lalo na yun mga cases sakit sa babae, bacteria sa vagina."

According to Sweetman and Medland (2017), as mentioned by World Bank Org. (2022), the lack of means for hygienic management of menstruation can cause discomfort and psychological stress and can add to the shame and, sometimes, depression that women and girls experience. Further, the findings of the study conducted by military veterans Czerwinski et al. (2001), as cited in the study of Trego (2012), show that military women will be better able to adapt in deployed (field) circumstances with ongoing instruction about safe feminine hygiene practices. The reproductive health problems of women in the military such as sexual dysfunction and chronic pelvic pain will lead to challenges in diagnosis and treatment for certain aspects of reproductive health. Once in the military, a soldier is required to deny all that is feminine and soft in themselves to successfully embrace the traditional role of a military soldier. Today's military is more integrated along gender lines than at any time in the past, so women are not excluded from any combat mission. However, women in the military are characterized differently than men. As women maintain "masculine" positions in the military, complexities between women's masculinity and femininity endure social and institutional levels of victimization. Subsequently, according to the journal of Robinson (2017), much of the attention has been negative, focusing on the potential adverse effects of women's gynecological and obstetric care military performance and organizational readiness characteristics.

Coping Mechanisms of the Women-participants with the Challenges Encountered during Military Training

Praying and having faith in God

When a person reaches their limit, there is nowhere to go but to God to cry out for help. The participants shared that they pray so hard they can have self-confidence and courage to go on.

This is as Bea shared:

Source na lang ng self-confidence mo ng courage mo sa taas kailangan mo lang manalangin lagi.

Prayer gave them the faith to become motivated despite all the challenges they were experiencing. There were times that they experienced low morale making them ready to give up but they talked to God and asked for guidance.

Siyempre, always talk to God. Lagi kasi akong nagdadasal ng guidance from God kasi like siyempre motivation. (Celeste)

Moreover, a researcher in general Psychology, Villani (2019), expressed that spirituality and religiosity have been identified to be positive predictors of subjective well-being, though results vary across studies. Conversely, a basic finding from Inzlicht and Tullet (2011), as cited by Shariff (2009), purports that faith, in a broad sense, reinforces people's need to feel personal control over events in their lives and reduces anxiety in the face of events that are beyond their control or simply do not correspond to their expectations. By some means, praying and having faith in God as a coping mechanism, kept the military women hopeful in the idea that their belief in an all-knowing and in-control God is an aid in dealing with events that are truly beyond their personal, mental, emotional, and psychological control.

Internal Motivation

Experiencing exhaustion, lack of sleep and punishment like being submerged in a filthy canal can break one's spirit to go on. However, seeing that it is part of the training and that others also experienced the same somehow motivated them to carry on. A participant expresses this:

"Mahiya ka sa sarili mo tapos hindi lang naman ikaw ang nakakaranas andyan din naman yung mga kasama mo. Siguro mindsetting nalang din. Positivity, kasi, minsan nasa tao din yan kung paano mo i-deal ang challenges."

The participants constantly motivated themselves by looking into common experiences with fellow trainees to do more to stay positive. Positive thinking was the driving force behind their perseverance when their challenges appeared overwhelming and nearly impossible. It helped keep them engaged for as long as they deemed necessary because, more often than not, their lives, freedoms, and security were at stake. Sternberg's theory of mental self-government (MSG) asserts that individuals have a variety of ways to manage activities and, therefore, may choose different styles to manage tasks. The management of these activities can be interpreted as thinking styles (Sternberg, & Zhang, 2014). Bea explained this, saying:

"Siguro mindsetting nalang din. Positivity, kasi, minsan nasa tao din yan kung paano mo i-deal ang challenges."

Furthermore, according to Knitz (2019), choosing a positive attitude takes constant vigilance and self-awareness to be attuned to one's actions and behaviors. To build a necessary vigilance is to be mindful of the attitudes of others and what the person surrounds themselves with. Women in the military are instilled to have a flexible mindset and a steady source of motivation they can rely on in any situation. They need to have a positive outlook and find reasons to keep themselves motivated in dealing with all the significant adjustments (Betterhelp Editorial Team, 2022).

Drive

Being a woman is not a hindrance nor a weakness in achieving one's dream of becoming a soldier. Having in mind that everything that is happening is just a part of training in the organization helps this woman to cope with all the difficult physical and mental training activities. In the study of Hull (1943) a prominent figure from whom comprehensive drive theory of learning and motivation is learned, as cited by Platania (2001), explains that drive theory combines motivation, learning, reinforcement, and habit formation to explain and predict human behavior. It describes where drives come from, what behaviors result from these drives, and how these behaviors are sustained. Drive theory is also important in the military setting specifically in convention formation as a result of learning and reinforcement. An understanding of how habits are created is essential; drive theory offers this insight. Furthermore, humans experience arousal (drive) to achieve a particular goal; habits (or dominant responses) dictate the means for reaching that goal. With enough practice, the perceived difficulty of a task will decrease, and people are likely to perform better. Pia attests to this:

"Nilakasan talaga naming loob namin maam dahil nangyari na saamin yun di pwede na mawalan kami ng gana syempre pangarap mo to, gusto mo to ipaglaban mo to, hindi porket na babae ka, hayaan mo na yun nangyari na yun, syempre nakatatak parin sa isip mo na may nangyari na part kana ng organization nato kung may mangyari man, mangyayari talaga yan."

Harnessing one's inner strength and resolving to fight for one's dream kept them sane. Looking forward to another day that would lead them to success was a good motivation for them to push through no matter what it took. Catriona includes:

Yung sa mga challenges na paano ko nakaya, lakas ng loob yung sabi ko kanina na 'may bukas pa ulit na 'successes'.

Submissiveness

Military training observes equal treatment to all trainees; hence, military women trainees should avoid such punishment as much as they can. The sanctions for disobeying rules could cause them reproductive system problems or infertility issues such as being submerged in a filthy canal for so long. Obedience to authority is a fundamental value and practice in the military, and as expressed by Venus:

"Sunod lang ng sunod kay hindi man giyapon kay ang rule nila diri basta mag sunod kalang ng mag sunod hindi ka maano. Exercise siyempre, pag pinaexercise gawin mo lang talaga ng tama".

Similar to any other person, a military person is given instructions to do the right things as instructed by their commandants. Adhering to these guidelines develops obedience and humility while avoiding mistakes with corresponding punishments. Submission to authority and following orders are

essential because they make life easier and safer, ensure that tasks are completed efficiently and on time, and eliminate confusion.

Social Support

Having a friend in the military changes a lot of things. It can be challenging when trying to emotionally connect with people in the army, but at the end of the day, they inspire one to do one's best, not to be pessimistic towards life and encourages one to be successful in life. Participants shared their experiences of having a friend to share their sentiments in life. Pia and Catriona shared this:

"Mag pili karin ng makaibigan mo sa training na lalong lalo na kung babae meron ka talaga kunin na kaibigan mo na ma share-ran mo kesa sa dibdibin mo kesa sa parang ma depress kalang. Ga motivate man sila na hindi lang mag isip sang negative ta tanan kay bal an naton na malampasan naton ni na mag abot ta sa point na ara na ta sa success na ginatawag".

"Minsan nagpaparinigan, diba oo pero sabihan mo naman na 'kausapin mo na yan".

Women in the military inevitably face issues with how best to cope with the deployment, rigorous training, and possible combat involvement in the future. The coping strategy that they strongly relied on was having someone they relied on in the army to sustain a focus, not on their fears but focus on what remains under their control (Kaner, 2015).

Insights

This study described the experiences of Military Women in the Division Training School in Cotabato City, particularly on how the military women withstood the challenges they confronted while in training and by what means they coped with those challenges. To understand the milieu, the researchers interviewed military women to hear inspiring narratives and consider their transforming encounters, psychological warfare, and military endurance throughout the course.

Hence, the researchers admire and respect the resilience and perseverance that unceasingly develop in service members. As what the women experienced, pass the pain and the glory, the mission never ends. As long as a nation exists, people will fight for national security.

CONCLUSIONS

The study's findings imply that it is essential for women who aspire to be soldiers to prepare themselves as they join the military. It is also crucial that they recognize the importance of becoming a soldier, as they will be trained, disciplined, and directed according to military rules; their lives will be in danger, they will lose their freedom, and they will be separated from their families. Students and aspiring soldiers should be taught not only how to prevent and reduce violence in their communities and countries but also how to be more responsive, knowledgeable, and effective in the event of future emergencies or wars and how to apply everything they learned while in training on how to protect, serve, and save individuals in danger; knowledge

by itself may not be sufficient. As a result, they must learn from the experiences of military women.

The military women trainees are convinced that the study validated their struggles and experiences as they risk their lives to be on the frontlines later on for the safety of their compatriots. May the Psychology community be one of the support systems for military women, particularly the trainees. The psychology community then takes the initiative and conducts additional mental health assessments for individuals preparing to serve as professional military personnel. Furthermore, the military women provided pertinent and significant information about their mental well-being while training. It may inspire society to be more understanding and to gather the information that may contribute to the field.

The military community makes daily sacrifices that often go unnoticed by their civilian neighbors. Service members and military families go above and beyond to serve the country. By bridging the divide between civilians and the military, the military community can exemplify to its members that their work for the nation is highly valued, respected, and appreciated, boosting morale and preparing them for another day in the field.

In these times of crisis or in times of peace, military members perform many tasks that are outwardly invisible to society, both in humanitarian missions and in routine activities. The military is responsible for the security and protection of citizens' fundamental freedoms. The military women provided information based on their experiences withstanding challenges through the Infantry Operational Courses. Given that military trainees would be the first to risk their lives to combat wars, natural disasters, and other emergencies, the government should be more willing to consider and compelled to carry out health-related initiatives that would meet their demands in terms of health and well-being.

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