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THE EFFECT OF JOB DEMANDS AND SOCIAL SUPPORT ON PEACEKEEPERS' STRESS AND SENSE OF COHERENCE AFTER DEPLOYMENT

Abstract

This study investigated how experienced demands of the job and the social support during operations were related to psychological well-being after deployment. The data was collected from 817 Finnish peacekeepers returning home between 2012 and 2014 from altogether over 10 different operations of which the most common were ISAF (Afghanistan) and UNIFIL (Lebanon). Experiencing less social support and more job-related demands was related to higher stress and weaker sense of coherence after deployment, even though overall level of emotional difficulties after deployment was low. These results suggest that there may be health gains to achieve in improved social support and balancing job demands during operation. Given the highly hierarchical organization of the military, role of leadership is essential in both establishing social support and balancing the job demands.

Key words

UNIFIL, ISAF, Stress, social support, psycho-social well-being, crisis management, peacekeeping

Introduction

Even though stress can be related to almost every working environment, working on a modern war zone or peacekeeping theater has undoubtedly unique features and can be considered as one of the most demanding and stressful working environment. In past decades vast amount of research has pursued to not only gaining understanding about stressors of warzone or peacekeeping environments

but also to identifying individual and social elements that serve as a buffer against experienced stress and negative consequences of stress.

Possible consequences of stress, especially long-lasting, are not always understood nor taken seriously. Physical injuries such as loss of a limb or eye sight can easily be understood to have major effects on both individual well-being and performance of the team or unit and it is thus easier to motivate troopers and leaders to use armors, helmets, and eye protection. However, consequences of stress related emotional problems are often neglected or misunderstood.

Stress can have a direct effect on success of the operation and security. Prolonged stress is known to reduce individuals' attention, reaction time and memory capacity, disrupt situational awareness, decrease motivation and creativity as well as impair communication and moral judgement (Lieberman et al., 2002; Staal, 2004), thus reducing the ability to complete the task at hand on both individual and team level. These shortages should be taken as seriously as physical threat and prevention should be of concern of every individual, but especially the leaders who need their unit to be efficient. Often the outcomes of stress are evident only after operation or deployment and thus do not necessarily pose an immediate threat. However, these long term outcomes may lead to "broken soldier" and may prevent the soldier or the peacekeeper to integrate back into civil society, continue life as it was before deployment, or to redeploy and be able to continue in the military profession. These injuries can disturb peacekeepers' further sense of themselves, their own capabilities in work and other areas of life as well as meaningfulness of their life, known as sense of coherence (Antonovsky, 1993). This if any, is tragedy that is not only of personal concern, but concern of the family, the employer, and more broadly, the society.

This study focuses on deployment stressors related to job demands and social support during the deployment and their relation to peacekeepers¹ experienced stress and sense of coherence after the deployment.

¹ The term peacekeeper has officially been replaced with the term crisis management person/personnel but in this article we use the term peacekeeper because it is a more simple way to refer to a person deployed either in more traditional peacekeeping operation or in a more war-like crisis management operation. The population of Finnish peacekeepers is described in more detail later.

Adverse outcomes and stressors

Stress can be defined as reaction to a demanding situation and thus, is result of a dynamic interaction between the person and the environment that is affected by individual's appraisal and coping strategies that are both highly dependent of both individual and situational factors (Lazarus, 1993). Stress is typically a curve-linear experience: too little stress is not good since it may reflect person's lack of interest towards the task at hand and on the other hand, too much stress is not optimal because it hinders person's possibilities to function. At best, stress can sharpen individual attention and thus performance. However, this depends on the level and amount of stress. How stress affects the individual typically depends on the type of stressors, proximity of the event, and duration of the stressful experience as well as the degree of surprise. Furthermore, while personal tendencies to handle stress, such as ways of coping (Lazarus, 1993), hardiness (Lambert, Lambert, & Yamase, 2003) or sense of coherence (Antonovsky, 1993) are relevant, also social context plays a major role in psychological well-being during and after peacekeeping operations. Personal tendencies to handle stress and cope stressful situation are not evolved in a vacuum but in social interaction from childhood with families, friends as well as during adulthood in extended social contexts such as a spouse or with members within the same work community or military unit.

Stress is typically divided, based on the time frame and severity, into basic stress, accumulated stress, and acute stress, also known as traumatic stress (Ponteva, Jormanainen, Nurro, & Lehesjoki, 2000). Even on a short time frame, stress can lead to, for instance, fear, sleep problems, depression, irritation, exhaustion, fatigue and problems in concentrating (Staal, 2004; The American Institute of stress, 2011). When stressful events or situations are overwhelming or individual coping mechanisms and other supportive elements fail stress may manifested itself an adjustment problems resulting decreased performance at work or school and changes in social relationships (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). When stress becomes chronic, severity of stress symptoms increase with possible adverse physiological effect on immune, cardiovascular, neuroendocrine, and central nervous systems (Anderson, 1998). Furthermore, when stressful events include exposure to actual or threatened death, serious injury, or sexual violence symptoms may include dissociative reactions such as flashback or recurrent distressing dreams in which the content and/or effect of the dream are related to the traumatic event. Exposure to these events may result Acute Stress Disorder or post-traumatic

stress disorder, PTSD, causing significant disability and distress (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). This article focuses on basic and accumulated stress.

A vast body of evidence has been build up during past decades in attempt to understand the underlying mechanisms that protect as well as the mechanisms that predispose peacekeepers to stress and its adverse consequences. Previous research has indicated stress related to military work may relate to several different things (Campbell & Nobel, 2009). Many of these stressors related to modern military operations can be considered to have common ground with “civilian world” work stress but some of them are suggested to be unique for military operations. Campbell & Nobel (2009) categorized the variety of different kind of stressors in military work to seven categories: 1) Work, 2) Social-interpersonal, 3) Family, 4) Self-identity, 5) Psychological environment, 6) Cultural environment, and 7) Physical environment. Work related stressors include, for example, the experience of the task, work load, group climate, support, and leadership. Social-interpersonal stressors on the other hand refer to aspects such as social status and acceptance. Separation, guilt, and worry again are considered as examples of family related stressors. By psychological environment related stress Campbell & Nobel (2009) refer to for instance risk of injury and death, hostility, isolation, and on the other hand boredom whereas cultural environment may cause stress because of value clash, discomfort or language. And last, stressors related to physical environment are aspect such as deprivation, climate extreme, and terrain extreme.

The first four, work, social-interpersonal, family, and self-identity related stressors, are generic in nature and can relate to any kind of work related stress in any occupation but that may still have different emphasis concerning military work. However, the last three, psychological, cultural and physical environment, are all rather specific for military profession, especially life threatening danger such threat of coming under fire, taunting and harassment by civilians, feelings of helplessness about reducing people’s suffering and improving their safety (Bartone, 2006; Bramsen, Dirkzwager, & van der Ploeg, 2000). It is also suggested that the impact of these vary based on whether individuals are deployed in combat or noncombat operations.

In the highly demanding working environments where peacekeepers work it is realistic to assume that beside the physical injuries and casualties also emotional injuries do exist and can be expected. Studies have shown that peacekeepers

experience, on average, stress and anxiety during the deployment and afterwards (Raju, 2014). Even if the numbers are not necessarily high among all veterans, also severe stress reactions occur. Among the wide variety of short term or minor emotional problems and stress, also long lasting and more severe emotional problems (such as post-traumatic stress disorder PTSD) have been reported during and after deployment. In military operations for example, Hoge et al. (2004) have reported up to 17% of U.S. veterans of the Iraq to have symptoms of major depression, anxiety, or PTSD. Also concerning peacekeeping operations, it has been reported PTSD to be evident in 3.7 % percent of peacekeepers who served in Cambodia and 8.0 % of those who served on former Yugoslavia (Dirkzwager, Bramsen, & Van Der Ploeg, 2005). Similar results have been reported regarding British peacekeepers: PTSD symptoms occurred in 3.6 to 5.5 % of the peacekeepers (Greenberg, Iversen, Hull, Bland, & Wessely, 2008). However when extending timeframe of emotional problems and distress further Klaasenger et al. found no significant increase of problems after 10 - 25 years of deployment (Klaassens, van Veen, Weerts, & Zitman, 2008). Similarly it has been reported that only 2 % of UK's Air Assault Brigade deployed to Iraq on 2004 to have significant emotional problems after deployment (Hughes et al., 2005).

On the other hand, it has been shown that individuals exposed to severe stress, often respond with remarkable resilience to stress (Bonanno, 2004). In fact, most of the peacekeepers report more positive than negative outcomes of deployment (Schok, Kleber, Elands, & Weerts, 2008). Thus participating on peacekeeping operation can be considered as positive or neutral experience for most individuals.

This, in fact, paints a more vivid picture of the phenomenon of well-being. It is not only the lack of negative emotions that constitute well-being but rather the experience of meaningful life regardless of the possible crisis along the way (Keyes, Shmotkin, & Ryff, 2002; Ryan & Deci, 2001). As a peacekeeper, one can experience stress concerning the uncertainty of the working environment and safety for instance and at the same time experience that they are doing something meaningful with a group of people they experience to belong to. This may buffer, at least to some extent, the adverse consequences of stress.

The relation of job demands and social support as source of occupational stress

From the seven factors that may cause occupational stress in military service described by Campbell and Nobel (2009), we focus on elements related to the first one: work itself and more specifically, to social support in forms of unit cohesion and leaderships and to job demands. Social support is considered as information or message that leads individuals to experience that they are cared and valued for and furthermore integrated in community (Cobb, 1976). Social support in military context has been defined as assistance and encouragement obtained specifically from military unit leadership and fellow unit, members (King, King, Vogt, Knight, & Samper, 2006), but can be extended to come from within (peers and leaders) and/or from outside (family and friends) (Overdale & Gardner, 2012). This study focuses on the support from within.

The relationship or balance between these two factors, social support and job demands, have, in many theories, been suggested to result in either well-being and work motivation or in occupational stress and at worst, in burn-out (Karasek, 1979). High workload itself is not necessarily a severe source of stress but it becomes more detrimental when it is combined with low social support from peers and superiors or lack thereof. This is understood to be a consequence of social support being a key resource for individual functioning and stress something that occurs originate from threatened or lost resources. Social support is an important personal resource since it helps provide access to other resources beyond those already feasible for the individual (Hobfoll & Freedy, 1990). Social support can therefore be described as a gateway to greater resource funds.

In military settings high levels of both social support and unit cohesion predict good performance and well-being during highly demanding situations (S. Cohen, 2004; Dirkzwager, Bramsen, & van der Ploeg, 2003; Marguen & Litz, 2006; Moldjord, Laberg, & Rundmo, 2015; Myers & Bechtel, 2004; Solomon, Mikulincer, & Hobfoll, 1986). Social support has been emerged as one of the strongest protectors against PTSD among military service members (Brewin, Andrews, & Valentine, 2000; Ozer, Best, Lipsey, & Weiss, 2003)

Leadership can be considered as a significant part of social support in peacekeeping operations, as the modern leadership is not only about giving orders, but a form of a social interaction where one having authority can demand the aid and support of

subordinates, but at same time has responsibility of hers/his subordinates. Good leadership is known to not only maintain good performance, but also to enhance resilience of subordinates, thus enhancing their ability to withstand stress and its adverse outcomes (Bartone, 2006).

The aim of the study

The aim of the present study was to analyze if experienced demands of the job and the social support was related to psychological well-being after deployment. The effect of the operation in question was also in the focus of our interest. The aim was approached from the perspective of following specific research questions:

1. In what degree were job demands and social support related to peacekeepers' stress after deployment?
2. In what degree were job demands and social support related to peacekeepers' experienced sense of coherence after deployment?
3. Did the relation of job demands and social support to psychological well-being differ between soldiers returning from Afghanistan (ISAF) and Lebanon (UNIFIL)?

Method

Context of the study

Finland has peacekeepers deployed in approximately 15 different operations around the world. After the change of law regulating the participation in peacekeeping operations changed into a law of crisis management year 2006 the nature of the tasks and involvement has also changed - Finland is now taking part in more challenging, and therefore potentially more dangerous, operations than before. While some operations, such as UNIFIL in Lebanon still represent more traditional peacekeeping operation, there is a growing number of operations that fit the characterization of modern war zone better. One example of these kinds of operation is ISAF in Afghanistan. This has been hypothesized to affect their psycho-social well-being. One factor that distinct Finnish peacekeepers from their colleagues of other nationalities is their background. Most of them are reservists and only part of them are soldiers from the Finnish Defence forces. Both groups deploy voluntarily but experience in working in crisis management operations is

considered as one important step in military officer's career. This means that they have different kind of professional background and expertise and furthermore, they also have a variety of different reasons to participate in crisis management operations. These factors may contribute to how they experience different things during the operation and how they cope with different stressors.

Data collection

The data presented in this article is based on survey data and was collected during January 2012 - March 2014. Participants completed the survey in web-based environment typically a few months after returning home. The questionnaire was part of home-coming training for the personnel that aims to help them to get back to every-day life after deployment and to help those in need for more psychosocial support. The participants complete the survey either before the two-day training or during it. The survey is designed so that it alarms the respondents in cases they have reported certain amount of different indicators of stress and encourages them to contact the social worker in the training.

Instruments

The survey is designed to measure peacekeepers' experiences of the operation regarding both operation environment and one's own duties as well as their experienced psycho-social well-being after the deployment. It entailed altogether 142 questions and took approximately 20-30 minutes to complete. The survey has been developed in the Finnish Defence Forces and it consists of several different instruments and scales that have been adopted from previous studies and that have been proven reliable previously.

Instruments used in the study presented here were:

- 1) *Stressors in the operation* including altogether 51 items measuring for instance worry about the family members, experienced job demands, work load, and experienced of the leadership in the operation. The items were developed based on interviews of Finnish soldiers returning from Afghanistan and previous literature (Adler, Litz, & Bartone, 2003). The items were measured on a one to three and on a one to five point Likert-scale. This study examined especially the variables related to *job demands* and *social support*.

- 2) *Stress-symptoms* including 11 items measuring the experienced level of general stress symptoms. The items were developed using a modified and shortened version of an originally 32 item questionnaire developed in Finnish Institute of Occupational Health (Leskinen, 2004)
- 3) *Sense of Coherence* scale to measure personal stress coping (Antonovsky, 1993) including altogether 12 items modified from the original scale to better suite military purposes. The items form three scales: manageability, meaningfulness, comprehensibility.
- 4) *Back ground variables*, specifically operation in which the individual was deployed.

This study focuses on operation related stressors more specifically demands and social support) as well as stress symptoms, sense of coherence, and background variables.

Participants

The participants were 817 Finnish peacekeepers returning home between 2012 and 2014 from altogether over 10 different operations of which the most common were ISAF (Afghanistan) and UNIFIL (Lebanon). The overall response rate during this period of time was 67%. Majority (60 %) of the participants had returned home 2013, 29 % had returned year 2012 and because the data entails only those returning 2014 who had returned by the end of March, only 11 % had returned 2014. Majority (48 %) of all the participants had returned from ISAF and 38 % from UNIFIL. Table 1 shows that most of them, approximately one third were under 25 years old. The majority (85 %) of the participants had returned home one, two or three months before answering the questionnaire and a little more than half of them had been deployed for the first time and the rest had been deployed also previously. Over half of the participants were either married or in a relationship and about one third had children during and after the deployment. Majority of them were working full-time after the deployment.

Table 1. Background variables.

Variable	Groups	Frequency	%
Age	under 25 years	246	30 %
	25–30 years	184	23 %
	31–40 years	213	26 %
	over 40 years.	174	21 %
Months from returning home	1 to 5 months	745	92 %
	6-11 months	53	6 %
	12 months or more	19	2 %
How many times has been deployed	This is the first time	431	53 %
	Has been deployed before	386	47 %
Did you interrupt your deployment	Yes	30	4 %
	No	787	96 %
Living conditions	Alone	230	28 %
	With a companion	451	55 %
	With parent	88	11 %
	Something else	48	6 %
Family status after the deployment	Married	249	31 %
	Living together with partner	179	22 %
	Steady relationship	109	13 %
	Separated	10	1 %
	No steady relationship	270	33 %
Did you have children when you were deployed?	Yes	267	33 %
	No	550	67 %
Work or study situation after the deployment	Full-time work	556	68 %
	Part-time work	14	2 %
	Scarcely working	29	3 %
	Unemployed	125	15 %
	Student	87	11 %
	On a long sick leave or unable to work	6	1 %

Analysis

The analysis was conducted using statistical measures. In the first phase descriptives for the scales (stress, sense of coherence, experienced demands of the job and experience social support for the job) in the interest of this study were

calculated. The internal consistency of each sum variable was tested with Cronbach's alpha.

In the second phase, a cluster analysis (K-means) was conducted to distinguish subgroups based on job demands and social support. Before the cluster analysis, the values of the sum variables were standardized because of the different scales in them. The cluster analysis were calculated: The first one for two scales measuring the demands of the job (the lack of meaningfulness concerning the job and the experienced strain of the job) and the second one for the two scales measuring social support (experiences of the leadership and sense of horizontal coherence). For both scale pairs both two cluster solution and well as three cluster solutions were tested but the investigation led to the decision to continue with the two cluster membership because of its clarity and the poor distinctive nature of the three scale solution.

In the third step, the clusters were cross-tabulated to form a 2 x 2 table indicating four different types of profiles of the participants based on experienced job demands and social support.

In the last phase, the profiles were compared with each other in relation to stress, sense of coherence with ANOVA (significance level $p < .05$) and to operation in question with cross-tabulation and accompanying χ^2 -test (significance level $p < .05$). Effect sizes for ANOVA were calculated with Eta^2 and the effect sizes for χ^2 - tests were calculated using Cramer's v . With respect to Cohen (1988), the limiting values were considered as follows: Eta^2 values between 0.01 and 0.06 mean a small effect, values between 0.06 and 0.14 a medium effect, and values greater than 0.14 a large effect (Cohen, 1988). Cramer's v ranges from 0 to 1, results close to 0 indicating small effect and results closer to 1 indicating large effect.

Results

Results in general suggested that participants did not report high levels of stress. Table 2 shows that the stress level in general was clearly below the scale midpoint and the standard deviation was low. This indicates that not only were the stress levels rather low, the participants did not differ from each other significantly on this but instead, reported experiences that were rather close to one another. Sense

of coherence on the other hand, was reported to be very high by the participants. In general they expressed high levels of manageability, meaningfulness, comprehensibility in one's own life.

Table 2. Means and standard deviations for stress and sense of coherence

Sum variable (scale)	Items and subscales	Mean	Standard deviation	Cronbach's alpha
Stress (1-5)	<i>All together</i>	1.3	0.39	.883
	<i>Fear</i>	1.1	0.25	
	<i>Anxiety</i>	1.3	0.58	
	<i>Depression</i>	1.3	0.57	
	<i>Sleep problems</i>	1.3	0.63	
	<i>Irritation</i>	1.5	0.73	
	<i>Tenseness</i>	1.2	0.51	
	<i>Exhaustion</i>	1.3	0.65	
	<i>Nervousness</i>	1.2	0.50	
	<i>Tiredness</i>	1.5	0.74	
	<i>Hopelessness</i>	1.1	0.45	
	<i>Problems in concentrating</i>	1.2	0.49	
Sense of Coherence (1-5)	<i>All together</i>	4.6	0.41	.886
	<i>Manageability</i>	4.6	0.38	
	<i>Meaningfulness</i>	4.5	0.56	
	<i>Comprehensibility</i>	4.6	0.47	

The experienced demands and social support for one's own job

Results indicated that in general, participants reported to experience their job in the operation as not very demanding or unmeaningful. Furthermore, they experienced rather little problems regarding "experienced leadership" and "group cohesion" which indicated an experience of good social support on average. (Table 3.)

Table 3. Items in each scale, means, standard deviations, and Cronbach's alphas

Sum variable (scale)		Mean	Standard deviation	Cronbach' s alpha
Work load (1-3)	<i>All together</i>	1.4	0.41	.685
	<i>"Rush, tight work schedule"</i>	1.4	0.58	
	<i>"Lack of rest"</i>	1.4	0.56	
	<i>"Night work"</i>	1.3	0.52	
	<i>"The monotony of work"</i>	1.5	0.61	
Experiencing the work as not meaningful (1-5)	<i>All together</i>	2.0	0.64	.820
	<i>"Appreciation of one's own work"</i>	2.0	0.84	
	<i>"Clarity and meaningfulness of the operation"</i>	2.6	1.00	
	<i>"A clear picture of one's duties"</i>	2.0	0.92	
	<i>"Division of duties between individuals"</i>	2.0	0.78	
	<i>"Meaningfulness of work"</i>	1.8	0.82	
	<i>"Feedback from work"</i>	2.0	0.86	
Group cohesion (1-5)	<i>All together</i>	4.4	0.56	.817
	<i>"Team spirit"</i>	1.5	0.76	
	<i>"Support from comrades"</i>	1.5	0.62	
	<i>"Relationships between comrades"</i>	1.6	0.71	
	<i>"Coping of comrades"</i>	1.7	0.69	
Experienced leadership (1-5)	<i>All together</i>	3.7	0.67	.722
	<i>"Chain of command and distribution of responsibilities in the Finnish leadership"</i>	2.4	1.00	
	<i>"Behavior and acts of immediate superiors"</i>	2.1	1.12	
	<i>"Availability of information"</i>	2.4	1.00	
	<i>"Availability and reliability of logistics and maintenance"</i>	2.7	1.11	
	<i>"Possibilities for rest and recuperation (R&R) on base"</i>	2.1	1.03	
	<i>"Introduction to work"</i>	2.2	0.98	

Table 4 shows the clusters created from the two sum variable pairs and the z-points in each cluster. Results indicate that there are more participants in the cluster that experiences more social support and more participants in the cluster that experience less job demands.

Table 4. Clusters for social support and job demands.

Clusters	n	Variables	z-points for sum variables
Cluster for social support			
Cluster 1: Experiences less social support	269	<i>Group cohesion</i> <i>Experiences of leadership</i>	-.91 -.98
Cluster 2: Experiences more social support	548	<i>Group cohesion</i> <i>Experiences of leadership</i>	.044 .048
Cluster for job demands			
Cluster 1: Experiences less job demands	531	<i>Job demands</i> <i>Experiencing the job as unmeaningful</i>	-.52 -.44
Cluster 2: Experiences more job demands	286	<i>Job demands</i> <i>Experiencing the job as unmeaningful</i>	.96 .82

Both the clusters based on experienced job demands as well as clusters based on experienced social support were distinctive (Figure 1). Scatter-dot pictures show that there is however, more variation in the cluster of less experienced social support and more experienced demands.

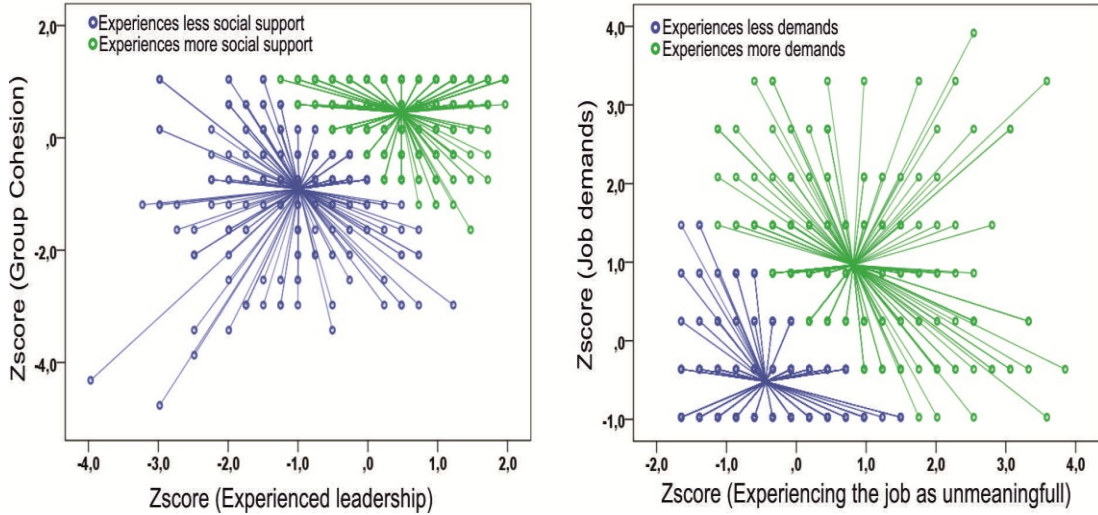


Figure 1. Scatter-dot pictures of social support and job demands clusters

Four different groups based on demands and support and their differences in stress and sense of coherence

Results furthermore showed that the four clusters presented above form four distinctive groups that had statistically significantly varying frequencies (Table 5). The most typical group was the one where participants experienced high social support accompanied with less experienced demands related to the job. On the other hand, differences related to demands were next to zero within the group that experienced less social support.

Table 5. Cross-tabulation of the four clusters

Clusters	Experiences less job demands	Experiences more job demands	Total
Experiences less social support	132 49 %	137 51 %	269 100 %
Experiences more social support	399 73 %	149 27 %	548 100 %
Total	531 65 %	286 35 %	817 100 %

Note. $\chi^2= 44.693$, $df= 1$, $p= .000$, Cramer's $v= 0.234$

It seemed, based on the results of this study, that the cluster membership was related to the level of experienced stress symptoms that the participants reported. The participants who belonged to the group that indicated less social support and more job demands reported more stress and lower sense of coherence than the participants in the other three groups. The differences between groups were statistically significant (Table 6). The opposite poles, “more support, less demands” and “less support, more demands”, differed from each other in all of the three outcome measures and the variation was in each three variables greater among the “less support, more demands” groups which indicates that “more support, less demands” forms a more homogeneous group.

Table 6. Differences in stress and sense of coherence among the four groups measured with ANOVA.

Scales	Group	Mean (SD)	Difference	Effect size
Stress (scale 1-5)	<i>Less support, less demands</i>	1.30 (0.44)	F=14.922, df= 3, p=.000	0.05 small
	<i>Less support, more demands</i>	1.38 (0.42)		
	<i>More support, less demands</i>	1.18 (0.29)		
	<i>More support, more demands</i>	1.37 (0.46)		
Sense of coherence (scale 1-5)	<i>Less support, less demands</i>	4.59 (0.38)	F= 22.252, df=3, p=.000	0.08 medium
	<i>Less support, more demands</i>	4.39 (0.53)		
	<i>More support, less demands</i>	4.68 (0.34)		
	<i>More support, more demands</i>	4.47 (0.41)		

The relationship between the group membership and the operation in question

Results further indicated that experience of the demands and social support was connected to the operation in which the participants had served. Table 7 shows that

participants returning home from Afghanistan (ISAF) more often belonged to the group that experienced more social support and less demands than participants returning from Lebanon (UNIFIL). The latter one's on the other hand, more often belonged to group reporting less support and more demands as well as to group reporting more demands but also more support. The relation between the two variables was statistically significant, yet small in effect size.

Table 7. Differences between ISAF and UNIFIL

	<i>Less support, less demands</i>	<i>More support, less demands</i>	<i>Less support, more demands</i>	<i>More support, more demands</i>	Total
ISAF	64 16,5%	210 54,0%	52 13,4%	63 16,2%	389 100,0%
UNIFIL	42 13,5%	129 41,3%	70 22,4%	71 22,8%	312 100,0%
Total	106 15,1%	339 48,4%	122 17,4%	134 19,1%	701 100,0%

Note. $\chi^2= 18.823$, $df= 3$, $p=000$, Cramer's $v= 0.164$

Findings indicated that the relation between the balance between social support and job demands and socio-psychological well-being in terms of stress and sense of coherence was evident both in ISAF and UNIFIL.

Discussion

On general, results of this study confirmed the findings of previous studies: Peacekeepers did not, on average, report alarming levels of stress (Greenberg et al., 2008; Hughes et al., 2005). Both low level of stress and high sense of coherence support previously reported results of positive outcomes of peacekeeping operations, as it has been shown that peacekeepers report more positive than negative outcomes of deployment (Schok et al., 2008). Stressful situations may indeed have positive outcomes, such as improved self-concept (e.g., perceiving oneself as a stronger, more mature, or more competent person), stronger relationships with social networks (e.g., perception of improved social relations), and perception of personal growth and life priorities (Updegraff & Taylor, 2000). On the other hand, it's possible that the sense of coherence has among these peace-

keepers been high already before the operation which would explain the low stress levels. For example, Norwegian soldiers who participated in the peacekeeping operation in Lebanon reported that their deployment experience had increased their self-confidence, expanded their political understanding, increased their stress tolerance, and improved their military qualifications (Mehlum, 1995).

Low stress levels can also be considered to relate to what kind of perception participants want to give of themselves. It is possible that they consider stress and lack of coping as experiences not suitable for soldiers. It has been suggested that it is not always acceptable or typical to report stress or other negative emotions in fear of stigmatization. There are two kinds of stigmas that may interfere with seeking mental health care: public stigma (i.e., that associated with public perceptions of being stigmatized) and self-stigma (i.e., that associated with internalization of stigma). (Corrigan, 2004). On the other hand, even though the survey is anonymous, some respondents may fear that reporting stress symptoms may hinder their possibilities for re-deployment. Thirdly, low stress level may be due to very high levels of sense of coherence that is a significant buffer against negative outcomes of difficult situations (Antonovsky, 1993).

This study focused on occupational stressors concerning the demands of the job and social support, that also Campbell & Nobel (2009) report as significant in peace-keeping operations. Regardless of the low stress levels on general, the participants did differ from each other in these experiences to some extent and some of the variance could, based on our result, be explained by the balance between experienced demands and social support concerning the work. The results of this study support the theory and previous results: Experiencing less social support and more job-related demands was related to lower psychosocial well-being during and after deployment (Solomon et al., 1986). However, it needs to be taken into account that while there were differences between the four groups, the stress level among each of the groups still remained rather low and sense of coherence again was very high in all of the groups.

Based on the results, it seemed that peacekeepers returning from ISAF experienced more social support and less demands set by the task than peacekeepers returning from UNIFIL. From one perspective this might seem opposite to what one might hypothesize. ISAF has typically been considered as more demanding than UNIFIL. However, this might be one indication that there are interfering variables in the

equation, such as help-seeking behavior. It is possible that the more demanding the situation and operation is considered, the more peacekeepers seek for support from their superiors. This might in turn diminish the experience of demands in cases where the individual experiences to have gotten support.

The comparison between more traditional peacekeeping operation, UNIFIL, and more war-like NATO led operation, ISAF, revealed interesting results. Findings indicated that in both cases, there was a statistically significant relation between the balance between social support and demands and experienced socio-psychological well-being. Thus, there is a potential risk on considering the more peaceful, traditional operations as not that stressful for the individual since the risk of physical injuries, due to IED for example, is lower. Also in these operations, other operation related factors may provoke experiences of stress.

Methodological reflections

The data was collected systematically from each peacekeeper who returned home from the operation from the beginning of year 2012 until the beginning of year 2014. Thus, the participants do not represent a sample but rather the whole group. The study was conducted using questionnaire data and by analysing the data quantitatively.

Instruments that were used to study different aspects of psycho-social well-being were validated in previous studies and functioned well also in this population. The Cronbach's alphas for each scale were good. However, the instrument was not developed for this specific kind of analysis but the scales for *the lack of meaningfulness concerning the job*, *the experienced strain of the job*, *experiences of the leadership*, and *sense of horizontal coherence* still provided rather good indicators for job demands as well as social support.

Due to limitations in the survey, we were not able to compare reservists and professional soldiers. Next version of the survey will be designed in a way that enables this comparison.

Educational and practical implications

The results of this current study highlight the importance of leadership and social support. From both educational and practical perspective it is vital to identify these factors and their value in peacekeeping operations and support to emotional fitness of peacekeepers. Our results suggest that there may be health gains to achieve in improved social support and balancing job demands on reasonable level. Given the highly hierarchical organization of the military, role of leadership is essential in both establishing social support and balancing the job demands, thus these aspects should be highlighted in military education and be valued by leaders in the field. Focusing on the balance between the demands that the job entails and the social support available for doing the job helps to fully utilize the potential and assets that the group of peacekeepers have, engage them into the work, and minimize the risk for job-related burn-out. At the end, this resonates not only to goal accomplishment of the operation but also to the safety in reaching for it.

To sum up the results it is evident that for majority of the participants returns healthy form deployment experiencing their life meaningful, comprehensible and manageable. There was however evidence that experienced social support and job demand were associated with post-deployment well-being, thus level of social support and perceived job demands may either serve as protective or as compromising element. This study was done in one point of time, participant retrospectively analyzing their experiences. By doing so, we were able to get a sort of a “snapshot” of the multifaceted phenomenon of occupational health. To gain a fuller picture of well-being trough deployment cycle (pre-deployment, deployment, and post-deployment) empirical, longitudinal studies covering different aspects of occupational health and factors contributing to it is still needed.

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