

ORGANIZATIONAL STRESS AND RESILIENCE. THE ROLE OF INTERNAL RESOURCES

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Abstract

Theoretical background. For military gendarmerie to survive potential threats to integrity, safety or their own lives, resilience is essential. Soldiers' ability to recover from job stress may also determine how well they can reintegrate into their families and communities after participating in high-risk missions without developing mental disorders or other behavioral problems. Stressors have the power to enhance or diminish resilience (Cavanaugh *et al.*, 2000). Perceived self-efficacy has been found to play a key role in determining reactions to stress (Bandura, 1997). Also, the literature states that workplace stressors correlate negatively with work engagement (Podsakoff *et al.*, 2007). *Methodology.* The research was carried out on a number of 214 gendarmerie military personnel, who completed self-report questionnaires regarding organizational stress, resilience, work commitment and perceived self-efficacy. This a cross-sectional correlational study of the relationship between perceived organizational stress and resilience. Moreover, the mediating role of perceived self-efficacy and commitment work was examined. *Results.* Stress has a significant negative effect on resilience. Perceived self-efficacy and commitment work acts as mediators of the relationship between organizational stress and resilience. *Discussions and conclusions.* The results show that work commitment and perceived self efficacy are partial mediators of the relationship between organizational stress and resilience of military gendarmes. The results have implications for improving the resilience of military gendarmes, by developing intervention strategies focused on raising awareness of the importance of internal resources, such as perceived self-efficacy and commitment work.

Cuvinte-cheie: stres organizațional, angajament în muncă, autoeficacitate percepută, reziliență

Keywords: organizational stress, work commitment, perceived self-efficacy, resilience

1. INTRODUCTION

Military gendarmes represent a professional group at risk, being constantly exposed to potentially traumatic events. This makes them vulnerable to developing mental health problems such as depression, substance abuse, post-traumatic stress symptoms, family violence (Hoge *et al.*, 2002). Cooper and colleagues (2001)

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mentioned six primary stressors related to the workplace: (a) factors intrinsic to the workplace, associated with the performance of specific tasks, such as the work environment and aspects of work planning (noise, vibration, overtime, overload at work, etc.); (b) the organizational roles, behaviors and job requirements that an individual fulfills; (c) workplace relations; (d) career development issues such as job insecurity, attrition, low pay; (e) organizational structure and climate, such as excessive formalization or discouragement of participation in decision-making; (f) the home-work interface, representing family problems that may arise due to work (lack of free time) or workplace problems generated by personal difficulties (dealing with a divorce, having an illness).

The stress faced by military gendarmes comes both from the nature of the tasks they have to perform, common to other occupations, such as shift work, working hours, dealing with excessive bureaucracy, but also from the specific pressures of their own profession, such as the risk of and puts his own safety at risk while protecting those around him. Previous studies are inconsistent regarding the type of work events that are most stressful. Some research cites organizational stressors as more stressful than operational stressors (Taylor & Bennell, 2006), while others find that for officers, mission-related, inherent stressors are more stressful than organizational stressors (Hartley *et al.*, 2011).

The significant costs associated with the recruitment, training and retention of military personnel make it important to identify and capitalize on psychological support resources. Thus, it is possible to avoid the loss of valuable military personnel, following the negative effects associated with stress (Keller *et al.*, 2005). Given the many negative effects that traumatic impact factors have on mental and physical health, this is the first study to clarify the influence of organizational stress on resilience. Based on a parallel mediation model, the role of internal resources, work engagement and perceived self-efficacy, as protective factors in the relationship between organizational stress and resilience of military gendarmes, was also investigated.

Organizational stress and resilience

The present study refers to the organizational stress factors faced by military gendarmes. These are both stress factors associated with organizational tasks, such as (a) role ambiguity: lack of understanding of work objectives, colleagues' expectations or workplace responsibilities; (b) role conflict: tensions between the demands of the job and the employee's perception that he is doing things he does not want to do or does not consider to be part of the job; (c) responsibility: the tension the employee feels because of the responsibility he has towards goods or people; (d) role overload, in the form of the large number of different roles that a person has to fulfill, as well as stressors associated with work relationships. In this sense, stress can be the result of a difficult relationship with bosses, generated by a lack of respect, trust or consideration or with colleagues, the appearance of

conflicts, lack of social support etc. (Gomez & Afonso, 2016). Organizational stressors have a negative impact on employee health, job satisfaction and efficiency (Dudchenk, 2011).

Resilience is a dynamic, complex and multidimensional phenomenon (Vaugh & Koster, 2014), defined as a person's ability to recover, recover, adapt, thrive after facing adversity, misfortune or change (Garcia-Dia *et al.*, 2013). Military resilience is the ability to achieve high performance and maintain honorable military traits, such as courage, bravery, and strength, despite hardship and loss (Moran, 1967). It is currently measured from a perspective that includes several components, such as optimism, self-efficacy, problem-solving ability, social competence, humor, family cohesion, or spiritual influences (Windle *et al.*, 2011).

Resilience represents the set of mental and behavioral processes that protect the individual from the negative effects of stress factors (Fletcher & Sarkar, 2012), being critical for military training. It plays an essential role in the face of cognitive, emotional and social stressors because a psychologically exhausted soldier will not cope during military operations, regardless of how physiologically capable he is (Nidl *et al.*, 2018).

In an organizational context, resilience represents the ability to bounce back from positive or negative changes or adversities (Luthans & Youssef, 2004), the ability to remain focused on tasks, productive and connected to the organization's missions (Warner & April, 2012).

The challenges and obstacles stress framework (Cavanaugh *et al.*, 2000) states that workplace stressors have the power to enhance or diminish resilience. Research differentiates between challenging and hindering stressors. Obstructive stressors are demands that become barriers to achieving goals and become inhibitors of personal growth, as opposed to challenging stressors that create opportunities for personal growth and development (Cavanaugh *et al.*, 2000). The effects of stress can vary depending on the intensity and duration of exposure, from relaxation to intense physiological activation (Oken *et al.*, 2015). The specialized literature provides a broad picture of the effects of stress on resilience, in different categories of populations. The present research complements previous studies by providing important insights into how organizational stress affects resilience in the military population.

Internal resources: Work engagement and perceived self-efficacy

The specialized literature mentions resilience as a dynamic process (Vaugh & Koster, 2014), influenced by a number of inter and intrapersonal factors. Determining the psychological variables with a role in the development of psychological resilience are key elements in the development of interventions to ensure the resilience of military gendarmes working in a high-stress environment. Gendarmerie soldiers adhere to a strong code of ethics, guided by work commitment, responsibility and integrity. They also show permanent resistance and

competitiveness, elements that are based on perceived self-efficacy. In this sense, this research addresses the role of internal resources: commitment to work and perceived self-efficacy, in the relationship between organizational stress and resilience, at the level of military gendarmes.

Self-efficacy is related to an individual's past experiences, core beliefs, and spiritual beliefs and has an important impact on how the individual manages stressors (Rees *et al.*, 2015). Perceived self-efficacy has been found to play a key role in determining reactions to stress, being related to the quality of coping with stressful and threatening situations (Bandura, 1997). It represents the interpretation that individuals give to their own training and achievements (Hudson, 2007) and directly affects the motivation to succeed in future situations (Pajares, 1996). Thus, perceived self-efficacy is strongly associated with resilience (Li & Nishikawa, 2012), generating its increase (Luthans *et al.*, 2006) and determines lower levels of anxiety, better adaptability and lower intentions to leave the place of work (Saks, 1994).

Work commitment is a psychological condition that determines the employee's strong desire to stay in the organization (Meyer & Allen, 1991). Work engagement is characterized by the association of three factors: strong acceptance of the organization's values and goals, the willingness to exert effort on behalf of the organization, and the desire to maintain its membership (Vakola & Nikolaou, 2005). The literature states that workplace stressors correlate negatively with work engagement (Podsakoff *et al.*, 2007). Likewise, work engagement correlates significantly positively with resilience (Vohra & Goel, 2009).

This study addresses the role of internal resources that the military can activate as a priority when facing various challenging situations of the organizational environment. Given the major importance of this population category in society, the results are of major importance for both managers and mental health professionals.

2. METHOD

2.1. RESEARCH OVERVIEW AND HYPOTHESES

Considering the previously mentioned theoretical and empirical framework, we aim to explore a possible model of investment that not only refers to satisfaction and commitment, but also includes forgiveness. Our main hypotheses are as follows:

Hypotheses 1: The level of perceived stress is a significant predictor of resilience.

Hypotheses 2: Work engagement and perceived self-efficacy mediate the relationship between organizational stress and resilience of military gendarmes.

2.2. MEASURES

We used the following four instruments to assess the main concepts of the study.

Organizational stress was measured using the *Organizational Police Stress Questionnaire* (PSQ-Org, McCreary, D. R., & Thompson, M. M., 2001). The 20-item PSQ-Op questionnaire assesses stressors associated with organizational culture and the organization as a work environment. Each item (“I have the feeling that I always have to prove my competences”) is rated on a 7 – point scale ranging from 1 (“not at all stressful”) to 7 (“very stressful”) with 4 indicating moderate stress. The total score is obtained by summing the values of the items. A higher value of the total score indicates a higher level of organizational stress. The Cronbach's Alpha value for this study is 0.928.

The *Connor-Davidson Resilience Scale* (CD-RISC, Connor & Davidson, 2003) was used to measure the resilience of police officers. The instrument consists of 25 items “Things happen for a reason”; “I don't give up even when things seem hopeless/solution”), each rated on a 5-point Likert scale, from 0 – not at all true, up to 4 – true almost all the time. High scores, obtained by summing the items, indicate increased resilience. The authors reported high internal consistency of the scale, with a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of .89. The Cronbach Alpha coefficient for this study is 0.754.

Perceived self-efficacy was measured using the *General Self-Efficacy Scale* (GSES, Schwarzer & Jerusalem, 1995). The scale consists of 10 items and measures the general sense of perceived self-efficacy in the face of daily challenges faced by military gendarmes and adaptation after experiencing stressful life events. The total score was obtained by summing the items, a higher level indicating a higher level of perceived self-efficacy. The Cronbach Alpha coefficient for this study is 0.838.

Professional Commitment (Meyer, Allen, & Smith, 1993) was used to measure work engagement. The instrument consists of 18 items, 6 in each of the following scales: AC – affective occupational commitment (“*I really feel as if this organization's problems are my own*”), CC – awareness of the effects of leaving (“*It would be very hard for me to leave my organization right now, even if I wanted to*”), NC – feeling pressured to stay (“*Even if it were to my advantage, I do not feel it would be right to leave my organization now*”). A higher level of the total score indicates a higher work engagement. The Cronbach's Alpha coefficient for this study is 0.714.

The instruments used were not validated on the Romanian population.

2.3. PROCEDURE

The study procedure and the instruments administered were in full compliance with the Declaration of Helsinki and the University's Code of Ethics.

The testing was carried out individually, by applying the tools using the pencil-paper method, in an appropriate environment, without a time limit. Participants completed a consent form and were informed about the purpose of the study, the research design, and the confidentiality of responses. Information related to age, sex, seniority, status held in the organization was collected. Participation was voluntary and participants could withdraw from the study at any time without prior justification.

The instruments were administered in April 2022 and were not part of an official evaluation of the group of military gendarmes

2.4. PARTICIPANTS

The research was carried out on a group of military gendarmes from a military unit, operative and non-operative personnel, with an experience in the organization of at least 6 months, N= 214 military personnel (95.32 % men and 4.67% women). The participants have a mean age of M= 38.41 years, standard deviation was SD= 9.04 and a mean seniority of M= 14.48 years, with a standard deviation SD= 7.95. 9.34% of the respondents are officers and 90.65% are non-commissioned officers.

3. RESULTS

3.1. PRELIMINARY ANALYSIS

In the first step, we performed descriptive and correlational statistical analyzes using the SPSS 28.0.1.0 software. Means, standard deviations, and Pearson correlations between study variables were calculated.

In the second step we proposed and analyzed a parallel mediation model using Model 4 (Hayes, 2018) of Process version 4.0 with IBM SPSS 28. We adopted 5000 bootstrap samples by constructing bootstrap-based confidence intervals to estimate intervals 95% confidence (Hayes, 2017). Confidence intervals that do not include zero indicate significant effects (Hayes & Scharkow, 2013). Mediation analysis was conducted to verify the mediating role of internal resources: perceived self-efficacy and work engagement in the relationship between organizational stress and resilience of military gendarmes.

Organizational stress correlates significantly negatively with the resilience of military gendarmes ($r = -0.64$, $p < 0.05$), perceived self-efficacy ($r = -0.55$, $p < 0.05$), work commitment ($r = -0.60$, $p < 0.05$).

Descriptive statistics and correlational analysis are shown in Table no.1.

Table no. 1
Pearson correlations among the variables of the study

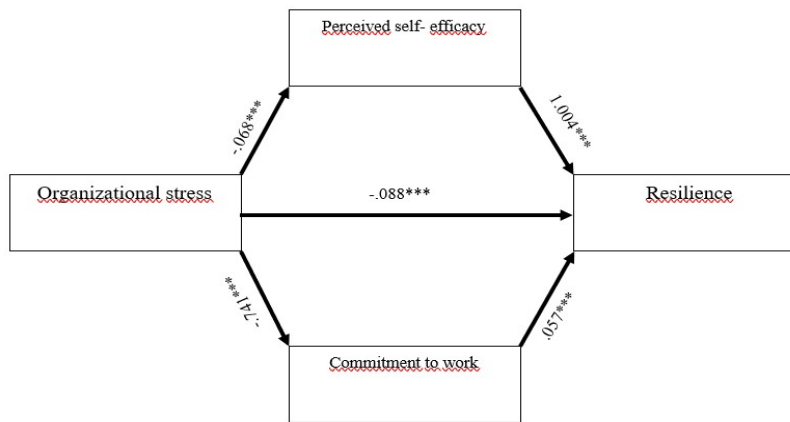
Variable	Measures					
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>4</i>
1. Organizational stress	37.66	22.55	1			
2. Resilience	93.77	6.97	-.647**	1		
3. Perceived self- efficacy	37.52	2.81	-.550**	.704**	1	
4. Commitment to work	144.87	27.85	-.600**	.650**	.612**	1

Note. ** $p < .010$

3.2. MEDIATION ANALYSIS

The parallel mediation model of the study addressed the predictive effect of organizational stress on resilience, as well as the mediating effect of internal resources of the military gendarmerie: work commitment, perceived self-efficacy. Organizational stress significantly negatively predicts perceived self-efficacy ($\beta = -.068$; $p < .001$) and work engagement ($\beta = -0.741$; $p < .001$). The direct effect is statistically significant, indicating that organizational stress significantly negatively predicts military resilience ($\beta = -0.088$; $p < .001$), in a relationship partially mediated by work engagement and perceived self-efficacy, confirming thus the research hypothesis (Figure number 1). Figure number 1 shows the unstandardized coefficients.

Figure no. 1. The relationship between organizational stress and resilience mediated by perceived self-efficacy and work engagement



Note. *** $p < .001$

Both the direct effect of organizational stress ($c = -0.881$; 95% CI $[-0.1219; -0.0543]$) and the indirect effect of perceived self-efficacy ($a*b = 1.0042$; 95% CI $[.7307; 1.2777]$) and of work engagement ($a1*b1 = .0577$; 95% CI $[.0288; .0867]$) are statistically significant because the confidence interval does not include 0 (see Table 2). This demonstrates that work engagement and self-efficacy perceived partially mediates the relationship between organizational stress and resilience, as the direct path still remains significant.

Table no. 2.
Direct, indirect and total effects of the relationship between organizational stress and resilience

Independent measures (IV)	Dependent measure (DV)	Self- efficacy (M ₁)		Total indirect effect		IV→ M ₁		M ₁ → DV		Indirect effect		95% CI	
		Total direct effect											
		<i>c</i>				<i>a</i>		<i>b</i>		<i>a*b</i>			
OrgS	RES	b - .088***	SE .017	b - .069	SE .014	b - .068***	SE .007	b 1.004***	SE .138	b - .043	SE .011	BootLLCI .730	BootULCI 1.277

Independent measures (IV)	Dependent measure (DV)	Commitment to work (M ₂)		Total indirect effect		IV→ M ₂		M ₂ → DV		Indirect effect		95% CI	
		Total effect	direct										
		c				aI		bI		aI*bI			
OrgS	RES	b - .088***	SE .017	b - .042	SE .011	b - .741***	SE .067	B .057***	SE .014	b - .070	SE .013	BootLLCI .028	BootULCI .086

4. DISCUSSION

The present study explores the relationship between organizational stress and resilience, as well as the mediating role of internal resources in the case of military gendarmes, constantly exposed to organizational stress factors. A mediation model was proposed and tested that investigated the relationship between organizational stress and resilience and its explanatory mechanisms: the perceived self-efficacy and work engagement.

Organizational stress and resilience

In emergency situations, critical incidents can create a sense of psychological disequilibrium, during which personnel lose the ability to organize their experiences in meaningful and effectively manageable ways (Paton, 1994). The military organization is the context in which police officers experience and interpret critical incidents and challenging events (Weick & Sutcliffe, 2007), influencing their thoughts and actions. The present research indicates that organizational stress is significantly negatively associated with resilience. It is shown that military gendarmes are exposed to organizational stress, which can arise from difficult relationships, unpredictable changes, role responsibilities, competition, service location, excessive bureaucracy, etc. Moderate stress can create excitement and energy, but too much stress can cause disruptive events to be perceived as adversity (Warner & April, 2012). The present research may illustrate either the existence of an episode immediately following exposure to a stressful event, in which initial life disruption may precede an increase in resilience, or how experiencing adversity causes limited resilience. Very strong negative emotions can cause an overwhelming response, with associated dysfunctions (Warner & April, 2012).

As a result of the interaction between biological, psychological and environmental factors, the resilience of military gendarmes is influenced by the severity of the stressors they face (Yao *et al.*, 2019). Organizational environments with low to medium levels of organizational stress can have a positive effect on resilience. But high-level situations can temporarily impair coping and cause impairment (Ord *et al.*, 2020).

The mediating role of internal resources

The results of this research demonstrate the mediating role of internal resources: perceived self-efficacy and work commitment, which partially explain the relationship between organizational stress and resilience of military gendarmes. In agreement with previous research, resilience is increased when, when faced with professional stress factors, internal resources are activated (Back *et al.*, 2016).

The study demonstrates a negative association between the organizational stress felt by military gendarmes and perceived self-efficacy. Military gendarmes with a higher level of perceived self-efficacy experience a lower level of organizational stress, compared to those with a lower level of self-efficacy. Consistent with previous studies, soldiers with increased self-efficacy have greater confidence in their ability to perform job duties despite organizational stressors (Jex *et al.*, 2001). They can challenge themselves to a greater extent, are more motivated to build harmonious work relationships and approach problems in a more innovative way (Phelan & Young 2003).

In agreement with previous literature, the present research demonstrates a positive association between perceived self-efficacy and resilience (Violanti *et al.*, 2014) of military gendarmes. A high level of perceived self-efficacy determines proactive responses to the stressful organizational environment (Prilleltensky *et al.*, 2001). Perceived self-efficacy is essential for the development of resilience (Lightsey, 2006) of military gendarmes. According to Flach's Resilience Theory (1989), perceived self-efficacy is part of the repertoire of strengths that allow individuals to evolve towards positive change.

Work engagement represents an internal resource that intervenes as a mediator in the relationship between organizational stress and resilience. In agreement with previous research, organizational stress correlates negatively with work engagement (Amin *et al.*, 2018). Military gendarmes with a high level of work engagement report a lower level of organizational stress compared to those with a higher level of work engagement.

Also, high commitment causes an increase in the resilience of military gendarmes. Commitment to work provides the emotional, motivational, affective and cognitive resources that favor the return to a state of equilibrium after confronting organizational stress factors, something that influences the increase of resilience (Youssef & Luthans, 2007).

5. LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

Limitations can be attributed primarily to the way data is collected. The research was based on information collected from self-report questionnaires. Future studies could consider other methods of investigation, such as observation. Second, another limitation is represented by the sample of military gendarmes from a single military unit. Future studies can be carried out on the basis of samples also

represented by the populations of other structures active in the field of public order and safety. Likewise, future research can focus on longitudinal designs to investigate both the stability of internal resources and the role of other variables that can contribute to maintaining or strengthening the resilience of military gendarmes.

The study has important practical implications, guiding military leaders and mental health professionals toward developing an organizational environment that fosters resilience, both through individual training and organizational interventions. The role of internal resources that perceived self-efficacy and work commitment have in the relationship between organizational stress and resilience guides us towards the development of prevention programs. Last but not least, the study orients us towards the selection activity. Recruiting staff with a high level of perceived self-efficacy and commitment to work will ensure the existence of resources that can be capitalized in the face of organizational stress factors

6. CONCLUSION

Psychological resilience is a central construct, important for the way military gendarmes respond to organizational stressors. The present research investigated the relationship between organizational stress and resilience, mediated by the internal resources of military gendarmes. Organizational stress significantly negatively predicts resilience. Perceived self-efficacy and work engagement mediate the relationship between organizational stress and resilience. The variables thus represent internal resources that ensure psychological growth and development, following the confrontation with stress factors at work. The study of internal resources of the military gendarmerie in increasing resilience has important practical implications and can represent the starting point of some intervention strategies aimed at reducing the negative effects of organizational stress.

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Abstract

Pentru ca militarii jandarmi să gestioneze cu succes potențialele amenințări la adresa integrității, siguranței sau propriei vieți, reziliența este esențială. Capacitatea jandarmilor de a gestiona stresul de la locul de muncă poate asigura, de asemenea, reintegrarea în familie și comunitate, după participarea la misiunile cu grad ridicat de risc, fără dezvoltarea unor tulburări mintale sau probleme de comportament. *Cadru teoretic*. Factorii de stres au puterea de a spori sau de a diminua reziliența (Cavanaugh *et al.*, 2000). S-a constatat că autoeficacitatea percepută joacă un rol cheie în determinarea reacțiilor la stres (Bandura, 1997). De asemenea, literatura de specialitate afirmă că factorii de stres la locul de muncă corelează negativ cu implicarea în muncă (Podsakoff *et al.*, 2007). *Metodologie*. Cercetarea a fost efectuată pe un număr de 214 militari jandarmi, care au

completat chestionare de auto-raportare privind stresul organizațional, reziliența, angajamentul în muncă și autoeficacitatea percepută. Acesta este un studiu corelațional transversal care investighează relația dintre stresul organizațional perceput și reziliența militarilor jandarmi. Mai mult, a fost examinat rolul de mediere al autoeficacității percepute și al angajamentului în muncă. *Rezultate.* Stresul are un efect negativ semnificativ asupra rezilienței militarilor jandarmi. Autoeficacitatea percepută și angajamentul în muncă acționează ca mediatori ai relației dintre stresul organizațional și reziliență. *Concluzii și discuții.* Rezultatele au implicații pentru îmbunătățirea rezilienței, prin dezvoltarea strategiilor de intervenție axate pe creșterea conștientizării importanței resurselor interne, cum ar fi autoeficacitatea percepută și angajamentul în muncă.