



Discovering the causes of mental weakness among conscript soldiers: a sample of qualitative research

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ABSTRACT

Background and Aim: Military service is one of the important steps before entering the working life for many young men in Iran, who usually have many worries about it. Some of the concerns are related to the complaints that other soldiers have about this period. Therefore, this study was to discover the causes of mental weakness of service soldiers. **Method:** This study was conducted with a qualitative method and thematic analysis method (Clark and Bravan, 2006) in the year 1400-1401 in Isfahan city and in order to answer the question that the causes of mental weakness of conscript soldiers are. The statistical population was all conscript soldiers of Isfahan city, from whom 13 soldiers were selected based on the entry and exit criteria and were interviewed by targeted sampling method. The research tool was semi-structured interview. **Results:** The collected data were analyzed with the help of thematic analysis. The results showed four main categories: intrapersonal weaknesses (external sources of happiness, high expectations, negative motivation, low self-esteem), family component (causes related to one of the parents and causes related to family conditions), interpersonal causes (weakness communication skills, weakness in managing communication problems) 3) environmental causes (perception of military personnel's weakness in establishing authoritative communication, perception of the environment's indifference to the current needs of soldiers). **Conclusion:** According to the results, it can be said that a large part of the causes of mental weakness is related to their life history, which can be managed well in the beginning days of military service with the help of increasing skills and awareness. And helped their mental enrichment.



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Introduction

One of the stages of entry into society for most young men in Iran, before or after attending university, is military service (Moladoost, Ebrahimian, and Amir Mozaheri, 2022). This service in Iran is about two years on average for most young people; According to some young people, this two-year period is a difficult and challenging period that delays their life and routine (Ghasemi and Alipuriani; 2019). However, according to many adults of this era, it is necessary to build young men's character (Vaezinejad & Mousavi Naghabi, 2020). In any case, this compulsory course can be a good opportunity for self-improvement and self-knowledge for young people. In this regard, being in military service comes with opportunities and challenges, one of the most important of which is the concern of commanders and families to prevent any harm and maintain their physical and mental health (Changi Ashtiani, Avakh Keysomi, Jahandari, and Rah-Najat, 2022).

This course has features that all require high resilience, such as: being away from family, punctuality, performing different physically difficult tasks such as long night and day vigils in the guard tower alone, and being with people from different cultures. However, changing the current life situation and facing new and forced conditions can create a special psychological state in a person that prevents the optimal use of the soldier's position and the opportunities in front of him. Kamalvand, Karimitaher, and Vosoughi, (2015). This situation can include a decrease in mood and anxiety, which is referred to as mental weakness (Lee et al., 2022). In mental weakness, a person experiences symptoms such as rumination, depression, high anxiety, obsession, and physical symptoms such as fatigue, headache, and digestive problems, which lead to the production of other symptoms (Bishop & Gagne, 2018) such as a decrease in self-esteem, poor self-acceptance, weakness in decision-making and a decrease in self-efficacy (Savci, Akinci, and Keles, 2020). This set of danger signs caused by mental weakness causes a person to be pessimistic about the situation and avoid facing the requirements of the situation. In mental weakness, tolerating ambiguity and uncertainty is also a problem that makes it more difficult for a person to endure military service (Chen, Yao, and Qian, 2018). A soldier suffering

from mental weakness can create problems for his fellow soldiers because this is also related to the weakness of interpersonal relationships (Ronchi, Banerjee, and Lecce, 2020). On the other hand, this situation in soldiers can cause wrong perceptions in them and make the common situations of daily life in the military to be seen as more complicated and uncomfortable (Voncken & Bögels, 2008). At the same time, research shows that military service can have many positive results for young people. For example, Mahjoub, Qadiri, Shateri, and Tanhaee (2020) showed that students who went to military service are in a better position than other students in terms of positive characteristics (such as tolerance of hardships, chivalry, and responsibility, strengthening religious beliefs and increasing self-control). Moladost, Ebrahimian, and Amir Mozaheri (2022) showed in research that military service improved lifestyle corrected terrible habits and improved interpersonal relationships. Firozjayan and Janmohammadi (2017) showed in qualitative research that military service brings personal and social functions for soldiers; At the same time, other studies show that young people want to delay this compulsory event as much as possible, especially by going to university. For example, Eskandarinezhad and Ghaffary (2022) showed that students try to keep their military position suspended. Also, some researchers have studied mental health among soldiers; For example, Sadri Damirchi and Samadifard (2018) showed that irrational beliefs, mindfulness, and cognitive avoidance could influence suicidal behaviors among soldiers.

In any case, according to the studies conducted, no published study has addressed the issue of the causes of mental weakness in active-duty soldiers. Therefore, the present research aims to determine why soldiers suffer from mental weakness qualitatively. The reason for choosing this research tradition was to investigate the in-depth experience of soldiers in the field of mental weakness so that it is possible to intervene better in solving the causes of mental weakness. In fact, with the revelation of the causes, those in charge of optimal life in military service can better formulate the necessary interventions. The result of such research will be effective in developing psychological improvement and enrichment packages, as well as in preparing treatment

packages and reducing the mental problems of soldiers. Therefore, this research aims to answer this question, what are the causes of the mental weakness of soldiers?

Method

Considering that the topic of this research was to examine the causes of mental weakness of soldiers, in this way, this research was of a qualitative type and a content analysis type. This method is used when there is no pre-existing theory (Vaismoradi, Turunen, and Bundas, 2013). In the present study, it has been acknowledged that knowledge is partially constructed in the social context of the interview. In this way, the meaning that the speech seeks to convey is produced in the conversation between the interviewer and the interviewee, and both the sender and the receiver cooperate to produce meaning. In the present study, the research environment was all the soldiers of Isfahan city. The current research was qualitative. Therefore, the research participants were selected by purposive method from those who were engaged in military service in Isfahan city. A targeted method was used to select the participants, and data saturation was considered to determine the sample size, which was observed after eight participants. However, the number of subjects increased to thirteen people. The criteria for entering this study were the willingness to participate in the interview, being in military service at the time of the interview, being in the first three months of military service, and allowing the interview to be recorded. The criteria for leaving the research were: inability to express experiences, having facilitating conditions such as shorter service period for any reason.

Tools

Semi-structured interview: In order to collect data, a semi-structured interview was used. Interview questions were prepared based on existing experiences related to military service. After review by three experts and an initial assessment, a preliminary interview was used. The topics and topics that were discussed were the same and included questions about the experiences before and after military service, the reasons for choosing to join the military service, the painful and sweet experiences of the military period, how to deal with problems and interpersonal relationships in the military. At the end of each interview, the participants were requested to state anything else they thought necessary so that another important matter would

not be missed. However, the questions were not mandatory and the participants could answer any questions they wanted. All interviews were recorded. In addition to audio recording, notes were also taken. Another thing that was done for the correct understanding of the participants' statements was that their statements were often summarized. They were also asked to confirm the correct understanding of their statements. The interviews were conducted in the barracks and in a cozy place provided by the authorities to the researcher. Their duration was between 45 and 50 minutes.

Results

In this study, all the participants were young soldiers, and their average age was 22.8 years. In order to analyze the data and considering that the research method was thematic analysis, Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-step method was used as follows: 1) getting to know the data, 2) generating primary codes, 3) searching for categories, 4) Examining the categories, 5) Defining and naming the categories and 6) Preparing the report. This research reports a type of inductive analysis.

In general, four overarching categories were extracted from the conducted interviews, which were as follows: the results showed four main categories: intrapersonal weaknesses (external sources of expected happiness, negative motivation, low self-esteem), family component (causes related to one of the parents, causes related to family conditions), interpersonal causes (weakness of communication skills, weakness in managing communication problems) 3) environmental causes (perception of military personnel's weakness in establishing authoritative communication, perception of the environment's indifference to the current needs of soldiers), which were explained in detail in the following.

1. Individual weaknesses

The content analysis of the interviews with the soldiers showed that one of the core categories in the psychological weakness of the soldiers is intrapersonal weakness. They were suffering from interpersonal psychological weaknesses, which included the following organizational categories:

-External sources of happiness, which showed that soldiers are dependent on the occurrence of external events to be happy, which included four basic categories: belief in the occurrence of a party for happiness, belief in having money for

happiness, belief in having a party for happiness and belief On vacation, the cause of happiness.

-An expectation in this nuclear category showed that some soldiers suffer from mental weakness more than other soldiers. This organizing category included the following basic categories:

Sadness due to broken pride
Waiting for rules to be set based on the characteristics and wishes of the soldier
Inability to accept military duties
Expect special encouragement

-The other negative motivation was the organizer category in this nuclear category, which showed that these soldiers had a negative motivation more than they had a positive or neutral motivation to join the army, that is, because of the fear of problems to join the army. Organizing category included the following basic categories:

Coming to the military for legal problems
Joining the army to escape family problems
Coming to the army to avoid absenteeism

-Inability to regulate emotions, another category in mental weakness, was caused by individual causes, which shows that soldiers have not mastered the appropriate methods of emotional regulation before entering the military. Naturally, after entering the military service period, they suffer more this organizing category included the following basic categories:

Extreme emotional need
Sexual harassment
Blame yourself
Rumination about problems
Comparing myself with others
Lack of purposefulness

-The inability to accept other conditions of the organizer category in the nuclear category was the individual cause of mental weakness, which showed that the soldiers did not have a proper understanding of the military period. This organizing category included the following basic categories:

Lack of correct understanding of military conditions.
Inability to perform military duties

-Low self-esteem was another organizing category in this nuclear category, which showed that these soldiers had not reached maturity in their self-worth. Therefore they were suffering from mental weakness. This organizing category includes the following basic categories was:
Fear of others knowing about family problems

Fear of others knowing about the lack of money
2. Family component

One of the core categories extracted from the data was the family components in the mental weakness of the soldiers, which showed that part of the mental weakness of the soldiers is related to their families. This organizing category includes the basic categories. It was as follows: causes related to parents and causes related to family conditions.

-The causes related to the parent was one of the organizing categories in this core category, which showed that part of the mental weakness of the soldiers was related to their family and the past that they had experienced in the family. This category includes the basic categories are as follows:

Separation of parents
Father's illness
Very strict father and sick mother
Addicted father

-Causes related to family conditions were another organizing category in this nuclear category, which showed that these soldiers were living in family conditions that contributed to their mental weakness and included The basic codes were as follows:

Financial poverty
Cultural poverty
Interpersonal causes

One of the core categories extracted from the data on the mental weakness of the soldiers was interpersonal causes, which showed that they have difficulty establishing and maintaining interpersonal relationships during the soldier time when a lack of family is felt. This core category included the organizing categories of weak communication skills and weak management of communication problems.

-Weakness of communication skills was one of the organizing categories in this nuclear category, which showed that the inability to communicate properly could play an essential role in the mental weakness of soldiers, which included the following basic categories:

Inability to start a relationship
Inability to maintain a relationship
Failure to recognize boundaries
Weakness in reflective performance

-Weakness in managing communication problems was another organizing category in this nuclear category, which showed that soldiers are not familiar with healthier ways to solve their

communication problems. This organizing category includes basic categories. It was as follows:

Aggression

Daring

Avoiding others

Environmental causes

The environmental causes of the mental weakness of soldiers were another core category that was extracted from the interviews. It showed that the military environment and the psychological atmosphere that governs it can also intensify or create mental weakness. Nuclear included the following organizing categories:

-The perception of the weakness of the military staff in authoritatively communicating was one of the organizing categories in this category, which showed that instead of the perception of authority, the youths have more perceptions of humiliation from the higher-ups, which included the following basic categories:

Being humiliated

Perception of party game

The perception of superior clairvoyance

-Perception of the environment's indifference to the current needs of the soldiers. Another organizing code in this nuclear code was that the soldiers felt that two years of their lives were spent in the military and the necessary job and life skills after the military. They are not suitable for managing life. This organizing category included the following basic codes:

Perception of inattention to job skills training

Perception of neglect of psychological skills

Perception of the indifference of the military environment to the available opportunity

Conclusion

This research aimed to analyze the causes of mental weakness among students with the help of qualitative research tradition. Therefore, with the help of Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis method, the data from a semi-structured interview with thirteen soldiers were analyzed. Four core categories were extracted: intrapersonal weaknesses (external sources of expected happiness, negative motivation, low self-esteem), family component (causes related to one of the parents, causes related to family conditions), interpersonal causes (weakness of communication skills, weakness in managing communication problems) environmental causes (perception of military personnel's weakness in establishing authoritative communication, perception of inattention environment to the current needs of soldiers).

The content analysis of the interviews with the soldiers showed that one of the core categories in the psychological weakness of the soldiers is intrapersonal weakness. They were suffering from interpersonal psychological weaknesses, which included the following organizational categories:

The organizing category of external sources of happiness, which showed that soldiers are dependent on the occurrence of external events to be happy, which included four basic categories: belief in the occurrence of a celebration for happiness, belief in having money for happiness, belief in having a party for happiness and believing in vacation as the factor of happiness. Another highly expected organizer category in this nuclear category showed that some soldiers suffer from mental weakness more than others because they are more expected. This organizing category included these basic categories. : Sadness due to the broken pride of Ahmad says: "The confrontation of the higher soldiers makes one's pride broken, they do not know how to deal with anyone, I have never seen such confrontations in my family before", the expectation of setting rules based on the characteristics and soldier's demands, inability to accept military duties. This result is in line with previous findings that have shown that sources of external happiness, high expectations, non-acceptance of experience or avoidance of experience are related to symptoms of psychological weakness, including the findings of Jacobson and Newman (2014) and Bardeen and Fergus (2016) based on the relationship between experiential avoidance and depression and anxiety are in line with the findings of Wang, Liu, Jiang and Song (2017) who showed that external sources of happiness and high expectations hinder happiness. Another negative motivation was the organizer category in this nuclear category, which showed that these soldiers had a negative motivation rather than a positive or neutral motivation to join the military, that is, they joined the military due to the fear of problems.

The inability to accept other conditions of the organizer category in the nuclear category was the individual cause of mental weakness, which showed that the soldiers did not have a proper understanding of the military period. Hence expectations are created in them. This makes the military path more difficult for them. This organizing category included the following basic categories: lack of correct understanding of military conditions and inability to accept military duties. This finding is also consistent with the findings of Caouette and Guyer (2016), who showed that high expectations and cognitive deviations create disruptions in accepting conditions.

Low self-esteem was another organizing category in this nuclear category, which showed that these soldiers had not reached maturity in their self-worth. Therefore they were suffering from mental weakness. This organizing category included the following basic categories: Fear of others knowing about family problems; this finding is in line with Kircaburun (2016) finding, which showed that self-esteem could predict depression.

In general, according to the results of this research, the causes of mental weakness in soldiers are multi-dimensional. However, it can be improved because psychological enrichment training can cover many of these issues. Because with the help of such training, the mental strength of the soldier can be helped in such a way that he can learn the most important life skills in the real military environment and can solve many problems now and in the future. Many incompatible cognitions and emotions can be solved through training. Also, these results contained important implications for those in charge of military service, and that is that the soldiers should understand the compassion of the managers in the majority of the concern for the training of the career path. This will be a good opportunity to form a purposeful and planned life among the soldiers .

In general, this research also had some limitations, such as the fact that only soldiers who were in the military for three months were introduced. Moreover, the course of mental weakness or its improvement during the months of military service was not investigated. In sum, it is suggested to study the course of mental weakness or mental richness among soldiers. According to these results, it is suggested that career development packages in the military should be considered by those in charge of military service, along with other behavioral reforms.

Conflict of Interest

According to the authors, this article has no financial sponsor or conflict of interest.

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