

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.

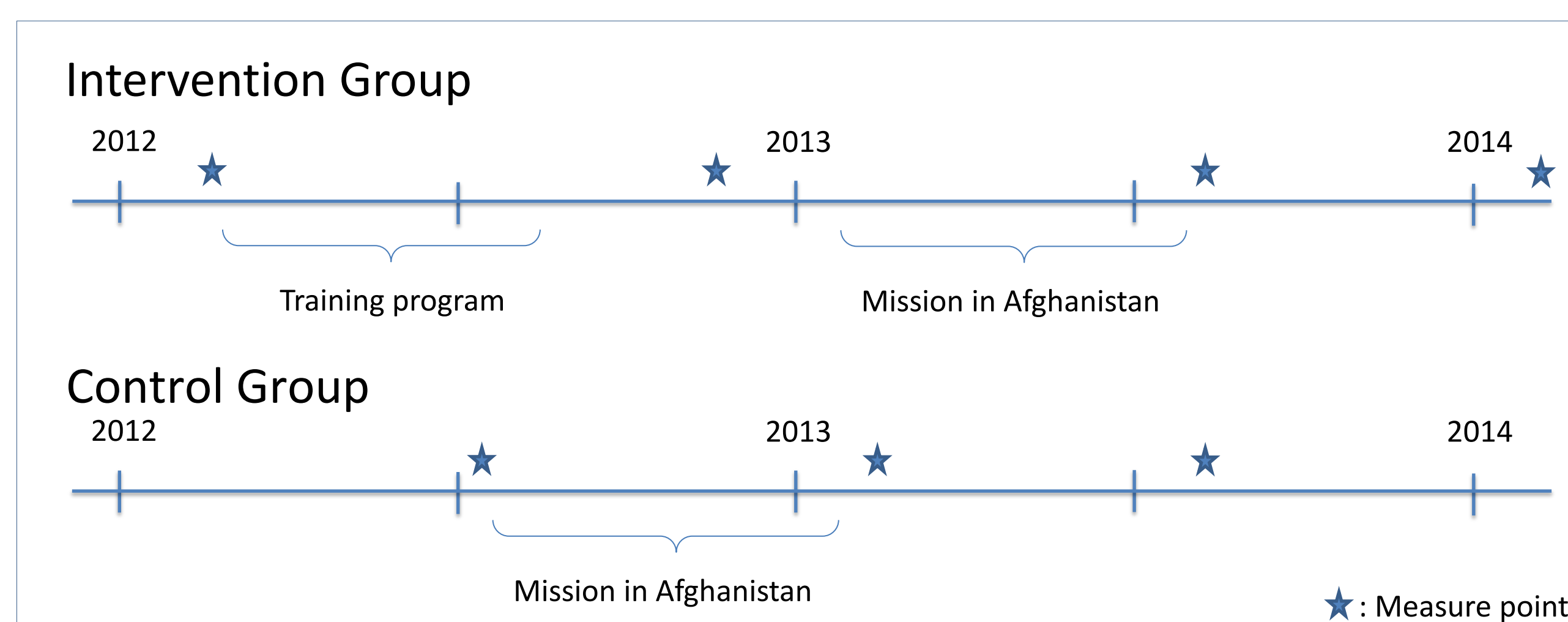
The aim of this study is to examine whether resilience training has a positive effect on these symptoms.

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-survey. A smartphone app. was designed to enhance the continuous resilience training.

A control group consisting of 23 combat soldiers from ISAF-14 was used.

Study Design – Flow chart



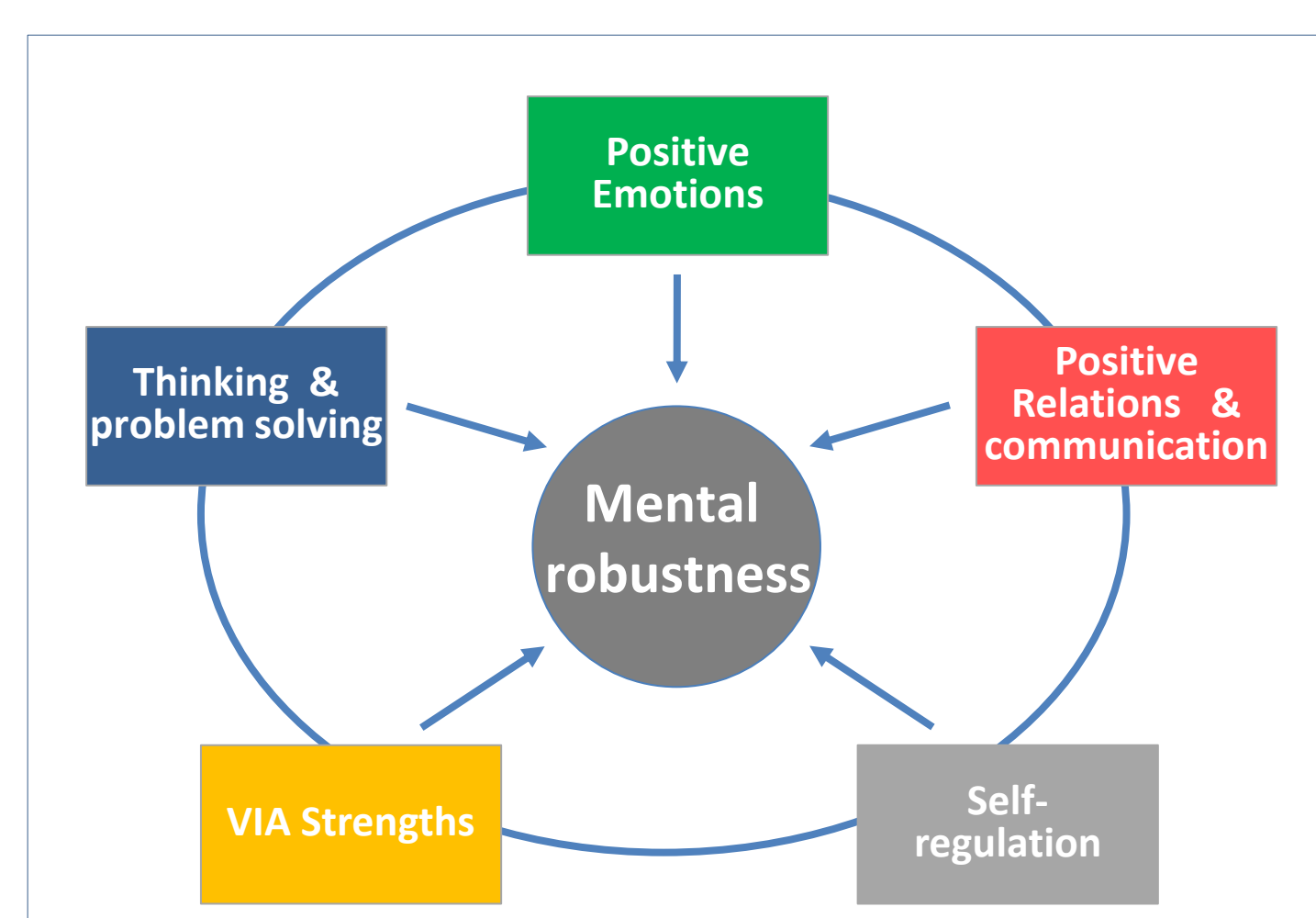
"Everyone of you will need to draw upon your personal robustness in order to address the challenges the mission implies – because you are bound to face a number of challenges."
Major-General Agner Rokos, Chief of Defense,
At the farewell parade for ISAF-15, 15 Oksbøl January 17. 2013

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.

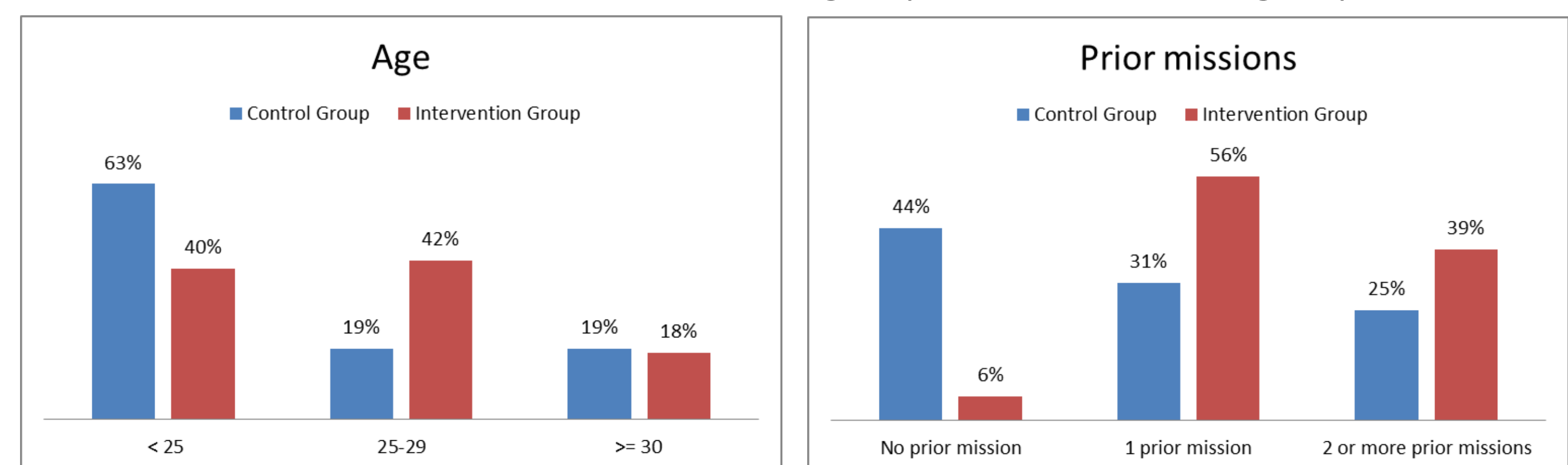
The Training Program



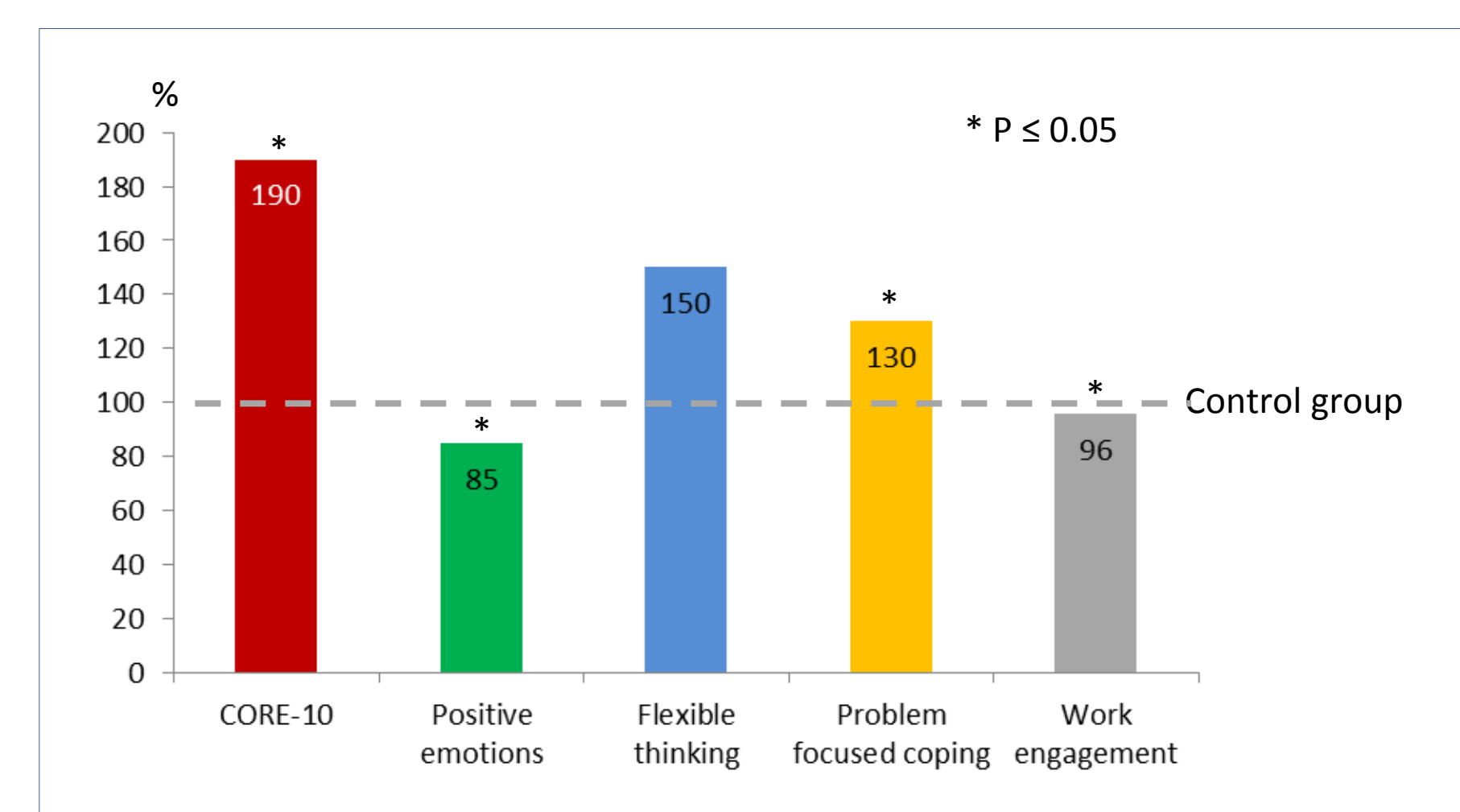
Results

The preliminary results shows that the resilience training program had an impact on the combat soldiers, i.e. lower CORE-10 scores (less symptoms of distress), higher scores concerning positive emotions, flexible thinking and problem focused coping on a significantly/almost significantly level.

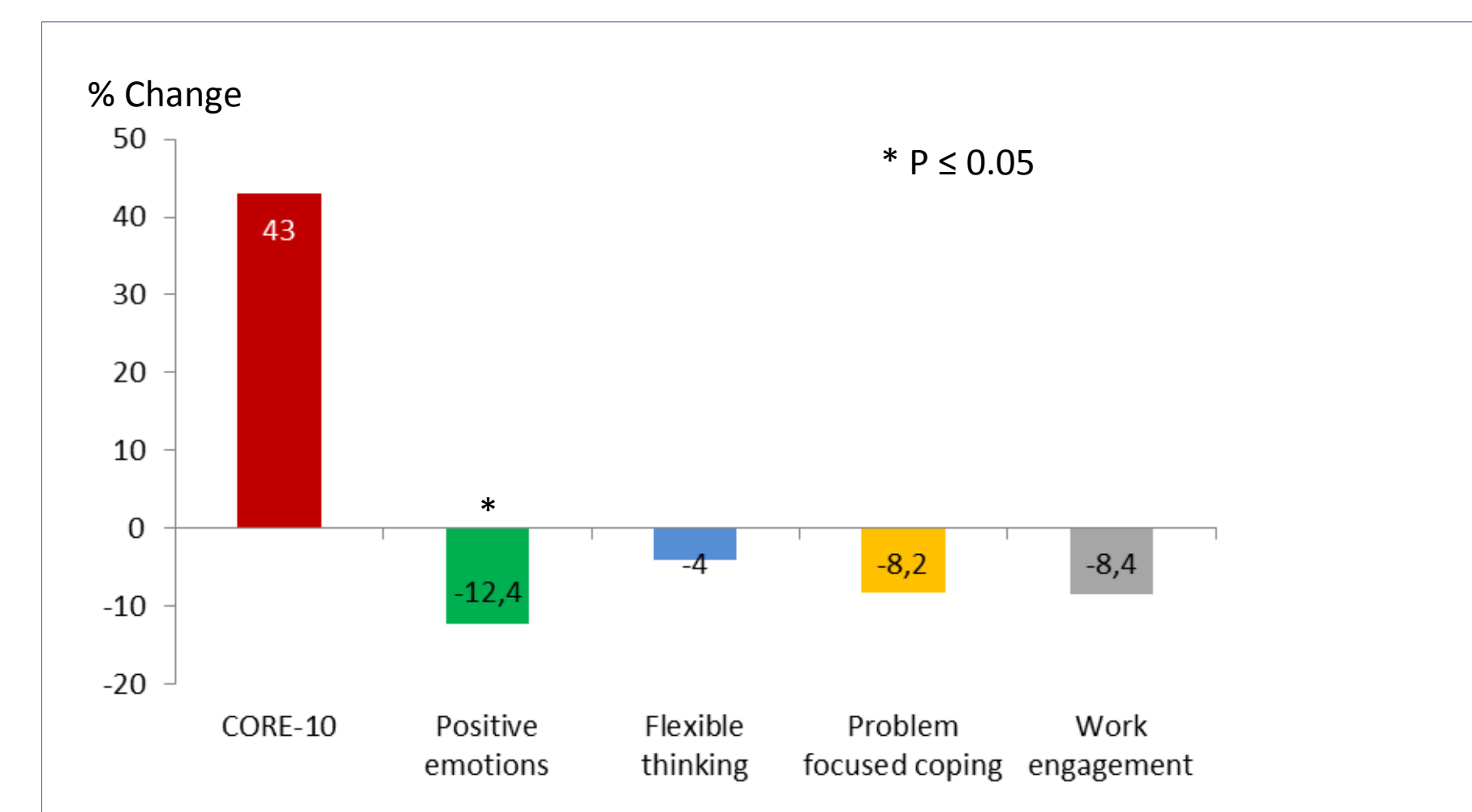
Differences between control group and intervention group



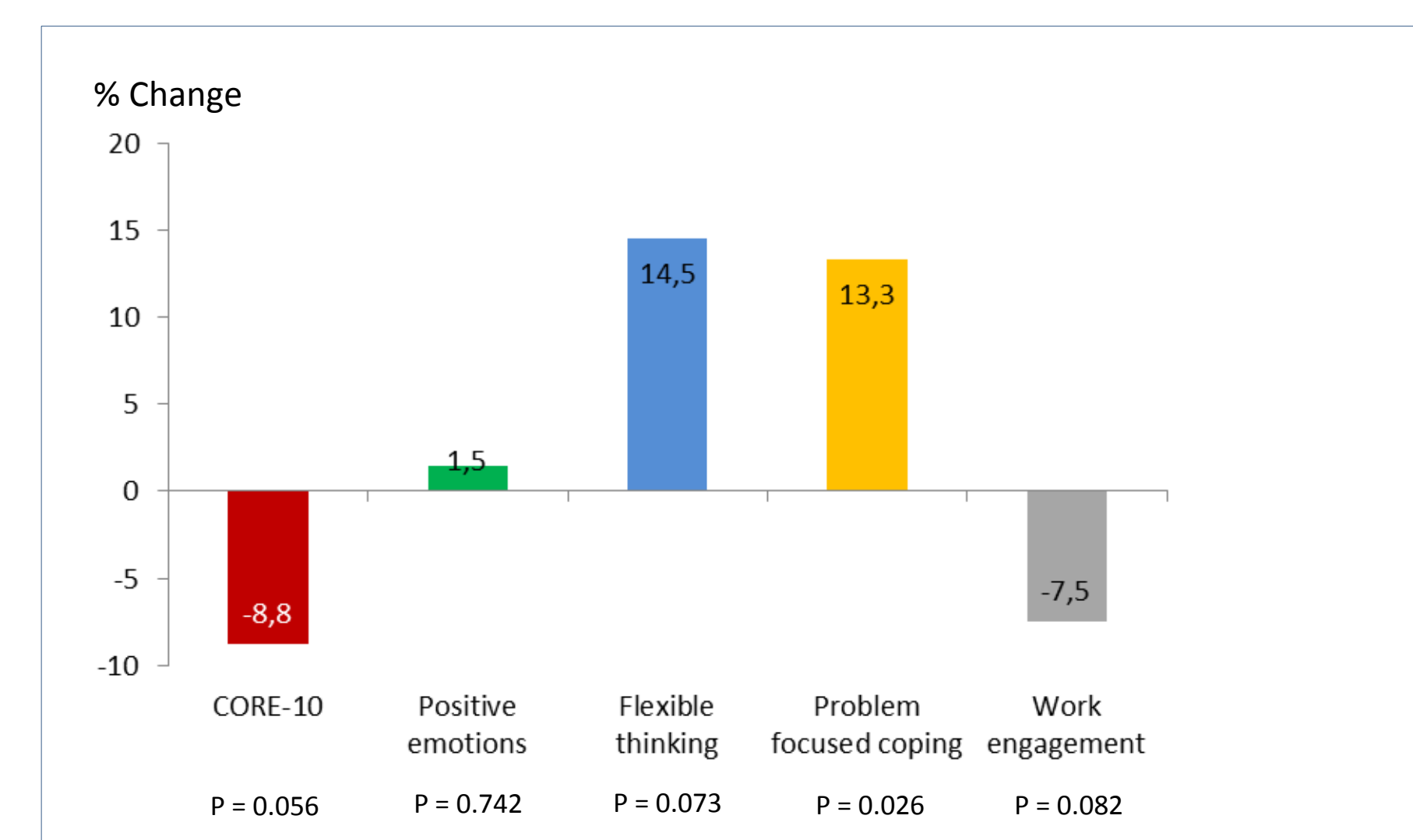
Intervention group in % of Control group before training



Control group - before and after mission



Intervention group - immediate effects of training



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 were before their first mission. This is a pilot study – but it is already evident that a larger control group and a larger intervention group is desirable to provide valid results.

Next results from the intervention group are available in March 2014.

Conclusion

Implementing resilience training in the Danish army is a new approach. The preliminary immediate effects of the training program are promising.

The implications of this study may result in a shift from the present focus entirely on treatment, to a focus on prevention.