

Book Review

The Routledge international handbook of military psychology and mental health

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The discipline of Military Psychology is multifaceted, as it takes into account multidisciplinary, multicultural, unpredictable, agile and vigorous environments. The intense nature of the military and its operational theatre require an understanding of the psychological factors confronting soldiers, their behaviour and their performance in the workplace. This Routledge publication covers the complexities of the military as a profession with an additional focus on aspects of mental health. The book is written in a scholarly yet practical manner making it relatable to practitioners in the field, military leaders, students and lay readers alike. This makes the concept of being a handbook applicable and relevant, as it provides the audience with a comprehensive approach to military psychology.

This handbook comprises a compilation of thirty-five chapters divided into three parts, each dedicated to a specific theme. Part one focuses on “Military psychology: The roots and the journey”. Part two is dedicated to “Soldiering: Deployments and beyond”, while Part three focuses on “Making a choice: mental health issues and prospects in the military”. These themes are carefully formulated to unravel contemporary issues with military psychology and interventions comprehensively. The first theme creates a solid foundation and overview for Military Psychology, as it revisits the origins of military psychology and ways in which the profession has evolved over the years. This theme stretches over eight chapters, focusing on the principles of Psychology and its application in the military organisation during both peace and war times; the evolution of assessments for military recruitment; culture and cognition in the military, implications of the fourth industrial revolution. This part is concluded with two chapters that are very critical to the field of Military Psychology, namely the prospective of military psychology as well ethical issues within the discipline. As a discipline and profession, military psychology has and continues to evolve based on a range of factors affecting the military and its personnel. Scientifically forecasting the trajectory and prospects of military operations becomes an imperative preparation and readiness tool for practitioners and military leaders to enhance the successful development of the organisation. The chapter highlights trends, possible directions and determinants of military psychology developments. The authors posit that the military is likely to be confronted with ten theatres of war: ground space, underground

space, above water space, underwater space, airspace, outer space, psychological space, social space, information space and cyber space. Future wars in these theatre spaces present the military with major “novelty, uncertainty, unpredictability and variability” (Karayani, 2020, p. 100). In return, military psychology will be required to develop the calibre of soldier (resolute, positive, resourceful, patriotic, collaborative, etc.) that will best fit the environment through training and development.

The last chapter of Part one focuses on the ethics of the discipline, which tends to be blurred in the military. Professionals in uniform often encounter a wide range of ethical issues in the line of executing their roles and engaging in various activities. This results from the organisational expectation that one is a soldier first and then a professional. Given the prevalence of ethical challenges experienced by most practitioners, the chapter proposes a structured ethical decision-making process to assist practitioners to reach ethical solutions.

The second part of the book deals with the key role player and contributor in the achievement of military success, namely the soldier. Over eleven chapters, there are deliberations on mental-related problems and factors that are affecting soldiers on deployment and beyond. This section of the book provides mostly insight for practitioners and leaders on the dormant and active issues experienced and reported by soldiers during and after deployments. The section further suggests effective psychological interventions to enhance mental health, resilience and hardiness, to mention a few. The two-pronged approach further looks at aspects after deployment, which military psychologists should consider to ensure the wellbeing of personnel. The section further extends into aspects relating to family reintegration, turnover, post-traumatic growth, transitioning from military to civilian life. As a pivotal point of influence, a framework of an ideal military leader in these highly unpredictable and highly demanding operational scenes is proposed to assist organisations in shaping the leadership climate for effective leadership. Military operations require leaders who have skills and abilities to face adversities; thus, they necessitate the development of a strong character of a leader. Turnover in the military is a topic of interest, and in this chapter, the authors enlighten readers on the unique dynamics of turnover and its implications in the military context. They further propose and develop a militarily relevant model to analyse and understand turnover in the military and the reasons why people leave the organisation. A comprehensive framework is introduced as a mechanism to manage turnover proactively. The chapters in this section seem interrelated, and they collectively contribute to the development of psychologically fit soldiers equipped to address operational requirements and its challenges effectively.

The final and most important part that accounts for the uniqueness of this publication, Part three, focuses on mental health: “Making a choice: mental health issues and prospects in the military”. The concept of mental health has received widespread attention in recent years globally and across various industries (Adler et al., 2011; Greene-Shortridge et al., 2007). The military, being one of the most physically and psychologically demanding working environments, has historically researched the concept of mental health of personnel in particular after wars, missions, operations and deployments. Due to the prevalence of soldiers showing signs of deteriorating mental health and military leaders

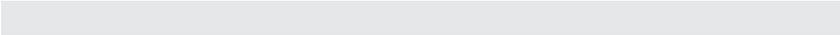
being ill equipped to address these challenges effectively and adequately, “[p]sychology is more relevant and viable today for the military, than at any point in history” (Matthews, 2014, p. 215). Owing to the prevalence and rise of mental health-related issues recorded and reported, psychosocial issues spilling over into the workplace, the effects of social media, as well as economic and political factors, there is a dire need for the field to conduct research, analyse and understand developments in the field. There is therefore a need to develop scientific evidence-based interventions to address contemporary problems using modern solutions.

This section provides a clinical approach to mental health in the military, zooming in on antecedents and aspects that contribute to mental health. This section has sixteen chapters addressing numerous mental health issues, such as burnout, work engagement, stress and coping in the military, traumas, moral injuries, suicide prevention strategies in the military and sexual trauma in and among the military, amongst others. It further explores effective psychological interventions that are scientific, multifaceted, specific and relevant to the military organisation. Overall, the nature of militaries comes with extreme exposure to stress and challenges that could lead to chronic mental health issues. One of the fundamental objectives of the military is to ensure a holistically healthy force. Military Psychology as a discipline serves to ensure psychological wellbeing of military personnel. Psychological aspects presented in this handbook on military psychology and mental health are critical and essential tools for military leaders, practitioners and students in the field with contributors from various streams within the field of psychology, from multiple continents, militaries and cultures all rich with knowledge and expertise within the field. The diversity and varying perspectives strengthen the content of the broad field of military psychology.

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Endnotes

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