

Psychosocial Climate of the Sri Lanka Army in Relation to Burnout Prevention: A Qualitative Study

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Abstract

Burnout is one of the most prevalent occupational mental health problems in military. Stressors are influenced by the psychosocial environment at work. Understanding the psychosocial environment is crucial in planning policies for prevention of burnout. The objective of this study is to describe the prevailing organizational psychosocial climate related to burnout in Sri Lanka Army. We conducted a qualitative study using in-depth interviews. Senior Army officers who have at least thirty years of military experience familiar with the psychosocial atmosphere were purposely selected. The interview guide was built using the Psychosocial Safety Climate framework. The data analysis employed inductive thematic analysis. At the theoretical saturation, sixteen participants were interviewed. We identified seven major themes; the importance of leadership, the importance of cohesion, the role of senior Non-Commissioned officers (NCOs), training and career development, identification of psychological issues, welfare and financial mismanagement, and preventive mental health services. Attitudes of leadership were important and problematic behaviors of leadership created a non-hosting atmosphere for mental well-being. The time-trend issues in the army affected the leadership as well as cohesion. The weakening of the role of NCOs downgraded the psychosocial climate. The participants claimed the need to change the recruitment and training as well as the detection of psychosocial issues. The current salaries, financial mismanagement and suboptimal welfare influenced distress. Targeted preventive mental health promotion was a suggestion. Existing psychosocial climate in the army assimilates vulnerability and leads to developing burnout. Early attention and proper action along identified themes is strongly recommended.

Keywords: *Burnout, Sri Lanka army, Psycho-social climate*