



THE PERCEIVED CHARACTERISTICS OF MISSIONS ABROAD, THE EMOTIONAL DISTRESS OF THE ROU MILITARY SPOUSES, AND FAMILIAL COPING MECHANISMS: A MODERATION STUDY

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Goal – to contribute to the development of an evidence-based psychological support program, as part of a Family Support Program

Objective – to investigate the moderating role of the familial coping mechanisms on the relationship between the perceived characteristics of the mission abroad and the level of the emotional distress experienced by the military spouses

Theoretical framework

□ offered by the theories of *family stress and family resilience* applied on the military family:

✓ the concept of family stress, defined as “an upset in the steady state of the family system, which requires that the family make adjustments in order to maintain or regain a sense of coherence (Blaisure et al., 2016, p. 104)

✓ the concept of family coping - refers to strategies, methods, and ways in which family members' concerted efforts are directed to cope with the newly created situation (Blaisure et al., 2016; Walsh, 2003, 2007):

- *family beliefs system* – which “shape how members make meaning of their world ” (Blaisure et al., 2016, p. 119)

- *family organizational patterns* - family members demonstrating “flexibility in their attitudes, thoughts, and behaviors as they respond to the challenges presented by the crisis while also maintaining necessary stability ” (Blaisure et al., 2016, p. 120)

- *communication processes* - include clear messages and information, open emotional sharing of their feelings, tolerating differences in opinions and engaging in positive interactions (Walsh, 2002; Blaisure et al., 2016)

The Main Research Hypothesis/Questions

- Which *stressful aspect* related with the mission abroad makes a better prediction of the *negative emotional state* of the military spouses who rest at home?
- Which of the three family coping mechanisms is a stronger moderator for this relationship?

(H1) The *negative emotional state of the military spouses is best predicted by the combination of all three predictors (the perceived level of risk/difficulty/stress experienced by the militaries)*

(H2) The *positive relationship between the stressful aspects related with the mission abroad and the negative emotional state of the military spouses is stronger when the family beliefs system is less flexible*

The Main Research Hypothesis/Questions

(cont.)

(H3) The *positive relationship* between the *stressful aspects* related with the mission abroad and the *negative emotional state* of the military spouses *is stronger when the family organizational patterns are less flexible*

(H4) The *positive relationship* between the *stressful aspects* related with the mission abroad and the *negative emotional state* of the military spouses *is stronger when the family communication processes are weaker* (less open emotional sharing and less tolerance for different opinions)

Materials and methods

- ❑ 167 spouses (28 men and 139 women), of the military personnel from 3 deployed units to Afghanistan, who filled out a questionnaire regarding:
 - ✓ *how they perceive the level of risk, difficulty and stress experienced by their live partners during the mission abroad – three Likert scales*
 - ✓ *the level of the negative emotions they felt during the mission abroad – a composite scale (resulting from the summ of the scores for six Likert scales)*
 - ✓ *the family coping mechanisms (the family beliefs system, the organizational patterns and the communication processes), used, in general, to cope with stressful situations – three composite scales (resulting from the summ of the several Likert scales for each mechanism)*

Key Questions

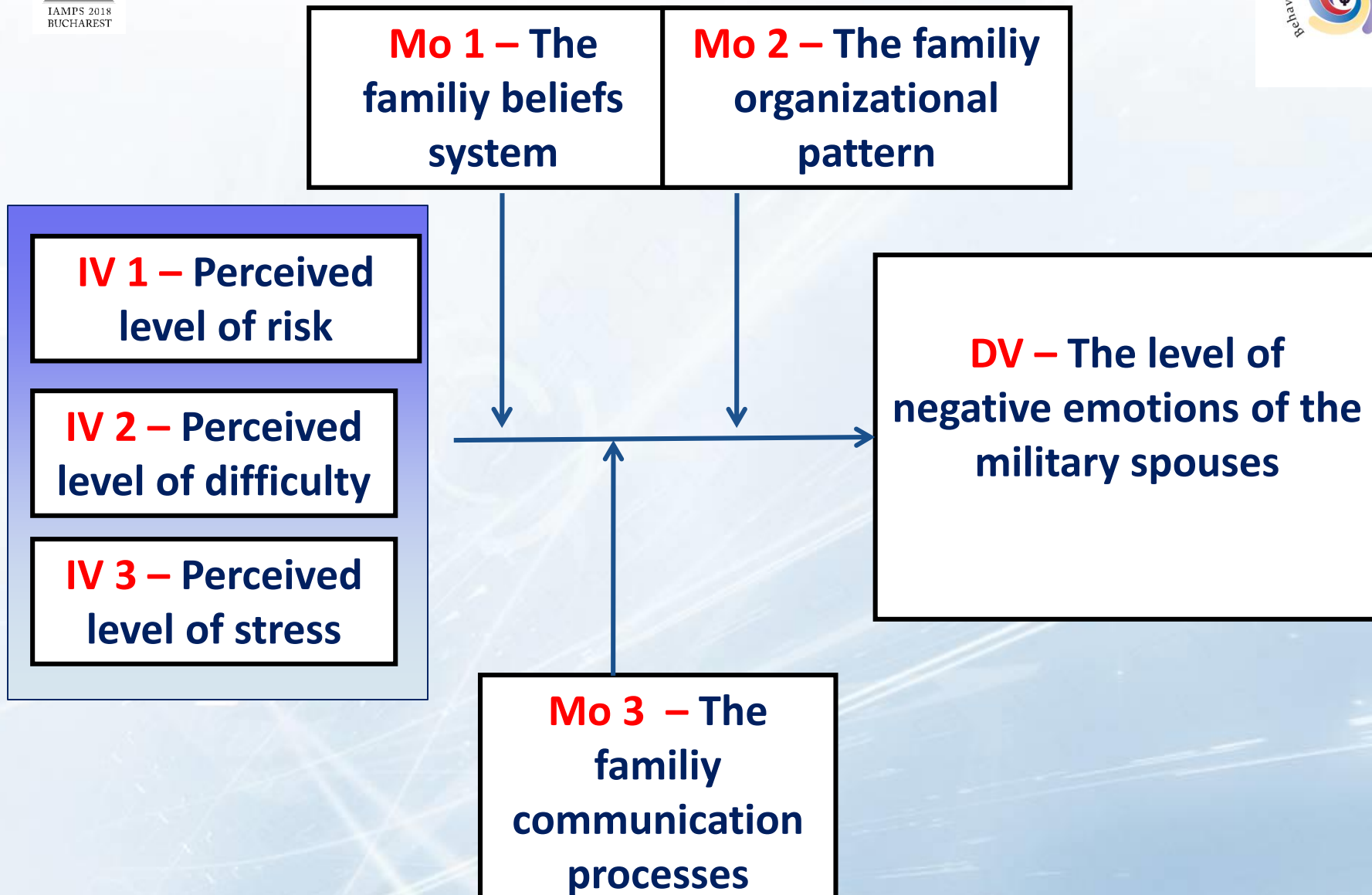


- Level of risk/difficulty/stress experienced by their spouses** – Thinking to the last mission abroad of your spouse, on a scale to 1 to 5 (where 1 means *totaly disagree*, and 5 *totaly agree*), how do you evaluate the following aspects ...? (the mission was very difficult/very risky/very stressful for him/her)(5 level Likert)
- Level of the negative emotions** – To what extent the following terms describe what you felt during the (last) mission abroad? (fear, anger, loneliness, worry, etc.) (5 level Likert each scale → a composite scale with scores from 8 to 40)
- The familiy beliefs system** – We accept the fact that, sometimes, issues/difficulties could appear in our family (5 level Likert each scale → a composite scale with scores from 5 to 25)

Key Questions (cont.)

- The organizational patterns** – In our family, each has its established role, from which we do not deviate (5 level Likert each scale → a composite scale with scores from 7 to 35)
- The communication processes** – In our family, we share our problems and concerns (5 level Likert each scale → a composite scale with scores from 7 to 35)

The conceptual model



Correlations between the Major Study Variables

Table 1. Correlation coefficients between variables

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. The perceived difficulty	-	.73**	.68**	.24**	-.03	-.19*	-.04
2. The perceived risk		-	.64**	.20*	-.05	-.15*	.00
3. The perceived stress experienced by their live partners			-	.33**	.00	-.12	.00
4. Negative emotions of the spouses				-	.00	-.22**	-.01
5. The family beliefs system					-	.32**	.64**
6. The family organizational pattern						-	.37**
7. The family communication processes							-

N= 147, **p<.001, *p<.05

Results

(H1) The *negative emotional state of the military spouses is best predicted by the combination of all three predictors* (the perceived level of risk/difficulty/stress experienced by the militaries)

Table 2. The coefficients for the linear regression models

	R	R ²	St. Err. of Est.	R ² Change	F Change	Sig. F. Change
Model 1 (Predictor 1)	.33	.11	5.68	.11	16.78	.00
Model 2 (Predictor 1, Predictor 2)	.33	.11	5.70	.00	.08	.77
Model 3 (Predictor 1, Predictor 2, Predictor 3)	.33	.11	5.72	.00	.09	.76

Predictor 1 – the perceived level of stress experienced by their military spouses

Predictor 2 – the perceived level of difficulty of the mission

Predictor 3 – the perceived level of the risk of the mission

Results

(H1) The *negative emotional state of the military spouses is best predicted by the combination of all three predictors* (the perceived level of risk/difficulty/stress experienced by the militarys)

Table 3. The coefficients for the linear regression models (cont.)

Variable	Unstand. Coeff.		Beta	t	Sig.
	B	St.Err.			
(Constant)	19.13	1.44		13.27	.00
Model 1 (Predictor 1)	1.88	.46	.33	4.09	.00
Model 2					
Constant	18.99	1.52		12.46	.00
Predictor 1	1.76	.62	.31	2.83	.00
Predictor 2	.16	.57	.03	.28	.77
Model 3					
Constant	19.14	1.61		11.88	.00
Predictor 1	1.81	.64	.32	2.81	.01
Predictor 2	.28	.70	.05	.40	.68
Predictor 3	.20	.68	.02	.30	.76

Predictor 1 - the perceived level of stress experienced by their military spouses

Predictor 2 - the perceived level of difficulty of the mission

Predictor 3 - the perceived level of the risk of the mission

Results

(H2) The *positive relationship* between the *stressful aspects* related with the mission abroad and the *negative emotional state* of the military spouses is *stronger when the family beliefs system is less flexible*

Table 4. The regression coefficients for the first moderation model

Model	Change Statistics						
	R	R ²	Adj. R ²	St. Err. of the Est.	R ² Change	F Change	Sig. F Change
1 (with the perceived level of stress experienced by their military spouses as predictor = p)	.33	.11	.10	5.71	.11	16.58	.00
2 (p, p*family beliefs system)	.33	.11	.09	5.73	.00	.30	.58

Results

(H3) - The *positive relationship* between the *stressful aspects* related with the mission abroad and the *negative emotional state* of the military spouses is *stronger when the family organizational patterns are less flexible*

Table 5. The regression coefficients for the second moderation model

Model	R	R ²	Adj. R ²	St.E rr. of the Est.	Change statistics		
					R ²	F Change	Sig. F Chang
1 (with the perceived level of stress experienced by their military spouses as predictor = p)	.33	.09	.08	5.57	.09	9.71	.00
2 (p, p*family organizational patterns)	.38	.14	.13	5.44	.05	5.31	.01

The low zone of moderation

	Negative emotions	The perceived level of stress
Negative emotions	Pearson Correlation	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.510**
	N	30
The perceived level of stress	Pearson Correlation	.510**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.004
	N	30

The high zone of moderation

	Negative emotions	The perceived level of stress
Negative emotions	Pearson Correlation	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.174
	N	29
The perceived level of stress	Pearson Correlation	.174
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.366
	N	29

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Results

(H4) - The *positive relationship* between the *stressful aspects* related with the mission abroad and the *negative emotional state* of the military spouses is *stronger when the family communication processes are weaker*

Table 6. The regression coefficients for the third moderation model

Model	R	R ²	Adj. R ²	St. Err. of the Est.	Change Statistics		
					R ² Change	F Change	Sig. F Change
1 (with the perceived level of stress experienced by their military spouses as predictor = p)	.35	.12	.12	5.65	.12	19.52	.00
2 (p, p*family communication processes)	.35	.12	.11	5.67	.00	.00	.97

Conclusions



- ❑ The single significant predictor for the negative emotional states of the military spouses was the level of stress of the military personnel during the mission abroad, as it was perceived by their spouses
 - ❑ The only family coping mechanism which has a significant moderating effect on the relationship between the negative emotional states of the military spouses and the perceived level of stress of the military personnel during the mission abroad was the family organizational patterns
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- ❑ In order to develop an evidence-based family support program, it could be important to take into consideration, as *preventive dimension*, the possibility to offer to the military families ways to growth their flexibility in attitudes, familial roles, and behaviors, and to respect differences.



Thank you for your attention!
Questions?