

PERSONALITY OF POLISH SOLDIERS AND THEIR WAY OF STRESS COPING DURING BOSNIA PEACEKEEPING MISSION

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ABSTRACT

There has been much concern about psychological consequences of stress during peacekeeping operation. The Polish Army is interested in how soldiers manage psychological stressor at various phases of mission. The paper deals with theoretical models describing coping style of stress "Eysenck"TM dimension (e.g. extraversion) relationships unfold in time. The aim of this study was to recognise and evaluate stress-coping styles developed by Polish soldiers during the peacekeeping operations in Bosnia (SFOR) in comparison with other Polish soldiers who were not there. The experimental group consisted of 50 soldiers taking part of UN peacekeeping mission in Bosnia and the control group involved 50 of soldiers from Representative Company of Polish Army. The another issue was to highlight the mechanisms of coping and to understand its value for individual soldiers. The preliminary results indicated some significant differences between groups which can be explained as a result of previous psychological selection.

There are different stressors affecting SFOR soldiers. These include both physical, psychological and sociological stress sources, and environmental factors and requires. The physical factors include geographical conditions under which military service is performed. The main psychological stress factors, connected with the participation in SFOR Peace Missions are danger, social deprivation and group characteristics. Military service always entails danger. It is very much the same as combat continuous awareness of danger, coping with anxiety and fear. Living far from the homeland results in treating everyday problems more seriously. No messages from home and bad news can be considered disastrous. General conditions and the nature of mission require intensive self-control. Besides, the soldiers have to observe numerous rules and orders, the duties performed are often tedious and the soldiers are highly dependent on their superiors (autocratic management style – typical for the army), so conflicts can be easily evoked. The social environment is different from that the soldiers used to live in.

Personality and Stress Coping

Statistics can evidence the preferable ways of stress coping in soldiers with certain personality traits. Psychologists have been interested in the ways people adapt to adverse conditions and fight stress. H. Eysenck (1970) assumes that individuals with level of neuroticism prefer the way of stress coping which is concentrated on emotions. Extroverts most often choose the style which is rather task oriented. N. Endler and J. Parker (1990), much the same as H. Eysenck (1970), claim that neuroticism is related to stress coping, concentrated on emotions, with a tendency to escape, stress avoidance and self accusation. Low level of neuroticism is characterised by stress coping style called “contact searching”, which is the sub-scale of the avoidance oriented style. It consists in “neutralising” a stressful situation by contacts with friends, and talking about the ways of finding a rational solution to overcome stress, asking for opinions and different viewpoints upon the same situation. Low level of neuroticism may prove a high tolerance to stress and emotional stability, enabling rational analysis of the stressful situation. Introverts prefer the style concentrated on emotions; they are more introspective and more often experience emotional tension. As R. Lazarus and Susan Folkman suggest (1984, 1987) that some strategies of stress coping which may be noticed in both styles (action oriented and emotion oriented), depend on the personality, and especially on the tendency to experience positive or negative moods. In their studies, J. Strelau and P. Szczepaniak (1994, Strelau, 1996, p. 107) have proved that the task oriented stress coping style correlates with the features of temperament which are task oriented, while the emotion oriented style is connected with temperamental traits, concentrated on emotions (e.g. emotional reactivity).

Hypotheses

Based on the theories presented above, as well as some concepts and study reports, we may assume that there is a correlation between personality factors according to H. Eysenck and the styles of stress coping.

To be more particular, we can assume that:

1. A high level of the extroversion factor results in the task oriented style of stress coping by an individual;
2. A low level of the extroversion factor (high introversion level) results in the emotion oriented style of stress coping.
3. A high level of psychotics results in the emotion oriented style of stress coping.
4. A low level of psychotics results in the task oriented style of stress coping and searching for contacts.
5. A high level of the neurotic factor results in the emotion oriented style of stress coping.
6. A low level of neuroticism results in the task oriented style of stress coping and searching for contacts.

Moreover, we can assume that the experimental group is characterised by a higher intensity of the extroversive factor and the lower intensity of neurotic and psychotic factors than the controls, therefore the experimental soldiers will more often choose the task oriented style of stress coping as compared with the controls.

Studies:

In order to verify H.J. Eysenck's hypotheses concerning the correlation of personality, and the way of stress coping, psychological studies were performed in 100 soldiers, aged 18-26, 50 from SFOR and another 50 – from the Representative Company of Polish Armed Forces. Two survey techniques were applied, namely Eysenck Personality Questionnaire – Revised (EPQ-R) and Coping Inventory for Stressful Situations (CISS) by N.S. Endler and J.D.A. Parker.

Study Performance

The experimental group consisted of SFOR soldiers. 50 soldiers participated in the survey, 3 questionnaires however, had to be rejected as they were improperly filled in. The control group consisted of 50 soldiers from the Representative Company of Polish Armed Forces.

Significance of Differences

In order to examine the significance of differences between the results obtained in both groups, it was essential to determine variance distribution in the populations under study. This required computing average results and standard deviations for both result scales for the experimental group and the control one. Tables 1 and 2 present these results.

Table 1.

Average EPQ-R results for both groups

Personality	Experimental group		Control group	
	x	SD	x	SD
N	6,78	4,12	11,24	5,47
E	17,49	3,21	15,17	4,02
P	6,62	3,1	8,7	4,76
K	12,34	5,27	10,5	3,99

x-mean value, SD-standard deviation, N-neuroticism, E-extraversion, P-psychoticism, K-control scale

Table 2.

Average CISS results for both groups.

Coping Style	Experimental group		Control group	
	x	SD	x	SD
T	57,53	7,45	53,91	8,12
EM	36,72	8,76	42,22	10
A	51,4	7,49	52,2	7,63
RA	22,6	4,17	23,41	4,63
CS	18,96	3,03	18,22	3,44

T-task oriented, EM-emotion oriented, A-avoidance oriented, RA-reverse attention oriented, CS-contact searching oriented

In order to compare the results obtained in both groups, using each scale, Student t test for independent groups was applied. Application of this test requires the assumption of normal distribution and homogenous variances. Fisher's test was applied to examine equality of variances in both groups. In order to compare the differences between traits with incomparable

variances, the second version of Student t test was applied. The accepted significance level was $\alpha = 0.05$. Tables 3 and 4 present the results of Fisher's and Student t test.

Table 3.

Values obtained using Fisher's and Student t test for CISS and EPQ-R in both groups.

Personality	Fisher' Test		Student' Test t -		
	F	α_F	t	df	p
N	1,76	0,059	- 4,45	91	0,000*
E	1,56	0,135	3,08	91	0,003*
P	2,36	0,004	- 2,50	91	0,014*
K	1,75	0,063	1,89	91	0,061

As far as personality is concerned, the differences between the experimental group and the control one proved to be statistically significant for: the neuroticism factor ($t = -4.45$; $p = 0.000$), extroversion factor ($t = 3.08$; $p = 0.003$), psychotics factor ($t = -2.50$; $p = 0.0014$). The results suggest that the extroversion factor level is higher in SFOR soldiers compared to Representative Company soldiers. These soldiers are also characterised by a lower neuroticism and psychotics factor level than the controls.

The experimental group obtained high results in the lie scale. This could be explained by the fact that the subjects were selected for SFOR units, therefore they treated the studies as an additional selection that was made in order to determine their ability to perform a peace mission.

Table 4.

Values obtained in Fisher's and Student t tests for CISS Questionnaire applied in both groups.

Coping Style	Test Fishera		Test t - Studenta		
	F	α_F	t	df	p
T	1,19	0,563	2,24	91	0,027*
EM	1,31	0,375	- 2,82	91	0,006*
A	1,04	0,899	- 0,51	91	0,615
RA	1,23	0,494	- 0,90	91	0,373
CS	1,29	0,395	1,11	91	0,274

The differences between the results obtained in both groups, regarding stress coping styles, proved to be statistically significant for: the task oriented style ($t = 2.24$; $p = 0.027$), emotion oriented style ($t = -2.82$; $p = 0.006$). The analysis of stress coping styles shows that there are no differences in stress coping regarding avoidance, diverting attention and searching for contacts, the controls however, obtain higher results in task oriented stress coping. The reverse correlation occurred for emotion oriented stress coping with higher results obtained by the control group.

Studying correlation between the variables

Pearson r correlation was applied to study the relations between personality factors and stress coping styles. Tables 5 and 6 present the data concerning correlations between the variables.

Table 5
Correlation between Eysenck's personality dimensions and stress coping styles for the experimental group

Coping Style	Personality			
	N	E	P	K
T	- 0,310 p = 0,836	0,146 p = 0,327	0,101 p = 0,502	- 0,290 p = 0,846
EM	0,694 p = 0,000*	0,012 p = 0,937	0,192 p = 0,197	- 0,368 p = 0,011*
A	0,121 p = 0,420	0,154 p = 0,303	0,005 p = 0,974	0,119 p = 0,425
RA	0,101 p = 0,499	- 0,121 p = 0,417	- 0,118 p = 0,429	0,074 p = 0,623
CS	- 0,145 p = 0,329	0,403 p = 0,005*	- 0,303 p = 0,038*	0,357 p = 0,014*

In the experimental group, significant correlations occurred between:

- the scale of neuroticism and the emotion-oriented stress coping style ($r = 0.69$, $p = 0.000$);
- extroversion scale and contact-searching-oriented stress coping style ($r = -0.403$; $p = 0.005$);
- psychotics scale and contact-searching-oriented stress coping style ($r = -0.303$; $p = 0.038$);
- lie scale and emotion-oriented stress coping style ($r = -0.368$; $p = .011$);
- lie scale and contact-searching-oriented stress coping style ($r = 0.357$; $p = 0.011$ - lie scale and contact-searching style ($r = 0.357$; $p = 0.014$).

There were significant correlations in the experimental group between the scale of neuroticism and emotion-oriented stress coping style, extroversion scale and contact-searching oriented stress coping style, psychotics scale and contact-searching oriented stress coping style, lie scale and emotion oriented stress coping style. In the first two cases, the correlation was positive. In the remaining cases, negative correlations were noted.

Table 6
Correlation between Eysenck's personality dimensions and stress coping styles for the control group

Coping Style	Personality			
	N	E	P	K
T	- 0,225 p = 0,132	0,369 p = 0,012*	- 0,511 p = 0,000*	0,239 p = 0,110
EM	0,509 p = 0,000*	- 0,053 p = 0,729	0,168 p = 0,264	- 0,297 p = 0,045
A	0,044 p = 0,771	0,482 p = 0,001*	- 0,161 p = 0,285	- 0,190 p = 0,205
RA	0,171 p = 0,256	0,468 p = 0,001*	- 0,077 p = 0,611	- 0,303 p = 0,040*
CS	- 0,125 p = 0,409	0,416 p = 0,004*	- 0,367 p = 0,012*	0,069 p = 0,645

In the control group, significant correlations occurred between:

- the scale of neuroticism and the emotion-oriented stress coping style ($r = 0.509$, $p = 0.000$);
- extroversion scale and task-oriented stress coping style ($r = 0.369$; $p = -0.012$);
- extroversion scale and avoidance-oriented stress coping style ($r = 0.482$, $p = 0.001$);
- extroversion scale and attention diverting-oriented stress coping style ($r = 0.468$, $p = 0.001$);
- extroversion scale and contact-searching-oriented stress coping style ($r = 0.416$; $p = 0.004$);
- psychotics scale and task-oriented stress coping style ($r = 0.511$; $p = 0.000$);

- psychotics scale and contact-searching-oriented stress coping style ($r = - 0.367$; $p = 0.012$);
- lie scale and emotion-oriented stress coping style ($r = - 0.297$; $p = .0045$);
- lie scale and contact-searching- oriented stress coping style ($r = 0.303$; $p = 0.040$).

In the control group, significant correlations occurred between neuroticism and emotion-oriented stress coping style (like in the experimental group), extroversion style and task-oriented stress coping style, extroversion scale and avoidance-oriented stress coping style, extroversion scale and attention-diverting stress coping style, extroversion scale and contact-searching stress coping style, psychotics scale and task oriented-stress coping style, psychotics scale and contact-searching style, lie scale and emotion-oriented stress coping style, lie scale and attention-diverting style.

Based on the above mentioned hypotheses, we can conclude that the experimental group is more extrovert, less neurotic and less psychotic than the control group. In this group, task-oriented stress coping style is preferred, while emotion-oriented style is less often chosen, compared to the control group. The obtained data confirm the hypothesis concerning differences between individuals, in personality factors and stress coping styles being used. The results suggest that:

- A high extroversion level is connected with the contact-searching style
- (correlation found in both groups) and task-oriented stress coping style (statistically significant correlation occurred only in the controls) what allowed to confirm partly the first hypothesis (1).
- A low level of psychotics is connected with preference for the contact-searching style (correlation found in both groups) and the task-oriented style (correlation found in the controls) what allowed to confirm the fourth hypothesis (4).
- A high level of neuroticism is connected with emotion-oconcentrated stress coping style (correlation found in both groups), which allowed to confirm the fifth hypothesis (5).

Moreover, it was concluded that;

- A low level of social approval affects the choice of emotion-concentrated stress coping style (correlation found in both groups) and attention diverting (control group);
- A pronounced tendency towards social approval is connected with the contact searching style (experimental group);
- The results did not allow to confirm the second hypothesis (2) concerning the correlation between introversion and emotion-concentrated coping style, the third hypothesis (3) concerning the relation between a high psychotics level and emotion-oriented stress coping style and the sixth hypothesis (6) concerning the relation between a low level of neuroticism and contact-searching-oriented stress coping style. The results may be interesting, particularly for military psychologists as they complete the results of studies on the consequences of military service under particularly adverse conditions.