

Coping Styles and Combat Motivation During Operations: An IDF Case Study

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Armed Forces & Society

1-20

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DOI: 10.1177/0095327X16632316

afs.sagepub.com



Abstract

The characteristic challenges of combat lead military personnel to develop adaptive coping styles that are different from coping styles used in routine life. This contention is explored using data collected from Israel Defense Forces conscript and reserve soldiers during intense military operations. The results of this study support this claim, in particular concerning faith. Coping styles were also correlated with combat motivations and measures of positive and negative emotions. It seems that a well-adapted soldier may use unique coping styles that, although perhaps not understood by outsiders, can contribute to his capacity to carry out his undertakings. A better understanding of such a state of mind should prove valuable for military leaders and religious experts.

Keywords

combat stress, coping styles, combat motivation, religion, IDF

Introduction

Coping With Operational Stress

“Operational stress” includes a myriad of challenges including fighting against armed opponents, operating among civilians, and protracted deployment away from

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the homeland (Adler, Castro, & Britt, 2006; Ender, 2009; Nash, 2006). Yet military personnel can successfully cope with these hardships (Ben-Shalom & Glicksohn, 2013; Britt & Dickinson, 2006; Gal, 1987). The ability to find meaning is an important source for coping with stress, and when a soldier is able to find a sense of purpose, he can withstand hardship better and for longer periods of time (Bartone, 2006; Frankl, 1959; Whitesell & Owens, 2012). The purpose of this study was to correlate coping styles with stress and combat motivation during actual military operations.

It is often recognized that active coping with stress is more efficient than passive or emotional coping. Nevertheless, it is important to note that coping with stress in a military operational context is linked to powers usually exceeding the control or prediction of the individual. First, the soldier is obligated to execute orders or carry out missions. Second, military operations inherently include arbitrary and random events. The enemy's intentions are not known, and his plans are concealed. Ultimately, the course of a skirmish or combat cannot be predicted (because it is subject to the will of the enemy), and this fact renders a soldier's hope of nonhuman combat impossible (Holmes, 1984; Johnson, 2015). The hardships of operational stress require soldiers to develop effective coping mechanisms that could be labeled as "healthy" or "unhealthy." A healthy coping mechanism helps the soldier to maintain a normative set of values as well as to carry out his assigned military undertakings. Healthy coping strategies include, for instance, the use of humor, even though its content may be bizarre and cynical (Koffman, 2006). An unhealthy coping strategy refers to the variety of actions through which the soldier copes with stress, which have a negative effect on his well-being and his ability to perform his undertakings. In this category, we can list: drinking to the point of intoxication, inappropriate use of violence, dangerous driving, and dangerous games with weapons (Ben-Shalom & Glicksohn, 2013). Since the challenge a soldier faces during wartime is so immense, part of the coping is necessarily idiosyncratic and a stranger may see it as irrational. After all, the soldier cannot cope with the challenges of combat merely by searching for information or attempting to rationally solve problems. Often, during situations of battle, he must change himself, even if only metaphorically, since he cannot change his environment. As an example of this change, researchers indicate that soldiers tend to efface themselves, either by temporarily imagining themselves as dead or by developing apathy. Thus, they efficiently cope with uncontrollable and horrific challenges (Nash, 2006).

Our contention is that the mechanisms used by soldiers for coping with stress may add something unique to our conceptualization of effective coping. For example, problem solving (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984) is usually depicted as an emblem of an efficient coping style. However, a soldier cannot solve the essence of stress since his participation in deployment is given. Instead of problem solving, a soldier may cope through apathy, numbness, dissociation, fatalism, and even a passive acceptance of the inevitable destiny (Nash, 2006; Taylor & Morgan, 2014). But even more than that, when a coping process takes place, it is often marked with magic, talismans,

and irrational dimensions. Thus, for instance, military history is filled with reports that soldiers during wartime, at times of stress, attach a magical belief to objects: lucky charms, animals, and people symbolizing control in destiny and promising success when coping with the danger of death (Fussell, 1975; Keegan, 1976; St. George, 2013; Holmes, 1984). Other coping elements that are described alongside the magical belief include apathy, acceptance of destiny, and lack of emotion. All are accompanied by an ability to fashion an intense belief in military symbols, such as the weapon, the unit insignia, and the leadership of commanders (King, 2013; Moran, 1945). In civilian life, this way of thinking could be considered bizarre and possibly negative and at the very least be labeled as ludicrous. However, at times of war, the soldier's ability to turn to the irrational dimension and his ability to create indifference, suppressing ominous thoughts, sometimes by apathy, constitutes an effective defense mechanism. Moreover, the military system encourages its soldiers to invest a lot of time and effort in diversions and substitutes for pestering emotions and thoughts about danger. The army fashions this by employing a strategy of constant occupations, as a welcome diversion and a means for the soldier to control his thoughts and emotions. Other coping styles are related to fatalism and accepting destiny from a position of indifference. "Every bullet has its billet" is a long-standing informal phrase among Israel Defense Forces (IDF) soldiers, pertaining to the fact that a person can function as his destiny is already set. Emotions of horror are therefore futile. Ceremonies, beliefs, prayers, and magical thoughts help the combat soldier who faces the immense powers of war. Together, they grant a sense of control in an altogether uncontrollable situation (Holmes, 1984; St. George, 2013).

Psychological and anthropological literature contains much evidence that magical explanations grow rapidly in uncertain conditions or in the face of nearly inexplicable phenomena. The relationship between elements of stress and magical thinking, or to the prevalence in which it appears, has already been documented as early as in Malinowski's studies (1954), which described how fishermen in the Pacific Ocean use rituals and magical thoughts only in situations wherein greater danger may be foreseen, for instance, when they venture out into the open ocean. Other examples also exist in technologically advanced societies, such as astrology and mysticism in times of financial crisis (Padgett & Jorgenson, 1982). A study conducted in Israel during the first Gulf War empirically examined the relationship between the amount of stress experienced during a missile attack and aspects of magical thinking (Keinan, 1994). The study compared participants from cities that suffered missile attacks (Ramat Gan and Tel Aviv) and participants from cities that did not see a single missile (Jerusalem and Tiberias). The results of the study indicate that high levels of stress significantly augment the frequency and strength of magical thoughts. However, psychological literature discussing the manner in which combat soldiers cope with stress using irrational mechanisms is scant. This also holds true for military psychology in Israel, which focuses more on the negative aspects of stress and less on the psychological and social mechanisms the soldier may access in

wartime (Ben-Shalom & Fox, 2009). Moreover, this literature is greatly influenced by the accumulated knowledge about man in battle in the context of the “great” (in Israeli terms) wars, mainly the Yom Kippur War, and less in the context of small wars, or operations with a smaller scope, which characterize IDF’s operations during the last three decades.

“There Are No Atheists in the Foxholes”

Belief in God, as an element in the soldier’s capability to cope in war, manifests in the institutionalization of religious activities in armies throughout the history of warfare (Keegan, 1976; King, 2013). We find much evidence of this manifestation in the Bible, the *Iliad*, Shakespeare’s plays, and modern films on war. Indeed, even today, when war is conducted through technologically advanced weaponry, this need is as strong as ever. This is because every military confrontation enfolds within itself the threat of death and a demand to struggle against unavoidably difficult conditions, which are augmented by the enemy’s hostility and the unavoidable malice of warfare. When coping with stress, religious belief constitutes a significant element (Pargament, 2001), and according to men of faith who work in militaries, faith is a strong need that grows even stronger in times of crisis during military service (Waynick, Fredrich, Scheider, Thomas, & Bloomstorm, 2006). The commonplace idiom that there are no atheists in the foxholes also means that man seeks comfort in God when he faces the horror of war. However, this claim holds true mainly in times of crisis during war but is not necessarily true in the long run. Some soldiers will turn to faith as an element that helps them cope with the actual situation of stress, yet they will not return to it when the situation comes to an end. Moreover, in light of their experience in war, they might even relinquish their faith because of disappointment and disillusion (Nash, 2006).

There is much evidence that when soldiers find themselves facing extreme danger, they turn to God and faith as a means of coping and alleviating the sense of anxiety. For the purposes of this research, we hypothesize that this is a form of coping mechanism that is not completely identical to the coping styles frequently seen in the literature, although it may be related to emotional coping (Lazarus & Flokman, 1984). To a certain extent, it does bear some resemblance to the methods of coping reported by the military physicians and historians, who have explored similar topics in the history of war and mainly First World War (Holmes, 1984; Moran, 1945). They pointed toward coping techniques that use magical beliefs, charms, talismans, ritual, and the consumption of food, drinking alcohol, and smoking. These techniques constitute psychological and social mechanisms, which the soldier adopts so that he can cope with stress (Holmes, 1984; St. George, 2013). Moreover, it seems that in this field, we need to distinguish more precisely between stress from immediate, short-term events and stress occurring throughout prolonged periods of time. Immediate or acute stress has defined psychological and cognitive coping methods. These methods enable the individual to reduce the experience of

stress and thus make it possible for him to perform complex actions without mistakes (Driskell & Salas, 1991). Much of military training is aimed toward the inoculation of the soldier against the blurring effects of immediate stress that may lead toward short-term paralysis and loss of function (Ben-Shalom, Klar, & Benbenisty, 2012).

Operational stress, on the other hand, possesses unique and chronic attributes of stress. If one is not attentive to these challenges, they eventually cause exhaustion. Coping with chronic stress is based, to a greater extent, on the unit's social, organizational, and ritualistic activities. This action is designed to help the individual persist in his role for an extended period of time. Such an activity is expressed by managing the unit's cycle of reinforcements and transitions between periods of combat and periods of organization, alongside an institutional training in the unit's weaponry, as well as the leadership skills of its commanders. This type of coping is intimately linked to the military organization's systematic activity and management of its material assets such as medical service, logistics, control, and reinforcements of personnel. This type of coping is accompanied by other elements that influence the cognitive and spiritual dimensions, such as defining the soldier's role and his training as a fighter and endowing war with meaning and purpose (Manning, 1991).

Magical faith as a way of coping with war was not empirically explored in the IDF. Yet studies in a similar field were conducted regarding religious behavior among Israeli citizens in times of war (Sosis, 2007). Some of these studies did point toward the importance of religious ceremonies among citizens, during times of distress. However, similar studies within a combat–military context were never conducted in Israel. Nonetheless, this topic is often described in the memoirs of fighters. The following quotation demonstrates an aspect of this claim. The context of this quotation is a desperate life and death battle of reserve duty soldiers in the Golan Heights in the Yom Kippur War. The tank commander, who is secular, includes in his instructions a dimension of faith in a moment of truth, a few seconds before the tank is hit. The gunner, who is orthodox religious, indeed responds to it:

... we're being shot at, gunner combat range, fire! Driver go back fast. Gunner, pray. I could barely hear his voice over the noises in the tank inner communication. I fired a shell and yelled you pray Gidi [Gideon]! And he yelled: but I don't know how to pray! I prayed. From the deep recesses of my heart I yelled: "Save now, Oh G-D, I beseech thee!" (Sabato, 1999, p. 87)

Combat Motivation

Combat motivation has attracted the interest of military sociologists as early as the Second World War (Shils & Janowitz, 1948) although the concept of "Heroic Suicide" (Durkheim, 1897/1951) is an earlier example. It is generally concluded that combat motivation should be understood as a factor in an actual combat environment (Kellet, 1982; Moskos, 1975) since distinctive motivations prevail in combat: the will to survive, the hostility and might of the enemy, or the social pressures

of the primary groups (or the lack of them) to take risks (Kellett, 1982; Newsome, 2003). For our purpose, combat motivation is the will of a soldier to take part in real-life military operations. Collective influences of the military institution such as training, the chain of command, manpower system, and military ethos were found to have great influence on the willingness of individuals and groups to engage in the risks of combat (Gabriel & Savage, 1979; King, 2013; Kinzer-Stewart, 1991; Moskos, 1975; Wong, Kolditz, Millen, & Potter, 2003). Although it is a key element in combat power, it seems that combat motivation remains unclear for multilayer determinants and the barriers of empirical study of this issue during actual combat.

The significance of combat motivation and the changing nature of war require a constant observation by military sociologists. In the last three decades, the IDF gradually shifted its orientation from large-scale military operations against state armies toward small-scale warfare against semiorganized foes. This shift had an effect on combat motivations although it seems that it was not fully recognized in the literature (Cohen, 2008). When scholars analyzed the tactical failures of the IDF in the 2006 Second Lebanon War (perhaps as opposed to strategic gains), they focused on material, doctrinal, or leadership reasons (Inbar, 2007; Kober, 2008; Matthews, 2008). It is the human dimension reflected in combat motivation that seems to us to be kept out of sight and research. While recently Kober (2015) identifies the "Post Heroic" era in which the IDF is now immersed, he also leaves the motivational dimensions of combat partially untouched. Our contention is that this factor should be further explored and that it is related to coping styles. We assume that the will to fight is partially connected to an understanding and interpretation of the combat reality, namely of the stressors of combat (Ben-Shalom et al., 2012; Kellett, 1982).

Interestingly, there are abundant studies about religious soldiers and special arrangements for their service in the altogether secular IDF ("Hesder"; Cohen, 1997; Libel, 2013) but not on religion motivation in actual fighting. Indeed, one element that was explored in the past in relation to combat motivation among IDF soldiers was the sense of Israeli Zionist patriotism. In this field, belief in ideological goals was examined many times, in relation to motivation to enlist and not the motivation to engage in combat. These studies examined diverse elements that are also identified in the global literature exploring man's behavior in combat. These include, among the rest, leadership, unity, patriotism, and a sense that "there is no choice" (Gal, 1986). In recent years, the question of religion as a source of combat motivation also aroused discussion (Libel & Gal, 2015). However, religious faith was not significantly examined in the context of the motivation to fight in actual military undertakings. Most of the current research is centered on the political control of the military (Levy, 2014) or the enlistment into the IDF in the wider Israeli context (Røislien, 2013) and the ensuing internal structure of the military (Libel & Gal, 2015). The connection between motivation to fight, stress, and coping with it in times of combat was also not extensively explored. The reason for this might be the fact that motivation belongs to a field that may be described as "positive psychology." That is, this topic is debated from a certain position in

psychology, which emphasizes the positive and productive aspects in man's psychology (Britt & Dickinson, 2006). By its very nature, coping with stress belongs to a field that may be called, with proper caution, "negative psychology." That is a field with a negative tone on mental well-being and a subject that must be criticized and reduced in order to protect mental health. Observing stress as an element that may eventually yield positive results is a developing idea in psychology in general and in the military context in particular (Britt & Dickinson, 2006). It is possible that faith is an important element in the ability to positively cope with stress during military missions and warfare. Research on this element has yet to be exhausted and may illuminate styles of coping with stress from a point of view that transgresses the basic division between rational and emotional coping. Conducting this kind of research in a military context seems important, especially in light of the historical testimonies from the great wars of the past, which showed that irrational coping methods and "magical" beliefs are of extreme importance for soldiers in times of war.

The Current Study

The study was conducted among ground forces troops participating in fighting against Islamic Resistance Movement (HAMAS) in the "Cast Lead" operation in Gaza from December 27, 2008, to January 18, 2009. This operation included fighting against well-prepared and armed opponents. The combatant not only faced this foe but also had to adapt to severe weather conditions and complicated humanitarian dilemmas. Its characteristics reflect the typical IDF operations in the last decade, such as Operation "Defensive Shield" (2002), the "Second Lebanon War" (2006), and Operation "Defensive Edge" (2014). As in previous campaigns, the heaviest fighting was conducted by the regular component of the IDF which is composed mainly of conscripts, while the reservists joined the fighting later and were assigned to areas which had less possibility of fighting. The purpose of this study was to correlate coping styles with stress and combat motivation during actual military operations. We were interested to see whether these variables are correlated in the turmoil and havoc of large-scale ground operations, and our research hypotheses were therefore articulated in a general form. These hypotheses were as follows:

1. We hypothesized that some coping styles will be used more frequently during the operation as compared to others which are more relevant for regular routine life.
2. We hypothesized that faith-based coping will be more frequent during the operation.
3. We hypothesized that certain coping styles will be correlated to combat motivation, while others will not be correlated to combat motivation.

Method

Sample

The study included 842 combat soldiers, comprised of 514 conscripted recruits (61%) and 328 reservists (39%). This sample represents the population of soldiers and junior commanders of the Ground Forces who participated in “Operation Cast Lead.” All research participants were soldiers and noncommissioned officers who served in one of the combat brigades on the ground, and 96% of the subjects crossed the border to the Gaza Strip. The mean age was 19 years and 8 months for conscripted soldiers ($SD = 1.4$), and the average age of reserve soldiers was 28 ($SD = 5.3$). The distribution of the ranks reflected this difference in age: Lance corporals and corporals were 30% of the conscripts and 1% of the reservists, sergeants and staff sergeants were 69% of the conscripts and 44% of the reservists, while sergeants first class were 1% of the conscripts and 55% of the reservists.

Procedure

The research questionnaire was administered as part of an organizational survey examining the general attitude toward the operation. The data were collected between 1 and 3 days following the operation. The participants answered the questionnaires when they were stationed at preparatory stages with their units, immediately after leaving the Gaza Strip. Questionnaires were usually answered in a parking garage or in an armored vehicle temporary assembly area, or in a large tent or shed, depending on the terrain. Respondents were told that they do not have to participate in the study, but the vast majority chose to answer the questionnaire.

Questionnaire Structure

The research tools included a self-administered questionnaire consisting of four parts: a questionnaire on coping with stress, a questionnaire assessing motivation to participate in the operation, a stress questionnaire, and a questionnaire to assess the impact of the military operation on the soldier. In addition, the questionnaire included background information such as age, gender, rank, and type of service (i.e., conscript or reserve).

Coping with stress. Coping with stress was assessed using a questionnaire developed by Luria (2008). It consisted of 15 techniques for coping with stress, such as sleep, thinking about stressors, expressing emotions, and humor. Respondents were asked to indicate to what degree each coping method was effective for them on a scale from 1 (*very slightly*) to 5 (*very much*), with respect to two situations: “normal times” and “during combat.” In a preliminary analysis, we examined the internal structure of the questionnaire using factor analysis with varimax rotation. Table 1 shows the results of this analysis, and it can be seen that the various coping

Table 1. Factor Analysis (Varimax Rotation) of the Questionnaire on Techniques for Coping With Stress.

I Coped With Stress by	M	SD	Emotional Coping ($\alpha = .63$)	Rational Coping ($\alpha = .71$)	Distraction Coping ($\alpha = .52$)	Faith-Based Coping ($r = .31$)
Relaxation	1.74	1.24	.72	.14	.07	-.00
Crying	1.24	.802	.71	-.00	.10	-.05
Disconnect myself	1.91	1.40	.66	.08	.13	.07
Self-talk	2.08	1.49	.58	.13	-.10	.30
Problem solving	3.33	1.52	.13	.69	-.03	.05
Keeping perspective	3.76	1.32	.08	.61	.00	.11
Acceptance of the situation	3.95	1.22	-.09	.49	.17	.20
I focused on stressors	2.64	1.48	.24	.48	.03	.04
Knowing the time is limited	3.34	1.48	-.02	.48	.42	-.03
Sleeping	2.77	1.47	.27	-.11	.64	-.01
Distraction of attention	3.29	1.51	-.01	.08	.63	.33
Humor	4.14	1.37	-.00	.19	.55	-.13
Imagination	2.77	1.47	.24	.02	.44	.42
Faith	3.85	1.57	.05	.07	-.10	.75
Encouraged myself	3.81	1.33	.02	.24	.14	.71

Note. Bold values indicate factor loadings.

techniques were grouped into four coping patterns (factors) that we called “rational coping,” “diversion coping,” “emotional coping,” and “faith-based coping.” Table 1 includes the distribution into four factors which explains 47% of variance. One item that was formulated as “knowing that time is limited” belonged equally to the first two factors in the table and was therefore removed from the analysis. Internal reliability of the variables within each factor was relatively low, but the small number of items in each factor should be taken into consideration (Cronbach’s α values ranged from .52 to .71). The last factor included only 2 items; therefore, Pearson’s r correlation was calculated in this case.

Combat motivation. Combat motivation was assessed by a tool developed by Benbenisty, Ben-Shalom, and Ronel (2010), which included 7 items that examined the soldiers’ reasons to participate in the operation. The participants were asked to what extent different factors affected their willingness to take part in the operation. The scale ranged from 1 (*not at all*) to 7 (*very much*). This questionnaire refers to three types of motives for fighting: “emotional motivations,” “motives associated with the military unit,” and “coercive motivations.” We first examined the internal structure of the questionnaire using factor analysis with varimax rotation. Table 2 shows the results of this analysis, and it can be seen that it includes the distribution into three factors which explains 69% of the variance. Emotional motivations

Table 2. Factor Analysis (Varimax Rotation) of the Questionnaire on Combat Motivation.

To What Extent, These Factors Affected Your Willingness to Participate in the Operation?	M	SD	Emotional Motivation ($\alpha = .60$)	Unit Motivation ($r = .51$)	Coercive Motivation ($r = .27$)
Your emotions toward the enemy	5.76	1.70	.86	.01	.11
The guys in the platoon/company	5.89	1.56	.79	.06	-.14
The opportunity to take part in real operational activity	5.87	1.66	.71	.39	-.22
It was important for me to be part of the regimental tradition	4.43	2.22	.42	.57	.21
The commanders	4.10	2.04	.13	.76	.34
Because this is the army and I have no choice	3.36	2.20	-.23	.15	.81
I just felt that there was no choice but to fight the HAMAS	5.31	2.11	.38	-.46	.70

Note. HAMAS = Islamic Resistance Movement.

included the following items: “The opportunity to participate in a real operational action” and “the way you feel about the enemy.” Motives related to the military unit included “The friends in the platoon/company,” “the commanders,” and “the importance of sharing the battalion’s tradition.” Motives related to coercion included the following: “Because it is the military and I have no choice” and “I felt that there was no choice but to fight the HAMAS.”

The effects of participation in the operation. Five questions examined to what extent the soldier felt that his participation in the operation affected him positively or negatively. The questions dealt with several factors, including professional level, desire for future participation in combat, trust in friends, confidence in the army, and a general assessment of participation in the operation. The scale for each answer ranged from 5 (*very positive effect*) to 1 (*very negative effect*). There was a high internal correlation between the questions (Cronbach’s α was .84). All questions were combined into one variable called “the effects of participation in the operation.”

The assessment of combat stress. Two separate measures were created to assess combat stress: negative emotions and injury. The respondents were asked to indicate how much stress they felt during the operation, on a scale from 1 (*very slightly*) to 5 (*very much*). Then, they were asked to indicate whether they felt exhausted during combat by marking 1 (*no*) or 2 (*yes*). The two questions had low significant correlation ($r = .21, p < .05$). Both were standardized and combined into one index called “negative emotions.” Two other questions on the stress questionnaire dealt with

Table 3. Descriptive Statistics of the Research Variables.

Variable	M	SD	Range
Rational coping	3.42	0.90	1–5
Diversion coping	3.39	0.92	1–5
Emotional coping	1.80	0.92	1–5
Faith-based coping	3.84	1.17	1–5
Emotional motivation	5.81	1.45	1–7
Unit motivation	4.80	1.52	1–7
Coercive motivation	4.34	1.72	1–7
The effects of participation in the operation	4.31	0.80	1–5

Note. $N = 835$.

physical damage suffered during the fighting, either by the respondent or by a unit member. Each question could be answered by marking 1 (*yes*) or 2 (*no*). Both questions had low correlation ($r = .08, p < .05$) and were consolidated into one index, which was referred to as “injury.” The two indices of negative emotions and injury had low correlation ($r = .10, p < .05$).

Results

Table 3 contains descriptive statistics of the research variables, and additional descriptive statistics are provided in Table 4 and will be discussed later. We first explored the first hypothesis about the use of certain coping mechanisms during the operation as compared to routine life. The results are presented in Table 5. Indeed, we have found that three out of four coping styles were reported to vary between emergency and routine. Faith-based coping was higher during combat, $t(df = 822) = 7.16, p < .01$, rational coping was also higher during combat, $t(df = 825) = 5.56, p < .01$, while diversion coping was higher during routine, $t(df = 833) = -3.78, p < .05$. There were no differences between emotional copings in both situations. Table 6 presents an expansion of the investigation about the use of coping mechanisms by comparing their use among reservists and conscripts. Our analysis showed a greater discrepancy among conscription soldiers than among reservists. The most evident discrepancy was found in faith-based coping among conscripts, $d = .25, t(df = 508) = 6.84, p < .01$, as well as reservists, $d = .10, t(df = 313) = 2.68, p < .05$.

Our second hypothesis anticipated that faith-based coping will be higher during combat. Indeed, that was found to be the case, both for reservists and for regulars. In order to better understand this result, we examined the number of respondents who reported a change regarding the importance of faith between the two modes. In accordance with the first hypothesis that faith-based coping would be more pronounced during fighting than during routine, we found that 16% of the respondents reported that they used faith-based coping during the fighting to a greater extent than in routine, and only 3% of the respondents claimed that faith-based coping served

Table 4. Correlations Between the Main Study Variables.

Coping Style	Rational Coping	Emotional Coping	Diversion Coping	Faith-Based Coping	Emotional Motivation	Unit Motivation	Coercive Motivation	Effects of Participation in the Operation
Emotional coping	.25**							
Diversion coping	.24**	.28**						
Faith-based coping	.29**	.17**	.21**					
Emotional motivation	.15**	.07*	.06	.23**				
Unit motivation	.25**	.12**	.19**	.30**	.46**			
Coercive motivation	.09*	.12**	.13**	.08*	.06	.25**		
Effects of participation in the operation	.15**	.03	.05	.23**	.31**	.30**	-.02	
Negative emotions	.05	.17**	.08*	.10*	-.10*	.04	.13**	-.03

Note. N = 830. The high ranking of the index scale "effects of participation in the operation" means it had a positive impact.

*p < .05. **p < .01.

Table 5. Comparison Between Coping Styles During Combat and Routine.

Coping Style	During Fighting	During Routine	<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>
Rational coping	3.42	3.30	5.56**	825
Diversion coping	3.39	3.51	-3.78**	833
Emotional coping	1.80	1.78	<i>ns</i>	821
Faith-based coping	3.84	3.65	7.16**	822

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

Table 6. Paired Sampled *t*-Tests Examining Differences Between the Coping Styles During Fighting Versus Routine—Among Conscript and Reserve Soldiers.

Coping Style	Conscript Soldiers	<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>	Reserve Soldiers	<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>
Rational coping	0.17	5.93**	509	0.04	1.29	315
Diversion coping	-0.16	-3.93**	515	-0.03	-0.84	317
Emotional coping	0.03	1.50	508	-0.03	-1.12	312
Faith-based coping	0.25	6.84**	508	0.10	2.68*	313

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

them more during routine. Another comparison between the percentages of respondents that relied on faith-based coping mechanisms during the operation versus routine showed that the rate was higher among conscript soldiers (19%) than among reservists (11%). Analysis of χ^2 found that this difference is statistically significant ($\chi^2 = 9.94, p < .05$). We also found among conscription soldiers a higher rating for rational coping during combat, $t(df = 509) = 5.93, p < .01$, and a lower rate for diversion coping during combat $t(df = 515) = -3.93, p < .01$. In both samples, we found no differences in relation to emotional coping. There were no differences among reservists between a battle and routine mode in any of the coping mechanisms, except for a slight difference in relation to faith-based coping.

Table 4 presents the analysis of the third hypothesis, according to which there is a positive correlation between motivation for fighting and coping mechanism. In order to examine this hypothesis, we first analyzed the correlations between the study variables. Faith-based coping was positively related to emotional and unit motivation. We also found a positive correlation between faith-based coping and the effects of participation in the operation. Furthermore, there was also a significant positive correlation between the measure of the effects of participation in the operation and rational coping. We did not find any correlation between faith-based coping and coercive motivation, nor was there a correlation between faith-based coping and the negative feelings. We found low to medium positive correlation between faith-based coping, emotional and unit motivations, and effects of participation in the operation. No significant correlation was observed between the index of negative emotions and the index of injury. We speculated that physical injury would have an impact on the

Table 7. Hierarchical Regression Analysis Using Coping Styles as Predictors of Negative Emotions and Perception of Participation in the Operation.

Predictors	Negative Emotions		The Effects of Participation in the Operation	
	β	ΔR^2 (Adjusted)	β	ΔR^2 (Adjusted)
First step:				
Type of military service	.21**	.044	-.01	.001
Second step:				
Type of service	.18**	.056	-.03	.039
Rational coping	.10*		-.01	
Diversion coping	-.02		.04	
Emotional coping	-.04		.17**	
Faith-based coping	.20**		.08	
ΔR^2 (adjusted)		.10		.04

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

stress factor and the other variables through which we examined coping patterns, negative emotions, and the effects of participation in the operation.

Table 7 presents an examination of whether coping styles may explain negative feelings and the perception of the effects of participation in the operation. Since there were differences between subsamples in these variables, we controlled for the differences using hierarchical regression analysis. The controlled variable is entered in the first step, and the predictor of interest is added in the second step. The equation allows the researcher to assess the contribution of the predictor that he is interested in for the research. First, we inserted the variable “type of service” (conscripted vs. reserve), and then, we inserted the four coping styles. We did not find high levels of predictability, but the results were statistically significant. Predictability of one’s perception pertaining to the effects of participation in the operation was slightly higher ($R^2 = .10$) than negative emotions ($R^2 = .04$). The strongest predictor variable of the effects of participation in the operation was faith-based coping ($\beta = .20$, $p < .01$), and the strongest predictor variable of negative feelings was emotional coping.

Discussion

In this article, we examined coping styles during operations and their correlation to combat motivation. These variables are of importance for military sociologists but usually are difficult to study during actual combat (Britt & Dickinson, 2006; King, 2013). The present study was conducted soon after Operation Cast Lead, which is a characteristic depiction of the type of ground combat during the first years of the 21st century. In line with our first hypothesis, we found that there is a relative

increase in the number of soldiers who report using faith-based coping mechanisms during combat, compared to reports of such coping during everyday life. However, this is true for only one fifth of the respondents, especially among conscription soldiers. In addition, it seems that the study of religion in the military may provoke the question of the role of institutionalized religion agents in the military as opposed to the military and political control (Eberle & Rubel, 2012; Levy, 2014; Røislien, 2013). Yet the current study sheds light on the individual soldier's coping style and its relation to combat motivations. Such information has great value for military leaders and for religious experts as well.

We have found that motivation to fight, especially unit motivation, was correlated with coping style, especially faith-based and rational coping. It appears, then, that an effective way of coping with stress in combat is related to higher levels of motivation to fight and firm belonging to the military unit. This result is accompanied by lack of correlation between coping style and coercive motivation. In other words, the higher the soldier's emotional and unit motivations to fight, the better he will be at coping with stress resulting from the fighting. These results and the absence of correlation between emotional motivation and coping style may reflect an IDF phenomenon due to its citizen soldier tradition (Kober, 2015). It is possible that the stress in the operation that we studied was not solely stimulated by a fear of death or injury. It may be that these stressors were accompanied by a sense of anger in relation to external civilian criticism of the army, a feeling of alienation, the awkward encounter with an unfamiliar culture, boredom, or other factors identified in the previous studies (Bartone, 2006).

Coping with stress is typically characterized by differentiating between rational and emotional styles. A rational coping style was more effective in relation to active coping (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Our initial analysis of the research pointed to four approaches for coping with stress: rational, emotional, diversion, and faith-based. As previously reported, we also found that the fundamental distinction between rational coping and emotional coping does indeed exist in our sample. Furthermore, we found that rational coping is positively correlated to motivation and positive aspects of participation in the operation. In contrast, emotional coping is correlated with negative characteristics of the operation. Therefore, our research findings show a link between a rational coping style in relation to stress and positive perception of one's experience while in combat. However, the findings also show that effective coping with stress in combat is not only a matter of rational thinking or problem solving. It is fundamentally nonrational and is probably also of magical dimensions (Holmes, 1984; Keinan, 1994; St. George, 2013).

During the fighting, conscript soldiers reported that rational coping and faith-based coping helped them to deal with the fighting more than emotional coping. It is possible that this is related to the content items of these variables that made up the study. Among conscripts, there were more respondents who reported faith-based coping mechanisms than there were among reservists. Moreover, more connections were observed among conscription soldiers between faith-based coping and positive

perceptions of the combat. In this respect, the findings are similar to the findings from the literature regarding the emergence of faith during crises and during combat (Holmes, 1984; King, 2013). Faith-based coping may offer better ways of dealing with the events because the soldiers can contain the emotional difficulty and focus on rational coping methods in practice. The reason for this difference between conscription soldiers and reservists is unclear. Furthermore, faith comes in many shapes and sizes and does not necessarily correlate with a religious sense of faith. Another possible explanation for the difference between conscript soldiers and reservists could be related to the intensity of the fighting among the different groups: The conscript soldiers experienced more intense fighting than the reservists, who joined the operation later and in a more limited capacity. If this explanation is correct, then the propensity to deal with stress through faith-based means is more significant during heavy battles. Another possible explanation is the process by which the views and preferences are formed, which significantly varies among younger soldiers, because their identity patterns are not yet forged.

Stress during operations results from a variety of operational factors such as fear of harm, injury, and death, as well as moral distress, alienation, boredom, and isolation (Bartone, 2006). In the current study, we examined only some of these challenges. Contrary to our initial hypothesis, we found that reporting of a physical injury was not related to a feeling of stress. This finding could be related to the intensity of the operation that involves extensive use of firearms operated from a distance or from the air and diminishing the occurrence of close combat. However, it may be the case that the stress levels experienced by the soldiers involved in Operation Cast Lead are related to topics that we did not investigate, such as the media debate regarding humanitarian aspects of the operation. The process of faith-based coping is essentially personal and possibly temporary. By contrast, institutional religious faith in military organizations is a gradual and systematic process. The two different processes can influence each other, for example, by addressing the needs of the soldiers before entering a battle with the help of the military's rabbinical establishment. The results of the fighting, especially disappointments and injury, could nevertheless bring about an opposite effect and instigate anger, resulting in a loss of conviction, especially in the long run (Nash, 2006).

This research indicates that it is possible to support soldiers to cope with operational stress by understanding their unique psychological world while they are preparing for combat or facing the consequences of its aftermath. The coping style may have a nonrational yet effective quality, and it seems that general literature on coping may find it of value. Professionals who operate in stressful environments such as firefighters or police and also professional athletes may find these results interesting. It seems that experienced spiritual advisors such as military Rabbis and Chaplains understand this contention very well when they approach religious and nonreligious soldiers. The empirical results may enhance such understanding by officers who are aware of their soldiers' needs to have faith and trust—in god or their unit. They can cultivate it, legitimize it, or share it with them. By doing so, they

may enhance identification with their subordinates, foster their coping with stress, and enhance resilience over time. The data also direct our attention to the importance of cohesion and its possible relation with coping and motivation. In a diverse military, such correlation is of great interest and merits a different study (Levy, 2014). Surely empirical studies can shed light on the nature of coping during war and its relation to the military unit. Future study could determine what exactly predicts the willingness to assume unique coping patterns, and its relation to the military unit, taking into account wider determinants of operational stress.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The authors declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Funding

The authors received no financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

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