

A PSYCHOLINGUISTIC STUDY OF THE CORRELATION BETWEEN MILITARY ORGANIZATION FROM MASCULINE TO GENDER-NEUTRAL

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Summary

The article presents the results of an empirical study of gender relations in the Ukrainian armed forces as one of the conflict zones, in which difficulties may arise during service. The study of correlation between the male service members' psychological well-being and the change of the military organization nature from masculine to gender-neutral can tackle the occupational segregation related to gender inequality and facilitate the creation of a balanced perspective for both genders in order to achieve more comprehensive decisions on gender equality in the armed forces. The study revealed a correlation between the level of cadets' psychological well-being and the process of integrating women into the armed forces of Ukraine. The integration of women into the military contributes to the psychological well-being of those cadets who perceive a female soldier as a bearer of the core values that constitute the essence of military service, and consider a female soldier as an equal member of the military collective. However, for another part of cadets the feminization of the army brings about the preconditions for experiencing negative emotions and, consequently, diminishes cadets' psychological well-being. The reason of men's negative emotions can be dissonance caused by biased thinking based on gender role stereotypes, but it can also have reasonable grounds. The main reason for the cadets' lack of psychological well-being is the sense of injustice caused by the privileged position of women in the army in the distribution of duties, functions, responsibilities.

Keywords: gender, integration, dissonance, positive discrimination, feminization of armed forces, emotions.

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1. Introduction

Nowadays, stressfulness of military service and professional burnout have increasingly become the reasons to discharge from the army. These notions are closely connected not only with personal features but also with conditions of military professional activity (high-stress environment, strenuous physical activity, statutory regulations governing military servicemen relations, irregular schedule of service and work on weekends, etc.). Thus, some military service requirements inevitably endanger the servicemen's mental and physical health and well-being, thereby potentially hinder their professional activities and development (*Hoge et al., 2004*). Individual variations cause a wide range of reactions to the military service requirements, so some servicemen quickly adapt and remain capable of maintaining the highest standards of efficiency, and others have a hard time coping with difficulties (*Hernández-Varas et al., 2019*). Therefore, it is very important for military organization to identify key psychological comfort factors at the duty stations for retention a specialist workforce in the armed forces. The main

components of psychological comfort are 1) an enabling environment in which the person's mental and physiological functions are not stressed out, and 2) the senses of enjoying the work and job satisfaction (Bartone & Bowles, 2020). The psychological well-being of military personnel is one of the principle indicators of psychological comfort at the duty station. Recently, some countries have given priority to the psychological well-being of military personnel in the framing national defense policies (Silgo, 2013). One way to achieve the psychological well-being of military personnel is to develop and implement policies, which help to identify potential difficulties that service members might face at the duty station and to eliminate conflict zones where difficulties can arise. E. Essig and R. Soparnot consider that one of the conflict areas where professional difficulties can arise is gender relations, whereby 'difficulty' is regarded "as a broad term that encompasses inequality and discrimination practices that men might witness or experience in the workplace" (Essig & Soparnot, 2019). Since historically women have fought for their rights in society, gender issues have been studied primarily from their perspective (Essig & Soparnot, 2019). Additionally, public debates and politicians focus narrowly on the female perspective (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005), but in gender studies both male and female perspectives are important (Essig & Soparnot, 2019). Moreover, "men are both talked about and ignored, rendered simultaneously explicit and implicit. They are frequently the center of discourse but they are rarely the focus of interrogation" (Collinson & Hearn, 1994), but the armed forces have always been identified as masculine institutions (Planiol, 2016), so "the male viewpoint should therefore be taken into account more often when fighting for gender equality" (Essig & Soparnot, 2019). Study and consideration of men's viewpoints and attitudes can help solve the problem of integration of women into the military. Furthermore, "the inclusion of men in the gender equality debate in a productive and open-minded way is a crucial step towards making progress on these sensitive issues" (Essig & Soparnot, 2019), and the study of issues relating to feminization of the military can contribute to a deeper understanding of the nature of the difficulties of male military personnel, cooperate in struggle with occupational segregation related to gender inequality, offer "a balanced perspective from the point of view of both genders to build broader consensus around gender equality and more comprehensive solutions" (Essig & Soparnot, 2019). These should undoubtedly have a positive impact on the military collectives and on a sense of psychological well-being both in general and in the context of gender.

2. Theoretical and Conceptual Framework of the Study

The theoretical and conceptual framework of this research is outlined in works that examine the correlation between psychological well-being and various aspects of human life (Dush et al., 2008; Frone, 2000; Ruggeri, 2020; Gerstorf, 2016). The term 'psychological well-being' (PWB) is "an internal emotional state that arises as a psychological response to the environment" (Nierenberg et al., 2010), it also can "refer to a sense of happiness or to a lack of psychological distress" (Grossi et al., 2006). PWB can refer to positive psychological traits, such as contentedness, gratification, happiness, confidence, aspiration, which are beneficial to well-being (Ryff & Singer, 1996; Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). However, PWB is a complex and holistic notion that includes not only feelings and emotions of happiness and contentment (Khumalo et al., 2012), it is more comprehensive than just well-being – it is indicator to gauge the subjective aspects of mental health (Grossi et al., 2006), and can be characterized by both positive and negative aspects such as optimism, pleasure, vitality,

self-control, depression, anxiety, general health, vitality (Uher & Goodman, 2010; Grossi et al., 2006, Hallberg, Hallberg & Kramer, 2008). PWB includes the following six components of positive psychological functioning: 1) positive self-assessment and self-acceptance; 2) process of continuous self-improvement and personal development (personal growth); 3) awareness of the values for which the person focuses on certain life goals and carries them out (purpose in life); 4) the need for positive emotional relationships with others (positive relationships with others); 5) the ability to effectively govern his/her own life, capability of dealing with reality in due course (environmental management); 6) the need for self-determination (autonomy), the desire to be in control of situation (Yarnell et al., 2019). The key concepts relevant to a military personnel's PWB are: positive emotions; awareness; purpose and meaning in life; social support; unit cohesion; core values that make up the essence of military service (Yarnell et al., 2019). In this study, psychological well-being is defined as "self-representations of intrapersonal affective or emotional states reflecting a sense of subjective well-being or distress" (Dupuy, 1984).

The methodological basis for the study are scientific works based on socio-psychological approach and focused on the study of the factors of the military personnel's PWB. C. Limbert (2004) analyzed to what extent such factors as social support and coping strategies affected psychological well-being and job satisfaction among military personnel assigned to a location outside their home country. M. Fadaei, M. Torkaman, and J. Farokhzadian (2020) highlighted the correlation between spiritual well-being and psychological well-being among Iranian military personnel. Their research showed that PWB not only improved the physical, psychological and mental health of servicemen, but also increased their commitment, productivity and efficiency. A positive, significant correlation was detected between the psychological capital, work satisfaction and health self-perception, and Hispanic military personnel's PWB (Hernández-Varas et al., 2019). The influence of stress factors on PWB and military service effectiveness, as well as protective factors such as personality traits and social support were analyzed in the context of military medical service (Yarnell et al., 2019). Correlation between military personnel's PWB and their quality of life (Schwerin, 2006) and PWB of military personnel and their families in work and life (Bowles et al., 2017) were studied from the perspective of the approach to understanding PWB as a multidimensional concept, which is defined as a continuous integration process between some dimensions (levels of happiness, sense and/or satisfaction) in three domains: work, life, and work-life (Bowles, 2017). The aim of this study is to examine the correlation between the psychological well-being of male cadets of college-level military academy and the process of integration of women into the military. Our study of correlation between male military personnel's PWB and the change of nature of military culture from masculine to gender-neutral as a result of integration of women into the military develops current approach to gender equality and promotes a balanced perspective from both genders to achieve more comprehensive solutions in terms of the gender equality in the military.

3. Research Methods

To begin with, it is worth noting that "the military is an organizational culture characterized by an unwillingness to display emotions or acknowledge personal weakness" (Harms et al., 2013) so collecting reliable and accurate data is a constant challenge. Therefore, to get the more genuine responses the preference was given to the psycholinguistic method of research, namely the free associative experiment. Association in the work is understood

as “a natural relation arising in individual experience between two contents of consciousness (sensations, representations, thoughts, feelings, etc.), which is characterized by the fact that the appearance in consciousness of one of the contents entails the appearance of the other” (*Meshcheryakov & Zinchenko, 2003*). We assume that the psycholinguistic research methods allow individuals to avoid an anxiety of publicly expressing their opinion, a dread of ridicule, a fear of being judged or misunderstood if others get to know the respondent’s feelings and thoughts. It is especially relevant in the implementation of the associative experiment among military personnel. Furthermore, the responses obtained during the associative experiment are most similar to respondents’ real thoughts and feelings. N. Kurganova (*Kurganova, 2019*) notes that the associative approach has great potential in terms of researching both the living word and its meaning. This knowledge is inscrutable for the respondent, but it is structured and this “allows us to suggest about an existence of stable core, which is a set of the most typical and regularly reproduced strategies, schemes and cognitive operations that guide the meaning-making activity” (*Kurganova, 2019*).

When conducting the free association experiment, respondents were given the following instruction: “Look at the given words *army, woman, female soldier* and quickly, without a second thought write down the first words that came to your mind. Limit time of writing, as far as possible, to no more than five minutes”. The association experiment was conducted in the framework of a pilot study in September 2021. Participation in the experiment was voluntary. Representatives of Heroes of Kruty Military Institute of Telecommunications and Information Technologies (62 1st-4th years cadets, age 17-25 years) participated in this experiment. The results of the associative experiment were subjected to cognitive interpretation, which “provides a basis for further conclusions pertaining to the manifested and reflected in associative experiments mental peculiarities of the people or a particular group of people, the mental processes in the minds of native speakers” (*Sternin, 2020*).

4. Limitations

The study has several limitations. First of all, the limitation is associated with the weaknesses of associative experiment as a method of research. It is to be noted that “any interpretation, including interpretation of results of psycholinguistic experiments, by definition always has a subjective character and can vary between studies, lead to different results depending on the research tasks even though researchers study the same material, and sometimes the same researcher can arrive at different conclusions depending on the time of reflection on the result” (*Sternin, 2020*). In addition, by the standards of qualitative research the sample size is small. The experiment was carried out within one college-level military academy, and this factor limited the number of respondents. Moreover, it cannot be assumed that the results are relevant for all branches of the military or for National Guard. The reason for this is that the military tasks (missions) and therefore the collective habits establishing behavior standards adopted by all members of the military collective differ significantly in different military units and formations.

5. Results and Discussions

The results of the association experiment are summarized in Table 1.

Table 1

Comparative table of associations for the word-stimuli *army, woman, female soldier*

Word-stimuli		
Army	Woman	Female soldier
Strength (11), intellect (1), craftsmanship (1), agile (1), reliability (1), power (1), consistency (1), system (1), duty (1), patience (1), stage of life (1), constraint (1), uniform (4), war (11), weapons (11), equipment (4), shooting (1), officer (1), training (4), Motherland (1), duty (1), leave of absence (1), boots (2), courage (1), bravery (5), discipline (6), responsibility (3), subordination (1), man (1), mines (1), training (1), obligation (1), soldiers (1), Donbass (1), endurance (1), fearlessness (1) excellence (1), stability (1), disorder (1), friendship (3), wisdom (1), protection (3), love (1), rank (1), formation (1), routines (1), orders (1), barracks (1), work (1), most important (1), array (1), patriotism (1), guarantor (1), career (1), honor (1), green (1).	Housewife (2), cosmetics (2), tenderness (6), lady (1), family member (2), family (4), mother (5), warmth (3), intellect (1), beauty (7), simplicity (1), comfort (2), care (8), love (7), support (5), flowers (2), hair (1), communication (2), teacher (1), complaisance (2), kindness (6), happiness (3), benevolence (1), person (1), girl (3), relationship (1), beautiful (5), order (1) infatuation (1), free (1), gentle (4), wife (3), nails (1), cunning (1), dress (1), suitcase (1), rails (1), goodness of heart (1), affectionate creature (1), home keeper (1), inspiring (1) home (1), food (1), children (3), romance (1), weaker sex (1), wonderful creature (1), grandmother (1), sister (1), talented (1), respect (1), joy (1), cheerful (1), borscht (1), support (1), sweetheart (1).	Slyness (2), character (2), maternity leave (1), wet chicken (1), useless (1), do nothing (1), gender equality (5), sleep (1), unwillingness to work (1), sleepyhead (1), hen witted (1), irresponsibility (1), laziness (1), idiocy (1), not for the military (1), misunderstanding (1), easy promotion (1), uniforms (1), uselessness (2), courage (3), beauty (3), half-soldier (1), crew (1), privilege (1), dissociation (1), medical aid (2), colleague (3), support (3), capable of damn near anything (1), communications officer (1), laziness (2), carefree (1), fatigue excused (1), exempt from duty (1), determination (1), difficult case (1), office (1), weakness (1), gender politics (1), punctuality (1), friendliness (1), self-command (1), fear (1), incompetence (1), warrior (1), nightmare (1), sucks (1), discontent (2), burden (3), zero (1), chaos (1), vacation (1), metro (1), dame wearing boots (1), hopelessness (1), to raise the morale of the comrades (1), pride (1), foul-mouthed (1), tears (1), injustice (1), routine violation (1), responsibility (1), shirker (1), friend (3), psychologist (1), help (1), comrade (3), friendship (3), what are you doing here? (1), disciplined (3), courageous (3), responsible (1), indulgences (1), comrade (1), fighting girl (1), secretary (2), comrade in arms (1), brave (1), smart (1), respect (3), talentless (1), common person (2), purposeful (1) confident (1), nuisance (1), unequal (1), general objectives (1), something new in the military (1), mistake (1), documents (1), initiative (1), anger (1), aggression (1), paper (1), paperwork (1), loyalty (1).

It is to be noted that “associations form the basis for the development of connotations” (*Vrublevskaya, 2019*) aimed at “comprehension of meaning and purpose of objects and phenomena of the surrounding reality, as well as words denoting them” (*Burukina, 2011*) through “establishing a whole set of involuntary probabilistic connections as well as connections deeply anchored in the consciousness, which embrace not only associations but also, first of

all, emotions, feelings, connotative ideas and many other elements evoked in the person's mind by a word" (Burukina, 2011). The associations gotten for the word-stimulus *female soldier* were divided according to connotative meanings that we interpret as "emotional and evaluative additions to the basic denotative meaning" (Meshcheryakov, Zinchenko, 2004), "insignificant but persistent features of a concept conveyed by connotation, which embody the accepted in a given linguistic community assessment of the corresponding object or fact of reality" (Apresyan, 1995). Associations with positive connotations (47% of the total associations) incorporate words that are usually perceived as approval, praise, compliment, and comprise a positive assessment of a person's behavior or personality traits, which 1) traditionally correlate with military professional activities (*character, courage, bravery, determination, hard work, restraint, warrior, comrade in arms*) – 16%; 2) conventionally correlated with women (*beauty*) – 2%; 3) irrelevant to the gender factor (*friendliness, pride, smart, respect, support, loyalty, confident*) – 29%. Associations with neutral connotations (12% of the total associations) combine words indicating 1) the field of professional activity (*medical care, communications officer, secretary, psychologist*) – 6%; 2) the gender equality policy in the military – 6% (*gender equality, something new in the army*). The parallel between associations to the word-stimuli *army* and *female soldier* indicates that some cadets believe that a woman in the army is, above all, a colleague, an equal partner in accomplishing their military objectives. This undoubtedly indicates a favorable psychological climate in the military unit and psychological comfort at the duty station. In addition, psychological comfort and, consequently PWB is also confirmed by similarity between associations to the word-stimulus *woman* and to the word-stimulus *female soldier*. This conclusion substantiates the fact that in the system of psychological processes that lie behind the associations to the word-stimulus *woman* the emotions of pleasantness (*warmth, kindness, happiness, comfort, care, food, borscht*) predominate. Associations with negative connotations (41%) incorporate words used to insult or express disrespect, contempt, indignation: 1) zoomorphic images referring to the names of animals and emphasizing some negative personality traits (*hen*); 2) words for accusation in violation of the national-cultural behavior norms (*foul-mouthed*); 3) words containing negative assessment of a woman's behavior, her personality traits (*anger, aggression, unwillingness to work, sleepiness, irresponsibility, laziness*); 4) words with built-in sexism (*dame wearing boots, hen witted, wet chicken*); 5) words with a pronounced negative evaluation, which indeed is their main meaning (*what are you doing here?*). Associations with negative connotations indicate that male cadets 1) oppose the reference group of female service members, who, by male definition, embodies the professional "anti-ideal" and 2) experience negative emotions such as irritation, annoyance, anger, resentment. These negative emotions affect the psychological comfort and PWB of male cadets. In order to identify what are the key factors for the cadets' PWB in the perspective of gender equality policy in the military, the associations were divided into thematic groups: 1) impressions and emotions, 2) purpose of military service, 3) emotional support, 4) unit cohesion, and 5) essence of military duty and core army values. The results were summarized in Table 2.

Analysis of cadets' self-presentation of intrapersonal emotional states reflecting feelings of subjective PWB or distress proved that integration of women in the army contributes to cadets' PWB primarily in cases if servicewomen are defined as bearers of basic values that constitute the essence of military service; they are considered as the military collective members, which contribute to the morale and psychological stability of the military community that is to the military unit cohesiveness; they live up to expectations of her male colleagues in terms of emotional support and engaging with military collective. Contrariwise, the integration

Table 2

**Key factors in achieving cadets' psychological well-being during
integrating women into the army**

Key factors	Examples of associations			
	%	indicating PWB	%	indicating insufficiency (lack) of PWB
Impressions and emotions	7	Friendliness, pride, beauty	44	Easy promotion, unfairness, maternity leave, inequality, indulgence, unwillingness to work, exempt from duty, privilege, shirker, do nothing
Purpose of military service	3	Hard work, warrior	0	–
Emotional support	21	Help, support, to raise the morale of the comrades	6	Anger, aggression, resentment
Unit cohesion	27	Collective, colleague, mutual assistance, friendship, friend, comrade-in-arms, respect	19	Dissociation, nuisance, half-soldier
Essence of military duty and core army values	42	Character, courage, determination, brave, responsible, brave, disciplined, courageous	31	Irresponsibility, weakness, tears, chaos, incompetence, routine violation
Total	100		100	

of women in the military creates the preconditions for decline in the male military personnel's PWB if female service members become a trigger for experiencing negative emotions. The reason of men's negative emotions could be dissonance caused by biased thinking based on gender role stereotypes, but it could also have reasonable grounds. Thus, the emphasis on the incongruity of female colleagues with the basic values that constitute the essence of military service (*irresponsibility, weakness, tears, chaos, incompetence*) indicates a negative assessment of women's professional fitness or preparedness to perform combat tasks. This can lead to a rise in the levels of anxiety, and, consequently, a decrease in the cadets' PWB. Since trust and the ability to rely on unit members is part of the military culture, the cause of cadet distress can be a low level of unit cohesion. Re general direction towards unity and stability (*unwillingness to work, dissociation*, sponsibility is placed on female colleagues if they do not support the group's *nuisance*). Besides, in deployment or combat situations, the military personnel might have the greatest need for emotional support, and the lack of emotional connection with female colleagues becomes a source of PWB decline (*aggression, resentment*). However, as it turned out, the most important reason for the lack (absence) of cadets' PWB is the feeling of injustice, which can breed resentment against female colleagues. Male military personnel can consider themselves unfairly discriminated against because affirmative action practices: "The perception that women can now be placed on the 'fast track' leaves many men feeling passed over, ignored or excluded" (*Burke & Black, 1997*). Positive discrimination is the establishment of inequality in order to promote equality. According to a certain preferential measures "it seeks to compensate for inequalities by creating discrimination that paradoxically redistributes equality" (*Levade, 2004*). The associations denote the reasons for cadets' feelings of injustice: the preference for women in assignment and promotion caused by political efforts to increase female representation in the military; the exemption of female military personnel from duty

when only one reasons for it is their sex; putting the women in a privileged position in the distribution of duties, functions and responsibilities (*easy promotion, unfairness, maternity leave, inequality, indulgence, unwillingness to work, exempt from duty, privilege, shirker, do nothing*). Feelings of injustice and resentment create prerequisites for the formation in the male cadets' minds a new woman image, which takes distorted form and turns out very different from its initial image. This fact is confirmed by the comparison of associations gotten for the word-stimuli *woman* and *female soldier*.

6. Conclusion

This study revealed a correlation between the level of male cadets' psychological well-being and the process of integrating women into the armed forces. Integrating women into the military facilitates male cadets' psychological well-being if female cadets are defined as the bearers of basic values that constitute the essence of military service; they are considered as the military collective members, which contribute to the morale and psychological stability of the military community that is to the military unit cohesiveness; they live up to expectations of her male colleagues in terms of emotional support and engage with military collective. The integration of women into the army creates the preconditions for declines in the male cadets' psychological well-being if female cadets become a trigger for experiencing negative emotions. The reason of men's negative emotions can be dissonance caused by biased thinking based on gender role stereotypes, but it can also have reasonable grounds, namely: the incongruity of female cadets with the basic values that constitute the essence of military service because of their low professional fitness or readiness to perform combat tasks; female cadets' unwillingness (lack of readiness) to maintain cohesion in the military unit through lack of sense of belonging to a group; shortage of emotional connection with colleagues because of deficit of interest in others and desire to interact; a sense of injustice caused by positive discrimination (reverse sexism).

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