

Resilience training in the Danish army

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Background

Over the last two decades, Denmark has sent 26.000 combat soldiers to Balkan, Iraq and Afghanistan. A large number of veterans have difficulties in adjusting to everyday life after mission and suffer from sub-clinical symptoms of depression, withdrawal, arousal, and insomnia.

The aim of this study was to examine whether resilience training had a positive effect on these symptoms.

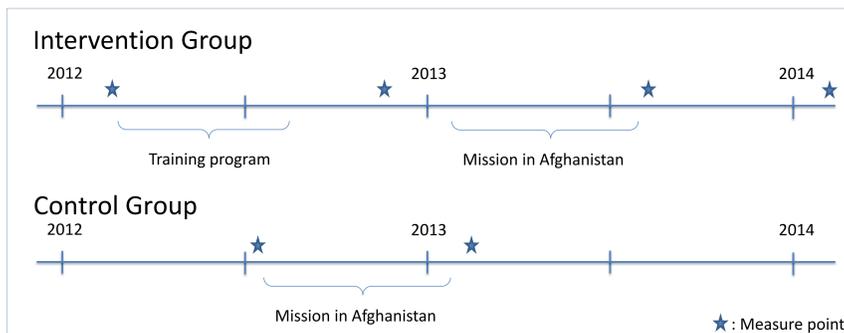


"Everyone of you will need to draw upon your personal robustness in order to address the challenges the mission implies – because you are bound to face a number of challenges."
Major-General Agner Rokos, Chief of Defense, farewell parade for ISAF-15, January 17, 2013

Methods

A pilot study was conducted among a battalion of 130 combat soldiers (ISAF-15) attending a five day course on resilience training prior to departure for Afghanistan. The curriculum included training of cognitive skills, positive emotions, communication and relationships, self-regulation and identifying character strengths using the VIA-Inventory of Strengths. A smartphone app. was designed to enhance continued resilience training on mission. To measure the effect of the resilience training, a survey of 31 questions was distributed (please see Flow chart below). The control group was 23 combat soldiers from ISAF-14.

Study Design – Flow chart

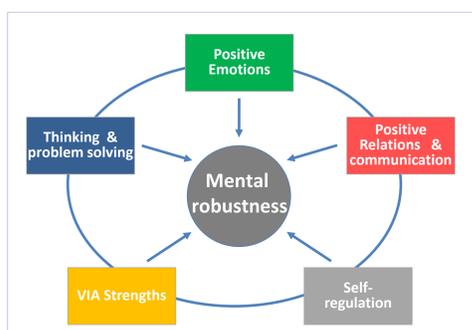


Data Analysis

The survey used consisted of:

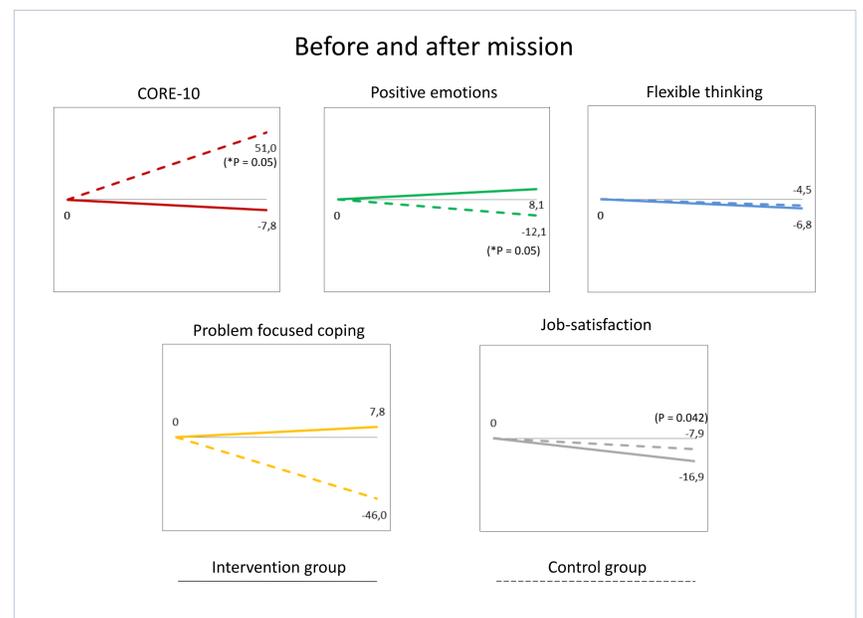
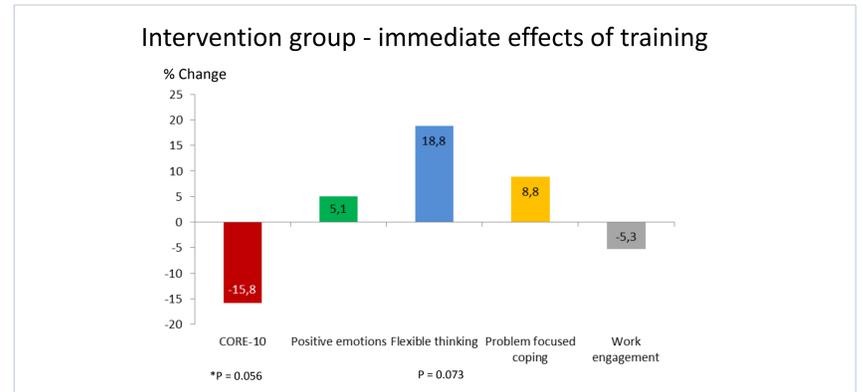
- CORE-10 (Clinical Outcomes in Routine Evaluation), a 10 item questionnaire covering anxiety, depression, trauma, physical problems, functioning - day to day, close relationships, social relationships and risk to self.
- 22 questions covering positive emotions, flexible thinking, problem focused coping and work engagement were validated by correlation analysis, Cronbach's α and factor analysis. $\alpha \geq 0.7$ for all but one question which was dismissed.
- The data of the intervention group and the control group were compared by Wilcoxon signed rank

The Training Program



Results

The immediate results of the resilience training were less symptoms of distress, higher scores concerning positive emotions, flexible thinking, problem focused coping and job satisfaction on a significantly/almost significantly level compared to the control group. These results persisted after mission in Afghanistan and after 6 months at home in Denmark, except for job satisfaction which was reduced. The control group at baseline started out better than the intervention group, but exhibited symptoms of distress at a significant level after mission. Job satisfaction fell more in the control group compared to the intervention group.



Discussion

The control group at baseline scored lower=started out better than the intervention group. This could be explained by the fact that 44% had never been on mission before – where as only 6% of the intervention group faced their first mission. No Danish soldiers were killed in any of these missions, but never the less the control group had higher levels of symptoms of distress and lower scores of positive emotions, flexible thinking and problem-focused coping.

Conclusion

This study implies that offering resilience training to combat soldiers prior to mission has a significant impact on their well-being. The two follow ups - after 6 months of mission in Afghanistan – and after 6 months back in Denmark showed that the training had lasting effect. This was a pilot study and it would be desirable to reproduce the study in order to confirm that the results are valid.

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