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The effect of psychical burden in particular situations, especially to gender varieties of coping strategies

Joining the NATO has brought a new situation for soldiers in the past few years: the role of working in a foreign country got more emphasis, for which not only physical and health conditions, but also adequate psychical preparation is inevitable. Arisen from the new role in a foreign country, the stress put on soldiers and its handling, as well as the effective solution of problems all get a role of high importance.

Meanwhile, another important factor occurred in the Hungarian Army at the same time, that is, the increasing number of women in different positions within the organization. Due to the reform of the military force, and the market situation of the work force in the last few years, as well as the economic crisis starting last year, more and more women go to military educational institutions or accept work in the bound of the Hungarian Army. The number of young women, who imagine themselves as officers, non-commissioned officers, or contractual officers, has been increasing year by year. The new challenges and the changing proportion of male-female employees make the overall study and research of gender differences.

The study of gender differences interests not only psychologists but researchers working in different fields of science and medical science. The decipher of gender differences can help the work of a psychologist or a professor of selection in picking the proper labour since the Hungarian Army has gone through powerful changes within the reform of military force. These manifest not only in the modernization of technique, but the selection system changes together with the continuous alteration of the military force. Gender differences could mean differences in abilities, skills which could be essential factors in a particular field of work.

Are there significant differences in particular factors between genders or are we alike apart from the anatomic and physiological differences? In my dissertation I put emphasis on the study of gender differences from the point of view of deciphering the coping strategies, since in our world full of stress (especially by such dangerous tasks which are made by the Hungarian soldiers during doing military service in a foreign country) we need to get to know those intra- and interpersonal coping ways, with which the human can respond to the outer and inner effects that affect him. The study of gender differences in coping strategies could help in developing the selection process in a way that what those positions established in the Hungarian Army are, which are fulfilled and performed more effectively by a man or a woman. The study of gender differences with regards to the selection process of the Hungarian Army and the use of coping and conflict resolution strategies for resolving conflicts is still regards to be an unexplored policy. However, taking into consideration the differences discovered in this field, a more precise selection procedure could be elaborated.

The aims of my dissertation:

1. I would like to prove that there are significant gender differences in the use of coping (intrapersonal) and conflict resolution(interpersonal) strategies in peacetime, which differences can be derived from anatomic and physiological backgrounds as well as that of the socialization.

2. In particular situation, during military service abroad (in situations with psychical burdens) the use of coping and conflict resolution strategies transform: some of the strategies come into the limelight on the one hand, and the probability of some other coping and conflict resolution strategies lessen compared to those techniques evolved in peacetime. This is due to the peculiarities and concomitants of military life that play an important role in the background. However, differences between genders still can be revealed. (Therefore, in my PhD thesis I regard the by Lund-scale detailed works as well as the Boutros Boutros Ghali classification in peculiar position.)
3. With the help of the Megküzdési Mód Preferencia Kérdőív (Coping Way Preference Questionnaire) and Thomas-Kilmann Test I would like to prove that differences can be discovered in the use of coping and conflict resolution strategies during peacetime and a psychical burden period.

Considering coping strategies, on the basis of Megküzdési Mód Preferencia Kérdőív (Coping Way Preference Questionnaire), the following significant differences between genders can be demonstrated in peacetime in the military group examined by me.

1. **Pursuit of support, ($p \leq 0,01$), 99% significance:** On the grounds of the results, women adopt the pursuit of support more often than men, which is responsible for the required roles claimed by society and the process of socialization. One of the biggest expectations of the collective agent regarding gender roles is that men should deal with problems that fall to them independently as breadwinners. Society regards it rather condemnable if men cannot maintain their families or speak about their problems in tears. However, it is completely accepted in case of women, since the 'weaker gender' can apply for support any time without prejudice. The 99% significance scale shows that there is considerable divergence in pursuit of support between genders.
2. **Tension control, ($0,01 \leq p \leq 0,05$), 95%-os significance:** 'The basic aim is to retain the stability of personality, the focus is directed from the threat to the self, but the person does not give up the possibility to change position.¹ (I try to contemplate the situation from a wider point of you to be objective.) The significance of this in an unfamiliar culture can be of overriding importance. The significance is dominant here; women prefer this type of coping strategy rather. This is due to the more effective communication skills probably, women try to analyse the situation from different point of views at the same time, and make the given situation objective.
3. **Distraction of attention, ($p \leq 0,01$), 99% significance:** "averting manoeuvre, the person steps out of the situation and postpones to interfere."² This type of coping strategy is rather typical of women, since with adopting the appropriate communication, they can distract their companion's attention from the real problem, meanwhile postponing the actual solution to the situation.

¹ Original quotation in OLÁH Attila: *Érzelmek, megküzdés és optimális élmény*, Budapest, Trefort Kiadó, 2005. p. 69.

² Ibid p. 69.

4. **Emotion emptying, ($0,05 \leq p \leq 0,1$), 90% significance:** The level of significance is the lowest at this scale which is rather explained as tendency. Due to the better verbal communication skills, women can express their emotions better and more often than men, since the social system demands men to solve their crisis situations on their own. This expectation prevails especially with those men choosing a military career, since military life is inconsistent with emotionalism as well as speaking about emotions in details with fellow soldiers.
5. **Self punishment, ($p \leq 0,01$), 99% significance:** As men share their information about their emotions or crisis situation less with their surroundings, they rather punish themselves for not being able to solve the given situation. Men are under pressure by society as well, especially as a soldier, to gain success independently either in their career as well as in private life. Since women often analyse the situation with certain problems from different points of view, due to their communication skills they are less likely to blame themselves for not being able to solve the situation full of tension.

With regards to the coping strategies, on the basis of Megküzdési Mód Preferencia Kérdőív (Coping Way Preference Questionnaire), these are the following areas where differences between genders can be revealed in a situation with psychical burden:

1. **Pursuit of support: ($0,01 \leq p \leq 0,05$), 95% significance:** Compared to the results of peace time, there is no considerable change in view of the pursuit of support, the significant difference is still remarkable.
2. **Tension control: ($p \leq 0,01$), 99% significance:** A more powerful difference between genders has developed comparing to that of the peace time. Women endeavour even more to keep the situation full of tension under their control. This kind of increased self-restraint can appear due to the pressure to prove from the women's side. In the earlier chapters I have already given account of the fact that if a woman wants to prove to be professional in her military career, she must do much more to reach her goal than her male fellow. Due to the effect of prejudice that encircle women with military bounds, a strong pressure to prove and to be suitable develops in women with profession consciousness. Under mission circumstances, women want to keep up more, which can strengthen tension control ability.
3. **Distraction of attention: ($0,01 \leq p \leq 0,05$), 95% significance:** Compared to the peace time, the significant difference between gender still exists, that is, both men and women try to react problem centred in operation field, since in a mission only the precise exploration and solution of the problem can help to solve the given situation. If it is not successful, even the lives of the fellows can be put at risk.
4. **Emotion focus: ($0,01 \leq p \leq 0,05$), 95% significance:** the considerable differences evolving on this scale are considered as new results comparing to that of in peace time. 'In case of emotion focus adoption, the efforts of the person tend towards to put an end to the negative, uncomfortable emotional condition that was brought about by the sense of threat.'³ This change is due to the fact that the emotion focus of men diminishes in comparison with the original state of theirs, however, the emotion focus

³ Ibid p. 69.

of women rises in a small compass only. In a mission, the emotion focus type of coping strategy is pushed into the background among military men, since it is not an accepted behaviour to show emotions in war situation in front of the community, commander, and other fellows. On the other hand, military men start to feel “serviceable”, since they help people and nations by their military activity, which leads to the hypothesis that they face fewer conflicts than they got used to at home. The coping strategies they got used to adopting at home are not effective and expedient in a different agent and field.

- 5 **Emotion emptying: ($0,01 \leq p \leq 0,05$), 95% significance:** A more considerable difference has revealed between genders in using the emotion emptying type of coping strategy in a situation with physical burden. This means there is less possibility for using emotion emptying among men. Military men can show and express their emotions with difficulty, which often cause problems for their closest relatives when after the head of the family comes home, the wife and the children want to know what happened to him during his mission abroad. In such cases, it is quite hard for men to talk about the events or traumas they have been through. Moreover, social expectations confirm this kind of “silent” behaviour. However, women still often tend to use the emotion emptying type of coping strategy.

6. **Self punishment: ($0,05 \leq p \leq 0,1$), 90% significance:** the decrease of significance level on the self punishment scale means the decreased use of punishment type of coping strategy among men. According to the surveys used till now, this supposed to be due to the phenomena mentioned earlier, that is, soldiers regard their work serviceable and effective during mission and enjoy “being a soldier at last”. This confirms the consciousness inside him that the soldier has solved the given situation according to his best after sizing up and examining every possibility. On the other hand, this can be due to the result of the sense of being free: the sense of locking up together for a long time can transform into the sense of being locked. After the mission comes to its end, the following feeling might occur inside the soldier: I have just been “released from my prison”, have coped with the situation for months, why should I punish myself?

With regards to the coping strategies, according to the Thomas-Kilmann Test, significant differences can be revealed between genders in the following areas:

1. **Rivalry: ($p \leq 0,01$), 99% significance:** It is shown by the 99% significance level that there is a considerable difference in favour of men with regards to rivalry: due to the evolutionary and socialization factors, men are still more likely to rivalry than women.
2. **Search for compromise: ($0,01 \leq p \leq 0,05$), 95% significance:** as the search for compromise is inevitable regarding family unity as well as it needs quite a lot of communication, women feel this type of coping strategy closer to themselves.
3. **Avoiding: ($p \leq 0,01$), 99% significance:** women often have to use avoiding in order to preserve togetherness and peace within the family. However, the exaggerated use of avoiding can lead to psychosomatic illnesses⁴ in many cases.

⁴ Psychosomatic illnesses are those illnesses where psychical burdens shape in physical symptoms. According to present-day researches, allergy, eczema, Crohn-illness, and different types of heart and circulatory diseases are also regarded to be such illnesses.

4. **Adjustment: ($0,01 \leq p \leq 0,05$), 95% significance:** after rivalry, this is the second among coping strategies, in which men seem to be „better” than women. This is a surprising result, since rivalry and adjustment are less compatible with each other. Our developing world and emancipation might be the consequence of the fact that women start to become mannish in the interests of their rights, and this might be the first step. On the other hand, if we trace back this question to evolutionary factors, it was inevitable for men during hunts to support and nourish their families, and to survive that they adjusted in compliance with changing circumstances. However, the military hierarchy does not make it possible for soldiers to often use rivalry.

We can see that with regards to the coping strategies, there are significant differences between genders in all the five fields. The explanation for these can be the anatomical, evolutionary changes, changes of socialization and that of the society in the 21st century, and the equal rights for women that came into limelight.

With regards to the coping strategies, according to the Thomas-Kilmann Test, significant differences can be revealed between genders in a situation with psychical burden in the following areas:

1. **Rivalry: ($p \leq 0,01$), 99% significance:** differences between genders evolving in rivalry still exist in a situation with psychical burden.
2. **Problem solution: ($0,01 \leq p \leq 0,05$), 95% significance:** the 95% significance level remains since the endeavour for problem solution increases to a small extent both among men and women in the state of being after a mission (see diagram 7. and 8.), which is inevitable in operation field. There is no time for devising compromises there, since people can die during the time we spend for matching interests or adopting a common policy. However, the danger exists that soldiers look for problems in such situations where there are not any by exaggerated search for problems.
3. **Avoiding: ($0,01 \leq p \leq 0,05$), 95% significance:** regarding avoiding, the difference between genders diminishes due to the fact that women adopt this type of solution method less under mission circumstances probably because it is not expedient in war situation.

The difference between genders disappears regarding the strategies of search for compromise and adjustment. Both men and women react to the situation full of tension with diminishing the search for compromise since it is a time-consuming type of solution as there is no time for matching interests under wartime circumstances. However, women become more adaptive since they have to adapt to the conception of the group and the commander to the utmost to be received into a group of men mainly.

In my PhD thesis I wanted to analyse such a field in details, where the results can be important not only for the experts who see active service at armed corps, but also make our everyday interpersonal relations more transparent.

Coping strategies, reaction to the surroundings, and conflict resolution are all of high importance in soldiers' lives, especially if they do their military service in a foreign country. If we decipher the differences between genders in the fields of coping strategies and conflict resolution, we can choose the people, especially for operation field, more specifically and

precisely in the course of selection. We should not disregard the fact that preserving psychological health should be considered to be of stressed importance above all. Due to the effect of continuous psychological burden, the psychological balance can collapse, which can leave its mark on the quality of work being done in the home country in peace time as well.