



The twilight of psychological resilience programs in the army? Lessons learned



European Semester
**On the Borders
of Psychology and Beyond**

AIMS = to think over

- a) theoretic framework linking prevention strategies to intended outcomes
- b) prevention and preparedness in relation to the environment

Bohumila Baštecká
Charles University,
Protestant Theological Faculty
bastecka@etf.cuni.cz
MV, Prague, October 20, 2017

CONTEXT

„The military is the largest and most well-resourced organization mandated with the prevention of PTSD. As such, it holds a unique opportunity and responsibility to develop an empirical and theoretic foundation for prevention efforts that can be used with generations of service members to come.“ (Steenkamp, Nash, Litz , 2013, p. 511)

CONTENT

- * the story of the Comprehensive Soldier Fitness program
- * some theoretic and empirical framework of the PTSD
- * prevention as preparedness embedded in the environment

1 The story of Comprehensive Soldier Fitness program



European Semester
On the Borders
 of Psychology and Beyond

<p>2009 Implementa- tion to U.S. Army</p>	<p>The Army implemented CSF, a \$125-million initiative designed to train all soldiers and their families in mental “fitness” and resilience. It is based on positive psychology work of Pennsylvania Uni. Brigadier-General Rhonda Cornum: „So we realised we would probably be better served if we had a preventative programme for psychological and emotional strengthening, rather than a reactive one that only began after someone developed a problem.” (philosophyforlive.org) „The Army states that CSF aims to: shift the normal psychological performance ‚curve´ of the soldier population to the right, that is, to increase the number of soldiers who derive meaning and personal growth from their combat experience (the rightmost part of the curve), to increase the number of soldiers who complete combat tours without pathology, and to decrease the number of soldiers who develop stress pathologies.” (Steenkamp, Nash, Litz, 2013, p. 508)</p>
<p>2011</p>	<p>The whole issue (66/1) of American Psychologist devoted to CSF.</p>
<p>2013 Critique</p>	<p>Steenkamp, Nash, Litz: „Military has a range of intrinsic endemic universal prevention processes, such as realistic deployment-role training, physical training, peer supports, and effective leadership.” (p. 507) „It is possible to be psychologically high-functioning and still develop PTSD.” (p. 510) Smith: „An emphasis on positive emotions and optimism could be maladaptive for post-combat recovery.” (p. 242) „Other models of post-combat coping indicate that service members may need to engage with negative emotions such as guilt and shame in order to contextualize morally challenging combat experiences and reconnect with others.” (p.244)</p>
<p>2014 IOM = the end?</p>	<p>„For example, on the basis of internal research data that show only very small effect sizes, DOD concluded that Comprehensive Soldier Fitness /.../ is effective—despite external evaluations that dispute that conclusion. (p. 4-5) „Recommendation 1: The committee recommends that the Department of Defense (DOD) employ only evidence-based resilience, prevention, and reintegration programs and policies and that it eliminate non-evidence-based programming.” (p. 5)</p>

2 Prevention or preparedness?



„A major hurdle to developing universal PTSD prevention programs is that **the known predictors of PTSD together account for at best only 20% of the variance** in response to traumatic events.“ (Steenkamp, Nash, Litz, 2013, p. 510)

Epidemiology of traumatic event exposure in general population (2015): Over 70% of respondents reported a traumatic event; 30.5% were exposed to four or more. **Exposure to interpersonal violence** had the strongest associations with subsequent traumatic events.

TODAY WE KNOW (military and general experience)

Coping is not universal; inducing positive mood can decrease coping ability in individuals with pessimistic coping style.

- Shame and guilt are social correctives; it is important to address them properly.
- Pervasive influence of trauma and grief-oriented therapists may reduce sensitivity to adaptive responses (G. Bonnano).
- There are links between PTSD and MST, PTSD and TBI, PTSD and experience of childhood maltreatment.

There are **rather environmental than psychological prevention processes** (in army: intrinsic to military culture - e. g. effective leadership and unit cohesion).

There are rather environmental than psychological causes of stress pathology (in army: MST).

Clear theoretic framework linking prevention strategies to intended outcomes in the context of psychotraumatology is missing.

It is needed to strengthen programs evaluation.

The **concept of resiliency** itself is not defined clearly and unanimously.

The **perspective of resiliency** has become to prevail in the period 2000-2010.

The important topics seem to be e. g. acknowledgment (of experience) and self/esteem.

It seems important to **cultivate the environment** – e. g. by ethos of service.

I still like the CFS ethos (Tedeschi, McNally, 2011) because it is about **preparedness**. E. g. by „life principles robust to challenges“:

a) Finding ways to be altruistic in trauma context;

c) Accepting and creating a changed social identity;

d) Considering the ancient Greek and Roman concept of the hero.



Univerzita Palackého
v Olomouci



RESILIENCE AS A DECISION

**8. Interdisciplinary conference
November 10, 2017
Protestant theological Faculty
Prague**