

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 BACKGROUND

It is impossible for soldiers in combat to avoid stress. With training, unit cohesion and leadership, soldiers are able to control their combat stress. That controlled stress keeps the soldiers alert, strong and durable so that they can accomplish their mission. On the contrary, if the stress cannot be controlled, it can cause fatal behavior that impairs individual soldiers and consequently interferes with achievement of the mission.

In the US military, many personnel have suffered uncontrollable stress from military operations, especially the counter-insurgency/ terrorism operations in Iraq and Afghanistan. In March 2008, the US Veteran Administration reported that more than half of 300,000 veterans of the wars in those countries treated at its hospitals were diagnosed with a serious mental condition and 68,000 were facing post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). According to the US National Center for Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (NCPTSD), witnessing or experiencing traumatic events such as wars, serious accident and disasters causes PTSD, once called shell shock, or combat stress/fatigue. Its symptoms include flashbacks, nightmares, feelings of detachment, irritability, trouble concentrating and sleeplessness. Moreover, it was reported that this stress disorder led to suicide of nearly 15% of the U.S. military casualties in Iraq and Afghanistan.

American military personnel, especially leadership, are provided with information to make sure that they can recognize the stressors present in their operations and know how to control the stress. According to the US Army's Field Manual (FM 22-51), combat stressors among soldiers in counter-insurgency operations are:

- (1) Cultural conflicts and language barriers
- (2) Climate differences and unfamiliar terrain
- (3) Difficulty identifying the enemy

- (4) Reaction to hit-run tactics
- (5) Support troops versus combat soldiers living standards
- (6) Soldier and family unclear concerning army's mission
- (7) Continuing the fight with slow programs
- (8) Dealing with extended periods of no activity
- (9) Inability to decisively engage opposition
- (10) Host nation support role

In Thailand, to overcome the insurgency in the deep South, namely Pattani, Yala, and Narathiwat provinces, it is necessary for the government to gain support from the local people and make them reject the insurgency in the area. The soldiers from the Psychological Battalion are assigned as a main effort to conduct psychological operation in order to create such desired attitude and behavior. They aim to “win the mind and heart” of the locals by using various means such as home visits to insurgent victim families, handbills, posters and radio programs for announcement and counter-propaganda operations, and youth camps for insurgents recruited for youth re-orientation to carry their weapons which are not rifles or bombs, but psychological messages to the locals.

According to the nature of the counter-insurgent operation, the soldiers, including psychological officers, cannot avoid exposing themselves to a fatal environment where most of the casualties are soldiers, farmers and police. There were 221 officials/ soldiers killed and 567 injured in 2007. These casualties included 7 psychological officers who were attacked by a bomb while traveling together in a truck back to their camp after negotiating with local civilian demonstrators. The insurgents also shot the injured soldiers to ensure that all of them were dead. Such attack did not only kill the soldiers, but also caused psychological effects, in terms of creating distress and outrage among the colleagues of the late soldiers.

Besides being in danger, there are a wide range of physical and social challenges that the soldiers have to deal with. According to the commander of the

Psychological Company, there are 144 psychological officers conducting a counter-insurgency operation in the deep South. Each soldier is assigned to station there for 2 years. They work about 10 hours a day with an hour lunch for at least 30 days continuously before having 10 days for vacation. Since most of their homes are in Lopburi Province, they have to spend at least 14 hours on a one way trip home. These physical challenges might become even tougher to handle when the soldiers face a social challenge. Mutual trust and understanding between the locals and military officials is limited simply because of the differences in terms of language, religion and culture.

The soldiers also deal with a challenge caused by organizational or internal factors. For example, the relationship between the soldiers and their commanders and colleagues is typically one of the key things that identifies if the soldiers will have difficulty in their work or not. A good amount of welfare and benefits provided by their unit is a good tool to create incentive and morale among the soldiers. Without it, complaints have been raised on many occasions and places, especially on Internet message boards where soldiers can speak out while they do not have to identify themselves.

All the challenges occurred at work have led the psychological officers to stress. Although the insurgent situation in the deep South of Thailand is not as serious as what the US military has been faced with, we have found some similar characteristics of combat stressors caused in the counter-insurgency operation in the country. Also, there have already been some indicators of remarkable level of stress at work among the police officers and soldiers shown in public. In September, 2008, six local policemen had so much stress that they had to be hospitalized. It was analyzed that their illness was a result of occupational stress.

The occupational stress also, unfortunately, has had a fatal impact on the personnel. A police major in Narathiwat held his subordinate hostage in the police station for 3 hours. He claimed that the long period of working in the area had caused him such great stress that he wanted to move out, but his request got rejected by his commander. A couple of months later, public concern about the local police officers' mental health was raised again by the death of a police lieutenant in Yala. It was reported that the officer was so stressed that his former mental disorder became

aggravated. He shot his commander to death and then was shot to death while trying to escape.

With an awareness of how severe the impacts of occupational stress can be for military personnel in their operations, the researcher realized that it is important to study the occupational stress specifically of soldiers in the Psychological Battalion in order to find out the most significant occupational stressor. This piece of information can be exploited as a tool for learning more about our soldiers, developing a course of action to eliminate their vulnerability, and consequently coming out of the counter-insurgency operation with another proud victory. As Sun Tzu stated in *The Art of War*, “If you know both yourself and your enemy, you will come out of one hundred battles with one hundred victories.”

1.2 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

What is the priority of occupational stressors of the psychological officers in the three southern border provinces?

1.3 OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1.3.1 Main Objective

To find out the priority of occupational stressors of the psychological officers in the three southern border provinces

1.3.2 Sub-Objective

1. To identify the most significant occupational factor that contributes to the stress among the psychological officers in the three southern border provinces, namely Pattani, Yala, and Narathiwat; and

2. To find out the least significant occupational factor that contributes to the stress among the psychological officers in the three southern border provinces.

1.4 DEFINITION OF TERMS

Definitions of the terms of this study are the following:

1) “Stress” means any feeling that positively or negatively affects the normal physical and/or psychological condition of a person and therefore needs a certain

amount of physical or mental adaptation to cope with. This study focused only on the distress or the negative stress.

2) “Occupational stressors” refers to five work-related factors that cause stress: work conditions, organization roles, work relationships, career improvements, and organizational structure and climate.

3) “Insurgency” means an organized movement aimed at the overthrow of a constituted government through the use of subversion and armed conflict. It is basically caused by issues related to history, society, politic, races, etc. In Thailand, confirmed groups of insurgents have mainly concentrated their activities in three southern border provinces: Pattani, Yala, and Narathiwat.

4) “Psychological officers” refers to non-commissioned and commissioned officers from Psychological Battalion, the organic unit of Special Warfare Command, Royal Thai Army. As of February, 2009, there were 144 psychological officers stationed in the three southern border provinces (Pattani, Yala, and Narathiwat) to conduct specifically the counter-insurgency operations.

1.5 SCOPE OF THE STUDY

1.5.1 Population

The population of this study is made up of psychological officers in the three southern Thailand border provinces, namely Pattani, Yala, and Narathiwat. As the total number of the population is not large, all 144 officers were asked to provide their information for the research.

1.5.2 Variables in the study

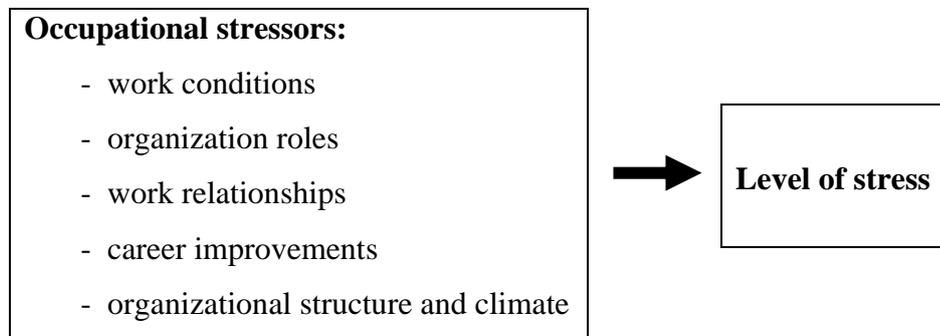
Two types of variable in the research are:

1. Independent variables: The following are 5 occupational stressors:

- work conditions
- organization roles
- work relationships
- career improvements
- organizational structure and climate

2. Dependent variable: Level of stress caused by the above mentioned occupational stressors.

The correlation of the variables is shown below:



1.6 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The research's result reflects the priority of the occupational stressors of psychological officers in the three southern border provinces of Thailand. Accordingly, the individual soldiers, leadership of the unit, and government, can put their effort and resources into getting rid of these negative factors. The study should therefore be exploited as a consideration for the plan makers of the psychological operations and, in the bigger view, governmental policy makers to overcome the insurgency in the stated area.

1.7 ORGANIZATION OF THE STUDY

This study of stress and occupational stressors is divided into 5 chapters. Chapter one describes background, statement of the problem, objectives of the study, definition of terms, and scope, significance and organization of the study. Chapter two covers the review of related literature. Chapter three is the methodology of the study. Chapter four presents the empirical findings and analysis of the results. At the end, chapter five is a summary of all details of this study, discussion of the findings, and recommendations for further research.