



**UNIVERSITY OF PUBLIC SERVICE
FACULTY OF MILITARY SCIENCES AND OFFICER TRAINING
DOCTORAL SCHOOL OF MILITARY SCIENCES**

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thesis brochure of the Doctoral (PhD) dissertation entitled
**Aspects of mental assistance, in particular disaster management
and military roles**

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RESEARCH TOPIC

The experience of recent years is increasingly showing - unfortunately - that disasters, crises, have become a fundamental part of our lives. In many cases, we cannot avoid these disasters, but we can mitigate their destructive effects with sufficient preparedness.

Increasing number of research results in the sciences have broadened people's experiences of various difficult social phenomena as well as natural and civilizational disasters. Rapidly evolving technology increases the chances of preparation, thus prevention would be more efficient. The professionals performing the primary intervention appear on the spot as the first contact during disasters. During carrying on their professional duties, they can frequently be under considerable psychological pressure, so they are often unable to provide mental support for others. Members of rescue services are living in a constant state of increased stress, their adrenaline levels are high, which can have negative long term effects. The staff of the defence services clearly needs mental support. This system is primarily waiting for the psychologists of the defence service organization in Hungary, whose capacity is not sufficient for full support in many cases, so the research about providing mental support efficiently and the necessity of its further development have become essential.

The intervention staff and the soldiers are also under extreme stress, so it would be necessary to monitor proper mental health. Stressors have already been identified by civilian science for citizens, but there are additional life situations with extreme stress for soldiers that are not explored yet. Research on resilience to mental injuries is necessary at both the individual and community levels, because currently neither the aspects nor the opportunities for increasing the resilience of rescue staff have been identified.

In addition to their professional training, the intervention staff should be aware of the degree of their mental training in order to avoid the occurrence of depression, possibly post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Military medicine and military psychology agree that while the losses caused by weapons decrease as a result of combat experience, mental problems may increase due to the time spent in combat activities. Thus, it becomes necessary to use the possibilities of psychosocial support in military tasks as well. The role of mental supporters is increasing, because they can strengthen group cohesion so that they can give strength to re-start, but the requirements for the supporters are waiting to be formulated.

Psychosocial assistance is a responsible activity that also requires certain competencies. As security challenges and threat situations have changed, we also need to monitor changes in the

competencies needed for support, especially to identify the competencies needed for the supporting activities of military and disaster management leaders. Situations resulting from disasters require mental crisis management, that is, a complex assistance. Disaster management staff are the first arriving at the locations of disasters, so those involved must also provide mental support, but their requirements are not defined.

The defence system, and the role of the authorities during an emergency, is a key component in the management and coordination of assistance, as it is their legal duty to take care of those involved.

RESEARCH PROBLEMS AND QUESTIONS

Psychosocial well-being is a fundamental need, and in the event of its interruption, stabilization is needed. The steps for this are: emotional stabilization, redesign, rehabilitation, stabilization. Processing the effects and consequences of disasters can differ in different individual persons, helpers and rescue staff, so preparing for this multifaceted task is very important. The question arises that what effects the rescue team will have, what the consequences will be, and how psychic preparedness can reduce the negative effects. Primary intervention professionals are the first point of contact during a disaster, when people are still in danger, so they are expected to help. Rescue, fast and professional care, mobilizing the right resources are all their job. Examining the various aspects of psychosocial assistance, it can be concluded that psychological screening of rescue professionals or volunteers is essential for their effective work.

Mental assistance is a very complex and multifaceted task, therefore during my research I dealt only with mental assistance in connection with disaster management and defence tasks.

ACTUALITY OF THE RESEARCH

It is a known phenomenon that during emergency situations some people react with narrowed mind and are unable to make a decision, even if in theory he knows perfectly well what the right decision would be. Others, on the contrary, turn off reality and the things around them, saving hundreds of lives with a good decision, calmly. It is a proven fact that frequently repeated stress situations can cause psychic break of varying depths in experienced individuals, possibly even in mission soldiers. People who have experienced difficult situations are trying to recover. People usually want to do something against hopelessness and despair, so mental assistance and crisis intervention can be a good solution for them. Assistance to a soldier experiencing battlefield stress reactions should begin as soon as possible, after recognition, and near the battlefield. In peacetime, soldiers face the same common crises as civilians. A crisis is not an individual problem as it affects environmental factors (family, workplace) and a leader has a duty to realize and be aware of the crisis. Special attention is needed when intensity of crises is extreme, such as when disasters occur. Research in this area and its results can also help leaders and other helpers in practice.

A crisis is a fundamentally negative experience. Defence services and soldiers can also find themselves in a situation where the crisis becomes dangerous and critical. Things and situations that were hitherto believed to be stable are changing, and the problem-solving abilities that was hitherto believed to be strong and secure is not enough to change or deal with their actual situation. A crisis can trigger anxiety. In this case, their task performance is narrowed and their solutions may become irrational. At the same time, by successfully managing the crisis, stakeholders can learn about new coping strategies. Crisis intervention is aimed at resolving a crisis situation with the intention of helping. In many cases, for example, soldiers discuss their stress with each other during emergencies. They can see each other's emotional state, support each other in the actual situation, and use crisis intervention unknowingly. However, the conscious application of these crisis intervention techniques can be more effective, so it is important to research the forms and ways of support and propose modern solutions and training. Missions, long-term absences have also changed family relationships, potentially causing many difficulties. Possible divorces, the processing of everyday problems, the necessity of mental renewal also justify the involvement of helpers. At the same time, the examination of the role of the leader and the camp pastoral service in this process, as well as the necessary abilities, can

help in the processes aimed at establishing and increasing the mental resilience to emergency situations.

RESEARCH HYPOTHESES

1. I predict that Camp Pastors could provide adequate support to the staff about preventing negative psychological phenomena. I hypothesize that the main historical points in the camp pastoralism can be identified and future expectations can be proposed. Representatives of religious organizations, camp pastors, are able to provide a protected spiritual community after crises and traumas.
2. I predict that the risk of mental injuries due to emergency situations arising from the tasks of disaster management and the military can be reduced by a complex mental assistance service, which I propose.
3. I assume that staff of disaster management and military leaders can be an effective helper in avoiding a crisis if, in addition to his professional competencies, he has adequate competencies, which I formulate based on my research.
4. I predict that the requirements for mental assistance need to be redefined in the light of both the new military and security challenges, and the specific characteristics of impact on the military and disaster management forces.

My choice of topic was also justified by the fact that I can live and experience my research topic from several aspects. I have been serving for 30 years as a professional soldier, where I meet the possibilities of providing assistance within the organization of the Military of Hungary as a defence service on a daily basis. Disasters, and the responses to them, require different solutions in each individual case, and the need for mental assistance has always been recognized in response. In my civilian life, I also act as an active mental helper in such events. I also had the opportunity to participate in the work of open aid organizations, so I was able to examine whether the process of defence, humanitarian assistance, and personal counselling becomes a whole together with mental support in the practice.

OBJECTIVES

My objectives for investigating, answering and presenting the research problem of improving mental support are the following:

- I analyse the most important milestones in the development of mental support and compare it with its current state. Then, I determine future expectations and analyse how can we reach those conditions.
- I examine the life situations in which soldiers need mental support, in order to compile a list of critical life situations and suggest forms of intervention in a methodological summary table.
- I use empirical research to examine the psychological burdens on professionals in the field of defense services in connection with their work, as well as their perceptions of emotional intelligence.
- I systematize sources of stress factors falling to the lot of soldiers, and examine the exposure of individuals and communities to mental injuries and resilience factors in order to compile a „stress map” and propose activities to increase resilience.
- By analysing and evaluating the issue of mental assistance, I emphasise the need for the psychosocial helper work of support services and individuals, such as camp pastors etc. Additionally, I propose the establishment and operation of a special service with modern methods.
- I develop an operational and alert plan for mental assistance that can serve as a good form of crisis intervention in the disaster management system of the Military of Hungary.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

During my research, I used several research methods in order to meet the research objectives:

1. I came to inductive and deductive conclusions primarily through the analysis of the literature, but in the questionnaire research I also used mathematical and statistical methods to draw conclusions.
2. During data collection, I worked from several sources, keeping the principle of “only one source is not a source”. I tried to supplement my research work with my knowledge gained in the army, my experience as a mental assistant for several years, and the conclusions that can be drawn from my interviews.
3. I followed a general research methodology, I mostly used the method of analysis and synthesis, and I performed an adaptation study.
4. I studied and processed the national and international literature related to my research topic. I separated the collected literature into logical units, and then synthesized the theoretical and practical findings.
5. I consulted with national and international experts. The interviews conducted increased the knowledge and the background material for the study of the topic.
6. I have incorporated the consequences drawn from the disaster and crisis situations I have experienced in my work.
7. I used my experience gained during my study trip abroad to formulate conclusions.
8. I published my research results in professional publications for the purpose of wide dissemination, and I incorporated the reflections into my conclusions and suggestions.
9. I also examined the currently applied national and international legal environment related to the topic.

The research work was facilitated by the large amount of literature available on the topic. In addition, I had the opportunity to gain insight into the methodology of examining the effectiveness of scientific results, literature and training related to mental assistance of the Military of Hungary in connection with my work and position. In-person interviews helped to learn about the work of Camp Pastors and the opportunities for mental assistance at the commanding officers’ level. These experiences may complement well the resilience development guidelines.

The gained experience highlighted the shortcomings of the existing system, the necessity of analysing my research topic, and the exploration of the possibilities for further development.

My supervisors, the teachers of the University of Public Service were also contributed to the success of my research, whose helpfulness, professional experience, research and publications helped me throughout my work.

My research work was hampered by the fact that, considering the Hungarian literature, there is insufficient scientific research on the system of mental support for combat units in the light of the new challenges, so I based my research on international sources, analyses and personal interviews, which often slowed down my work.

STRUCTURE OF THE DISSERTATION

Chapter I of my dissertation deals with the historical background of mental assistance. I present the presence of health organizations, the difficulties of their research, and the results from the First World War to the present day. I especially focus on the development of the camp pastoral service, proving that mental helpers has been present in the lives of the fighting soldiers since biblical times. I also introduced the aid services that have developed over the last century, such as mental health and telephone counselling. I also tried to summarize and list the organizations that help the lives of military families in difficult times. I provide an international perspective in which I present the spiritual assistance organizations of some NATO member states within the army. I chose countries where I had personal acquaintance and experience, so I can incorporate the personal experiences and opportunities of the soldiers serving there into the dissertation. In this chapter, I examine how these countries help their soldiers in mental crisis, what organizations they have created. I also point out that each country, using its own cultural and historical background, tries to find a solution to help and support the people serving in their defense forces.

In *Chapter II*, I present the sources of stress factors that combat units have to face. I focus on the causes of battlefield stress and possible ways to treat it. I analyse the sources of missionary stress, their appearance at different times and their treatment options. As an important point, I present resilience as ability of coping to external influences, and spiritual and mental self-healing. I also present some of the research results achieved within the Military of

Hungary in relation to resilience, and I also carry out an international outlook in connection with this topic.

In *Chapter III* I examine the important personality traits of mental helpers and the psychological bases of effective mental assistance. I analyse the personality traits, mental components that can make certain people suitable for community helpers, spiritual counsellors. I focus on the issue of emotional and intellectual intelligence. In this regard, I examine who can be considered as a good commander, what are the personality traits that can make a person a real leader to follow. I explore the possibilities to develop emotional awareness and to make a good commander successful in providing mental assistance. I present the role and tasks of the Camp Pastoral Service today. I point out that churches must also pay attention to make both soldiers and civilians feel safe. Additionally, I explore the role of churches in society nowadays.

I present my empirical questionnaire research in *Chapter IV*. I surveyed professionals working in the field of defence about the burdens they face during rescue work. Then, according to the responses and the interviews in the appendix, I propose to set up a support group within the military. I present the members of this group that I consider necessary, the operating model both in face-to-face interactions and using online webinars. The problem I have formulated has been of great importance in recent years, as it must provide an accurate programme for the preparation and protection of citizens, as well as the mental preparedness of the intervening and relief forces. The target group of the empirical research is the intervention staff, as members of the rescue services can also experience psychological difficulties and they may also need help.

CONCLUSIONS

To sum up my research, I phrased the following thesis points:

1. *I analysed* the most important milestones in the development of mental assistance and compared it with its current national state. In the historical overview, I pointed out the main actions that led to the current situation of mental assistance, proving that the pastors have performed outstanding helping activities in the past as well. *I found that* the Military of Hungary is struggling with the challenge of mental helpers are occurring as outsiders in their lives. There is no close connection between soldiers and mental helpers, and although the conditions are existing, those in need still do not use these resources.

2. *I have identified* future expectations of mental assistance and analysed the conditions that could be provided to reach them. *This was supported by* an interview with camp pastors as well as my personal conversation with the team psychologist. The main requirements for participants in professional training *were systematized* in a summary table. With regard to foreign armies, *I have demonstrated* that they provide many examples to follow, but their adaptation studies should be the subject of further research.

3. *I systematized* the sources of stress factors on soldiers and *examined* the exposure of individuals and communities to mental injuries and the degree of resilience to them in relation to the staff of defence services. *I examined and determined* the factors of individual and community resilience, the main ones being emotional intelligence, flexibility, stress management, cohesion, trust, efficiency. Analysing the possibilities of increasing resilience, *I established* the criteria of a resilient community.

4. Using the empirical research and interviews, *I created* a summary table the about factors that can promote and hinder community resilience. From the literature overview and the results of the questionnaire research, *I explored and prepared* a “stress map” of those working in the field of defence, especially of soldiers, which takes into account the life situations that apply specifically to them.

5. *I identified* the competencies required for the leader's supporting activities. By analysing and evaluating the issue of spiritual assistance, *I highlighted* the need and the requirements for psychosocial assistance work of helpers. The main expectation was the important abilities and competencies of the leader, what *I included* in the system.

6. *I examined* the role of the churches in emergency situations, as well as the aid organizations, and *I made suggestions* for the establishment and operation of a multi-disciplinary support service accordingly.

7. Exaggerated overload of members of rescue services and leaders can also affect the physical and mental health. Psychologically improving methods can help to prevent psychosomatic illnesses. The aim is to be able to help to treat what is seen in all intervention teams and to expand the knowledge of crisis psychology of professionals involved in military and disaster management.

I used empirical research to examine the psychological burdens defence professionals suffered in connection with their work, as well as their perceptions of emotional intelligence. *I have developed an operational and alert plan* for mental assistance, which can serve as a good practice for crisis intervention in the disaster management system of the Military of Hungary.

8. *I have found* that in order to ensure successful cooperation, the intervening forces should work together with the citizens and with civilian organizations when disasters occur. With the continuous development of civilization, it can be increasingly demonstrated that effective preparedness reduces the damage caused during disasters. It is true that rapidly evolving technology increases the chances of preparation, yet a sense of vulnerability becomes perceptible. Society expects that the actual crises would be carried out humanely and professionally by coordinated services and organizations. Through the example of the red mud disaster, *I have demonstrated* the need for mental assistance, and by presenting the former and present organization of professional disaster management, *I have demonstrated* their suitability for complex assistance, including the organization of psychosocial support.

NEW RESEARCH RESULTS

1. *Analyzing* the historical practice of mental assistance in the Military of Hungary, I found that the staff of the defence services is struggling with the challenge of mental helpers are occurring as outsiders in their lives. Therefore, in order to find solutions, I prepared a historical overview (1.1) about camp pastoral service, and I proved that camp pastors, as in the past and now, would be able to participate effectively in the mental assistance of soldiers also in the future (3.4).

1/a. *I determined* the specific organizational, personal and methodological characteristics influencing the effectiveness of spiritual assistance (1.3.), (3.1.).

2. *I summarized* the results of my empirical research in a stress map and assigned those components of organizational and task-specific individual and community resilience that can be defined as effective protective factors. *I also identified* organizational and activity-specific factors that can promote and hinder the development of community resilience to support leadership. (2.4.), (2.5.).

3. As a result of my research, *I have demonstrated* that mental assistance is essential in dealing with consequences of disasters, but in order to adapt to new organizational tasks, a constant follow-up examination is needed. In this way, the current effective method of assistance can be flexibly modified to address current problems. *I also determined* the expected personality traits of disaster management and military leaders necessary for the role of an effective mental assistance (3.2.), (3.3.).

4. *I have demonstrated* through case studies that not only professionals but also intervention staff need to be prepared and aware of the need for psychological assistance. In connection, I have demonstrated the need to establish a mental support service that prepares intervention staff for mental assistance. Additionally, I proposed its structure and operation and demonstrated the need for integrative cooperation of human needs organizations in order to provide a higher level of psychosocial and mental support and ensure efficient organizational functioning as an independent psychological support service (4.5).

DEDICATION

The dissertation comprehensively demonstrates the great need for assistance in disasters, crises, and emergencies, including mental assistance. I have demonstrated that the mental vulnerability of disaster management services and the military can be reduced by proper activities of psychosocial assistance.

I recommend my dissertation for further research that comprehensively examine the methods of mental assistance and explore how the body and soul can live in perfect harmony.

I recommend accommodating my results to those who apply scientific research work.

I recommend learning my dissertation to crisis intervention groups who can combine the psychological aspects of the mental assistance and the practical performance of the professional helpers.

I also recommend it to the specialists of disaster management and the army, to the lecturers and students of the University of Public Services. The Institute for Disaster Management and the Disaster Management Education Center, the Ministry of Defense, to the Human Service of the National Directorate General for Disaster Management, as results of my research provide practical assistance in the implementation of protection tasks.

I recommend my dissertation to those professionals in defense services and commanders who dare to take mental assistance of their soldiers into a new way.

For leaders who efficiently combine scientific research findings with their own hands-on experience.

I recommend it to all involved in the assistance services who want to help with all their might, and they might grab the opportunity to achieve the goal, and treat religion, faith, and education for a helping lifestyle as a new opportunity.

PUBLICATION LIST

Publications in English in national journals:

Budo versus Christianity The Possibilities of Counseling and Psychological Aid in Disaster Managemet. AARMS, Academic and Applied Research in Military and Public Management Science; Volume 14, Issue 3, 2015.

Tsunami in Japan. TRADECRAFT REVIEW, Periodical of The Military National Security Service. 2012/3. Special Issue.

Hungarian publications in authoritative journals (A, B, C, D categories of the National Academy of Sciences):

A cunami kialakulásának okai.
Hadmérnök, VII: 1 pp. 129-135., 7 p. (2012)

A cunami előrejelzése.
Hadmérnök, XXI: 1 pp. 66-77., 12 p. (2012)

A Sri-Lankai szökőár.
Bolyai Szemle: 2011: 2 pp. 73-81., 9 p. (2011)

Az egyház és a társadalom kapcsolata.
Hadmérnök, VIII: 4 pp. 265-271., 7 p. (2013)

A lelki segítségnyújtás jelentősége a katasztrófák során.
Szakmai Szemle, 2014: 1 pp. 180-187., 8 p. (2014)

A pszichés viselkedések szerepe katasztrófavédelemben
Szakmai Szemle, 2014: 3 pp. 214-223., 10 p. (2014)

A lelki segítségnyújtás katasztrófavédelmi aspektusának értékelése.
Védelem Tudomány, 2021. 3. 14 p. (2021)

CURRICULUM VITAE OF THE DOCTORAL CANDIDATE

Name: Róbert Zsákai

Place and date of born: Hódmezővásárhely, 02. 11. 1974.

Professional work:

In 1993, he graduated from the Military of Hungary Officer Training Vocational High School. He then continued his studies in theology at St. Paul's Academy, where he graduated in theology in 2008.

From 2009 he continued his university studies at the Department of Defense Leading of the Miklós Zrínyi University of National Defense, where he graduated in disaster management in 2011 as a certified MSc Head of Defense officer.

He started his studies in 2012 at the Doctoral School of Military Sciences at University of Public Services. The year of obtaining the Graduate Certificate: 2015.

Since 1999 he has been involved in religious church pastoral duties. His professional experience as church pastor, as well as the perceived needs for mental care during his nearly 30 years of service in the Military of Hungary, prompted him to write his doctoral dissertation on the topic of mental assistance.

Regarding his professional career, he participated in:

- the prison mission of the Sopronkőhida Prison by reorganizing the prison clergy in accordance with the official agreement of the National Command for the Execution of Sentences. As a result, it was possible to receive mental care on a monthly basis and to monitor their successful integration into society;
- a telephone pastoral service;
- care of young people between the ages of 18 and 24 to discuss their own problems and performing self-knowledge tasks;
- teaching religion and ethics courses for primary school students;
- relationship counselling during marital crises.

As a volunteer, he participates in humanitarian aid, in cooperation with local aid organizations, in the distribution of food and clothing to the needy living in the Veszprém micro-region, and in the collection of donations

Scientific work:

His main research topic is the possibility of mental, psychological assistance among the population affected by disasters, and the need for mental assistance in aid and defence services.

One of his key research areas is to strengthen the effective role of the Church in providing mental assistance that meets the needs of society.

His research also covers the mental processing of the mission experiences of soldiers serving in the Military of Hungary. Furthermore, to explore new scientific findings that increase the effectiveness of the military camp pastoral service.

He emphasises the attention of the soldiers and commanders working in his unit to the importance of their mental health during the performance of national defence duties, as the need for mental training is essential for the successful performance of their task. He particularly takes special care to draw the attention of his colleagues and employees to the importance of the family.

He published his research results both individually and as co-author, both in Hungarian and in English in journals of AARMS, Tradecraft Review, Bolyai Szemle, Szakmai Szemle és a Hadmérnök. Currently he published eight publications in peer-reviewed scientific journals, and an additional publication is in progress.

He has attended a scientific conference as a presenter.

Languages: German, English

Further research plans:

To monitor the relationship between religion, science and society and their effects on each other, and to examine the possibilities arising from combining them in the future.

He is a member of the Balatonfüred Hungarian-Israeli Circle of Friends Association.

The purpose of the association:

Presentation, acquaintance and popularization of the cultural, artistic, historical, economic, social and spiritual values and traditions of historical Israel and modern Israel State and people

in Balatonfüred and its region, and promoting the presentation of the values of Balatonfüred and the Balaton Upland region in Israel. Promoting Judeo-Christian dialogue, taking action against all forms of anti-Semitism and anti-Zionism.

Company roles:

1993 – 2018.08.31.	Former organisations of Hungarian Defence Forces 54th Veszprém Radar Regiment
2018.09.01 – 2019.11.14.	Hungarian Defence Forces 54th Veszprém Radar Regiment, Leader organisation, Action leading office, advanced guard non-commissioned officer
2019.11.15 –	Hungarian Defence Forces 54th Veszprém Radar Regiment, Leader organisation, Action leading office, advanced guard officer
2020.08.01-	MH LMVIK Garrison Support Headquarters, Comendant line, platoon commander