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Communication Support and Religious Support in Managing Occupational Stress in Military Careers: A Career-Span Approach

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**COMMUNICATION SUPPORT AND RELIGIOUS SUPPORT IN
MANAGING OCCUPATIONAL STRESS IN MILITARY CAREERS:
A CAREER-SPAN APPROACH**

by

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B.S. May 2013, Old Dominion University

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ABSTRACT

COMMUNICATION SUPPORT AND RELIGIOUS SUPPORT IN MANAGING OCCUPATIONAL STRESS IN MILITARY CAREERS: A CAREER-SPAN APPROACH

Shantonee' Malee Mitchell
Old Dominion University, 2014
Director: Dr. Thomas J. Socha

This thesis reports an exploratory and descriptive study of communication support and religious support used by military personnel to manage occupational stress over the course of a career and their perceived effectiveness at helping to manage occupational stress. Drawing on a lifespan communication approach, this study employed a career-span perspective where occupational stressors and sources of support (human and religious) are examined over the course of military careers. Results find three different groups of sources of communicative support were used in different ways to help manage military occupational stress: sources within the military, sources outside of the military, and religious sources. Also, across the career-span, some sources of support (communicative and religious) appeared only at certain times (e.g., the *Bible* figured in the beginning stages) whereas others were prevalent throughout the career-span (e. g., Chaplains). Looking at the various sources of communicative support that military personnel turned to, religion figured more prominently in both early years and the later years, but was also turned to far less than human communication support sources. Participants did report that communicative support they received was helpful in managing occupational stress with familial support and support of other military members as most beneficial throughout career-span.

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This thesis is dedicated to my parents, family, friends, and colleagues that supported me through this journey.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION AND REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Introduction

When people experience stress their blood pressure rises above normal (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2011). According to the National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute, an unsafe rise in blood pressure can lead to a number of negative health outcomes, not the least of which is heart failure (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2011). Further, experiencing stress over long periods of time compounds the negative health outcomes. Studies of the many ways to reduce and manage stress are important for many reasons. Included among these ways are turning to others for communication support as well as turning to religion to reduce stress and lower and prevent deadly health risks.

According to Albrecht and Adelman (1987) “social support can be verbal and nonverbal communication that is used to reduce uncertainty and enhance the perception of personal control of an individual’s experience.” Another definition suggests that social support is emotional, physical, and informational support provided during times of need or crisis and may also offer a buffer against negative life events and stressors (Towey, n.d.). Social support has also been studied by Sidney Cobb, who has stated that social support can also be defined as information which allows an individual perceive that he or she is cared for and protected during a time of crisis (Cobb, 1976). An example of social support could be offering words of encouragement and detailing the exact procedure of what to do and what is expected of someone who is leaving for their first deployment. Social support is said to reduce uncertainty but not all forms of

communication reduce uncertainty (Linking health communication, n.d.), such as offering a hug to someone before their first deployment. Although this is a form of social support it will not help prepare to individual for the mission or disclose what is expected of him or her, which would hopefully reduce uncertainty. Similar to social support is communication support, which can be defined as verbal or nonverbal communication that is used to offer assistance to those in need (Linking health communication, n.d).

Communication support can be used to combat stress and many health risks and can be used to help enhance the longevity of one's life. Stress is a common problem for a lot of people, the military especially. Stress can decrease one's life expectancy if it is not properly managed. Stress can leave one feeling mentally and physically drained. With involvement in school, work, and leisure activities, sometimes it can be difficult to manage or cope with stress or health related problems. Religious coping is also a source of communicative support that can be used as a resource for stress.

As we grow older supportive communication may be needed more to deal with the stressors that come along with aging. As individuals grow into young adults, responsibilities tend to grow along during this age cohort. Financial responsibilities, taking care of children, a spouse, or parents-in-need, and work obligations are all responsibilities that come with aging and can play a vital role in stress. Adults tend to be busy raising families, and at the prime in their careers. Taking on responsibilities for themselves as well as for their children and aging parents may also pose a few health and stress concerns. Fingerman, Nussbaum, and Birditt (2004) explain this time period as a juggling act due to the multiple responsibilities along with aging. Religious coping is one source to help alleviate stress that could potentially lead to other health risks. This can be

received across the lifespan but may need to be received more during the emerging adulthood stages of life and provided more as we age and tackle more responsibilities.

The power of communicative support has the ability to significantly enhance the well-being and happiness of others, as well as help withstand a variety of major stressors (Segrin & Flora, 2005). The effects of supportive communication in the form of religious coping by a partner could reveal how positive supportive communication can reduce stress in all periods of the lifespan. This could potentially help individuals live a healthier life and discover how religious coping may be a healthier and rewarding way to deal with stress. The impact of communication on stress is important and relevant to society because it displays an effective and simple way to alleviate stress from your own life or a loved one's life. The stress reliever techniques described can also help improve an individual's interpersonal relationships and can be used across the lifespan.

According to the Department of Defense, about one-half of 1% of Americans have served in the military (Miles, 2011). Although this is a small percentage we should not underestimate the importance of supporting these individuals, as well as the many others who are connected to those who do. Over three-quarters of adults over the age of 50 reported that they have an immediate family member who has served (Miles, 2011). Nearly 60-percent of civilians ages 30 to 49 stated that they had an immediate family member who served, and one third of those who were ages 18 to 29 reported that they had an immediate family member who served (Miles, 2011). Looking at these statistics it is evident that the United States invests in its military whether active duty, reserve, guard, as well as our veterans, and/or retired military.

Service members in the United States military experience a unique set of circumstance that includes the uncertainty of being deployed with little to no communication for months at a time. Communication is a major resource in managing stress, but sometimes the location of where the service members are stationed can offer little to no communication with family. In these situations, other forms of communication may be added as stress resource, such as turning to religion. Although sometimes circumstances may not allow for face-to-face worship, other religious coping forms such as prayer, received prayer, the Bible, or chaplain, may be utilized.

There has been considerable research on stress and the role of communication in managing stress. Using the ABCX model (Hill, 1958), I will look at how military professions are crisis-precipitating events that lead to occupational stress, and how this stress can be managed with social support networks that include religious sources of support. I will also consult related theories such as Social Penetration Theory (Altman & Taylor 1973), Anxiety/Uncertainty Maintenance Theory (Gudykunst & Kim, 1984), Attachment Theory (Bowlby, 1951), Selective Optimization and Compensation Model (Baltes & Baltes, 1990). Specifically, this study seeks to describe the communication support and religious coping sources that military personnel turn to manage stress throughout their time of military service, or their military career-span. The thesis proposes the research question: What does communication support, religious coping, and stress on military members look like across the career-span?

Study Background

Along with supportive relationships that have been studied in past research on managing stress, religious coping is often looked at as a very private aspect of many

people's lives and can also serve as an important role in managing stress. Supportive communication as well as religious coping can be used to manage many health risks and can be used to help enhance the longevity of one's life. Stress is a common problem for a lot of people and can decrease one's life, if it is not properly managed. Stress can leave one feeling mentally and physically drained. Along with supportive communication, prayer is one of many positive supportive communication skills that can be used to help cope with stress. Because stress is inevitable and is bound to happen to all of us multiple times in life at various levels, finding strategic but simple ways to help deal with stress is highly beneficial. Not only does everyone encounter stress but military service members in particular are known to encounter an abundant amount of stress due to their occupation. This is why I have chosen to study how various forms of religious coping, as a form of positive communication, can be used along with supportive communication networks throughout the lifespan as a resource for coping with stress in military occupations.

Literature Review

Stress

The experience or overload of stress is a common problem for many. Stress can leave one feeling mentally and physically drained. With involvement in school, work, and leisure activities, sometimes it can be difficult to manage or cope with stress. It is important to study stress because it can also elicit and contribute to conflicts in relationships (Bodenmann, Meuwly, Bradbury, Gmelch, & Ledermann, 2010). Relationship conflicts can range from ordinary to severe and have the potential to damage one's emotional state as well as cause health risks. At times partners may take out their

stress on each other (Bodenmann et al., 2010). Individuals may turn to aggression and abusive communication as a negative coping mechanism. Individuals turn to aggression and abuse to inflict their pain and suffering onto others (Nock, 2009). When others can feel the pain of the abuser, the abuser may use that against the abused person to feel relieved of pain (Nock, 2009). Stress is one cause among many for arguments, fights, aggression, isolation, negative changes in behavior, and depression (Lupien, McEwen, Gunnar, & Heim, 2009).

The more communication support people received in a relationship, the less likely chronic stress will be experienced (Floyd & Riforgiate, 2008). The psychological effects of stress can be negative, but with the right coping methods and communication skills, the amount of stress on an individual experiences across one's lifespan can be made more manageable. With the use of supportive communication, including religious coping, stress and health risks can be diminished and alleviated. Stress is how our body responds to threats and challenges that take place around us (Floyd & Riforgiate, 2008). The challenge can be emotional, financial, mental, or physical (Floyd & Riforgiate, 2008). The emotional challenges and threats that come along with stress are hurt feelings. Hurt feelings can occur when another individual communicates in a way that produces emotional pain (Vangelisti & Hampel, 2010). Stress can also affect the hormones in an individual's body causing them to become more angry and aggressive (Floyd & Riforgiate, 2008).

One possible result of stress is that it can impact one's finances by becoming so engulfed in stress that one fails to maintain a steady bank account or begins to make poor financial decisions (Porcelli, & Delgado, 2009). Because stress directly affects the brain,

judgment can become cloudy resulting in risk decision making when managing finances (Porcelli, & Delgado, 2009). The vulnerability to develop anxiety, depression, and other mood disorders greatly increases with the presence of stress (Cirulli, et al., 2009). The effects of an individual's health can diminish due to stress because of the extensive amount of pressure (Cirulli et al., 2009). A negative physical effect of stress is that it can lead to obesity (Cirulli et al., 2009). In America obesity has become a large concern (Bean, Stewart, & Olbrisch, 2008). Seventy-two million American adults are classified as being obese which can lead to many health complications and death (Bean et al., 2008).

Stress has also been directly correlated to a higher chance of developing type 2 diabetes (Heraclides, Chandola, Witte, & Brunner, 2012). Type 2 diabetes is described as a disease that resists the use of insulin, which is needed for energy (American Heart Association, 2014). This causes sugar levels to build up in the blood stream. Type 2 diabetes often leads to other serious medical complications such as organ failure (Heraclides et al., 2012). As we can see stress possess a domino affect that can cause multiple problems.

Some occupations contribute to the level of stress more than others. In particular military occupations carry a heavy load of stress. The term "burst stress" is often used in the context of public safety and department of defense employees (Hornan, Bochantin, & Booth-Butterfield 2012). Burst stress occurs frequently in law enforcement positions because there is not a steady flow of stress but at times there is an instant burst of stress depending on a call (Hornan et al., 2012). These burst happen in a matter of seconds and the situations can quickly escalate (Hornan et al., 2012). If we take a look at the Master

at Arms (MA) rate, also referred to as the job title one holds within the military or Military Police (MP), for example, burst stress can be seen as a common type of stress for this rate. The duties of an MA and MP are similar to that of a police.

Master at Arms and Military Police are not the only military jobs that can suffer from burst stress, as other rates in the military or duties such as being on watch, being ambushed, or on the front lines in combat can be steady and then escalate quickly in stress levels due to danger. The term burst stress is defined as when a situation in a job that starts out calm and quickly escalates to a lot of activity or pressure in an instant (Hornan et al., 2012). Burst stress is different than “normal” stress because it is not a build-up of problems. Burst stress develops instantly where as normal stress build up over time. Normal stress can be deescalated, reduced, or adapted before it gets out of control whereas burst stress cannot be controlled (Hornan et al., 2012). Both forms of stress can have negative effects on the mind and body. Burst stress is prevalent in law enforcement careers and less prevalent in others (Hornan et al., 2012).

Stress also comes from the lack of disclosure to an individual’s partner (Hornan et al., 2012). In the context of military life, this can be due to policies making it unethical for many individuals in department of defense occupations to disclose information about their job. The levels of occupational stress military personnel experience has the ability to spill over into their personal relationships at home. When occupational stress begins to spill over into personal and home life this can begin to affect an individual’s partner. This can also lead to separation due to the fact that many people do not want someone else’s stress to become their stress and problem (Hornan et al., 2012).

The problem with coping with stress by means of supportive communication, religious coping, affectionate, and intimate communication is with whom to communicate, about what, and when? If the stress is chronic or has reached such a high point it may be nearly impossible to control or relieve it. Supportive communication, affectionate, and intimate communication must be used in an ideal circumstance, but this may change within the context of the military. And, because the frequency, depth, and levels of stress can fluctuate it is important to use these solutions at the first sign of stress, but also recognize that stress is experienced across a career.

Intergenerational/Lifespan Experiences and Stress

Stress can occur at all stages of life. The way individuals cope with stress or even experience stress may change throughout the lifespan. Millennials, Generation Xers, and Baby boomers may all experience stress relatively differently. Millennials, ages 18 to 33 and Generation Xers, ages 34 to 47 reported the highest stress levels (American Psychological Association, 2014). It is also significant that these generations may also seem to be aware of the benefits of religion as a coping resource for stress. These age cohorts also make up the majority of the military, making it even more vital to increase our understanding not only of communicative support, but also to recognize the importance of the variety of religious coping mechanisms. Not only are Millennials and Generation Xers reporting high levels of stress but even Baby Boomers ages 48 to 66 have reported higher than what is considered healthy levels of stress (American Psychological Association, 2014). With studies showing that all generations are enduring stressed at different levels, it is important to determine what sources should be utilized to not only reduce stress but also to see what sources work best for each generation.

Over the last year studies report that Millennials found their stress to have increased 39 percent, which is slightly higher than Generation Xers who have reported a 36-percent increase, and Baby Boomers who reported a 33-percent increase (American Psychological Association, 2014). Occupational stress, money, and job stability are the most common stressful factors in the life of Millennials and Generation Xers (American Psychological Association, 2014). Unlike Millennials and Generation Xers, health issues tend to be the main concern of Baby Boomers (American Psychological Association, 2014).

Seventy-six percent of Millennials and 65 percent of Generation Xers reported that “work” is a significant stressor (American Psychological Association, 2014). With over half of Millennials and Generation Xers stating that work is a significant stressor, it is important to look at this population when studying stress in the military. Millennials and Generation Xers make up a large percentage of the military, report a high percentage of stress, and find work to be a significant stressor. The high percentages reported by Millennials and Generation Xers exceeds the 62 percent of Baby Boomers who claim work is a significant stressor (American Psychological Association, 2014). The age difference may play an important factor in whether one may rate his or her occupation or job stability as a significant stressor.

For the most part, the military is a stable and steady job, but with a few obstacles and constant goals to reach it is not always steady. Job stability is a concern to many service members due to the downsizing of the military that has occurred since 2013 (Milano, 2012). With downsizing of the military comes stricter policies and rules, which keeps service members on their toes to ensure job stability. Service members must meet

height and weight requirements, stay out of trouble, pass physical fitness tests, advance in their ranks accordingly, as well as possess various certifications and qualifications to remain valuable to the military, to help promote job stability. Job stability is a source of stress to more Generation Xers than Millennials (American Psychological Association, 2014). Sixty percent of Generation Xers reported that job stability is a source of stress whereas only 53 percent of Millennials reported job stability as a source of stress (American Psychological Association, 2014).

Every generation copes with stress differently as well as experiences negative consequences of stress. Millennials and Generation Xers are more likely than Baby Boomers to engage in unhealthy or risky behavior as a result of stress (American Psychological Association, 2014). Irritability and anger due to stress was reported by 44 percent by Millennials and Generation Xers compared to only 36 percent of Baby Boomers (American Psychological Association, 2014). Another health concern linked to stress experienced across the three generations is a lack of sleep or lying awake. Over 52 percent of Millennials and 48 percent of Generation Xers reported that stress has kept them awake at night (American Psychological Association, 2014). This is over half of all Millennials and just about half of Generation Xers who are suffering sleep loss due to stress, which can be managed with religious coping. Only 37 Baby Boomers experienced a lack of sleep as a result of stress (American Psychological Association, 2014), but this does not mean that they cannot utilize religious coping as a stress resource. In addition to restlessness, irritability and anger can be an outcome of stress. Forty-four percent of Millennials and Generation Xers reported irritability or anger as a result of stress, while

36 percent of Baby Boomers found that irritability or anger was a result of stress (American Psychological Association, 2014).

With the evidence showing that Millennials and Generation Xers have higher-than-average stress levels, it is vital for these two generations to have the ability to manage stress. Sixty-two percent of Millennials, 63 percent of Generation Xers, and 59 percent of Baby Boomers have reported that they have tried to reduce their levels of stress over the past five years (American Psychological Association, 2014). Although over half of the people in these three generations have tried to reduce their stress levels, a quarter of Millennials and Generation Xers expressed that they are not doing enough to manage their stress and that 15 percent of Baby Boomers are not doing enough either (American Psychological Association, 2014). The ability to manage stress comes with age based on the statistics. All of the generations, uniformly, report that managing stress is very important (American Psychological Association, 2014), but not all of them are able to adequately manage it. Managing stress seems to be a greater priority for Baby Boomers. Thirty eight percent of Baby Boomers stated that they have managed their stress excellently whereas only 29 percent of Millennials and 35 percent of Generation Xers were able to excellently manage their stress (American Psychological Association, 2014).

Of the three generations that I will be studying, Millennials experience the most stress (Yandoli, 2013). Millennials are so stressed that half of them can't even sleep at night and 39 percent of Millennials stress levels increased over the past year (Yandoli, 2013). Although stress is necessary and can be healthy in the way that it motivates an individual to do his or her best, it can become paralyzing after a certain point (Yandoli,

2013). Uncertainty about the future is one of the main sources of stress for Millennials (Yandoli, 2013). Many Millennials in the military may experience uncertainty about their future as the military in general is composed of many uncertainties. Although Millennials are under the most amount of stress, they are more likely to use communication to relive their stressors. Millennials are more likely to talk to their friends about their problems and stressors, as they have more of a desire to have physical experiences (Yandoli, 2013). With the use of communication, Millennials are finding an outlet to stress by optimizing their technological abilities. Blogging is one way that Millennials are positively acknowledging their stress by opening up and managing their stress in a healthy way (Yandoli, 2013).

Stress in the Context of Military Careers

Mental health disorders are ranked as the second leading cause for hospitalization in military personnel (Taylor & Schatz, 2011). Stress is a physiological response to threats and changes (Floyd & Riforgiate, 2008). Military relationships tend to be different from other romantic relationships because of the unique relationship differences such as distance, safety concerns, training, and returning to society after deployment (Merolla, 2010). These relational differences and stressors contribute to relational problems and increased divorce rates (CRS Report of Congress, 2008). Military couples experience a unique set of stressors, and may not manage their stress effectively based on their increased divorce rate. Military couples utilize topic avoidance more than non-military couples (Frisby et al., 2011). Due to separation and war, military couples may find communication rare and limited in their relationship (Frisby et al., 2011).

Separation is not always necessarily a bad thing, as it allows for couples to avoid certain topics. Although most couples wish to be open with one another, in military relationships avoiding topics can be used to help protect partners, maintain the relationship, and avoid conflict (Caughlin & Golish, 2002). In Merolla and Steinberg's (2007) study, military couples were instructed to avoid talking about negative issues that could distract them while deployed. This is only one form of military occupational stress that can be stressful for both partners because of the secrecy and lack of disclosure. Through communication exchanges stress can be reduced in military couples (Frisby et al., 2011).

Military psychologists continue to look at techniques to cope with stress as well as methods of understanding stress on individuals in the military. With the use of improvised explosive devices, rockets, mortar attacks and more, modern day warfare and combat stress is important to understand (Lynch, 2012). Across all of the branches in the military, there are services and programs to educate service members about combat stress (Lynch, 2012). As military psychologists become more aware of the presence of stressors in the military, they have added preventative strategies, support, as well as ways to diagnose and treat stress (Lynch, 2012). These methods have been integrated into post-deployment health readiness programs throughout the military, as the importance of stress management has become a more prevalent concern (Lynch, 2012).

Prevention and intervention by the individual's chain of command has become a focus for dealing with stress on Navy aircraft carriers, as the large population is often hard to handle by just the psychologist (Lynch, 2012). Military psychologists, a medical evaluation board, and a physical evaluation board assess service members to see if they

are suitable for full duty (Lynch, 2012). This is yet another stressful encounter that service members must deal with in this occupation.

The military provides many resources to help families, couples, and individuals with stress management. FOCUS (Families Over Coming Under Stress) is one of the many resources that the military uses to help couples manage stress (Focus, n.d.). FOCUS is an eight session strength-based resiliency training at various military installations and addresses stress concerns (Focus, n.d.). Because couples may face challenges such as separation, changes in daily routines, concern about the safety of their loved one, as well as the well-being of the partner who remains at home, FOCUS project was developed to ease these stressors (Focus, n.d.). FOCUS is beneficial as it provides skills to address the many changes, teaches service members and partners how to stay connected with one another, teaches ways to re-establish routines, as well as manage other stressors (Focus, n.d.). Supportive open and effective communication through FOCUS or with one another can help out couples and families. Direct, clear, consistent, and honest communication are key components for a healthy family (Walsh 2003, 2006). These components are even more important for families that experience stress and change (Saltzman, Lester, Beardslee, Layne, Woodward, & Nash, 2011). Stress management and emotion regulation skills can enhance resiliency (Saltzman et al., 2011).

Although the military as an occupation has multiple stressful aspects, deployment tends to yield a significant amount of stress, which may lead to mental health illnesses. Service members and their partners experience distress after returning from war. In a study that measures job stress in university, corporate, and military personnel noted that they experienced multiple job stress events more frequently (Spielberger & Reheiser,

1994). Distress, depression, and anxiety tend to be experienced by a large number of returning service members (Eaton, et al. 2008). Eighteen percent of all returning service members reported significant mental health problems in the mandatory post-deployment survey (Hoge, Auchterlonie, & Milliken, 2006). The symptoms of these mental health disorders may cause a break down in a romantic relationship. Irritability, tiredness, and disengagement may occur from the mental health disorders, making the service member appear to be distant, unmotivated, lazy, or uncaring (Beardslee, 2002; Cummings, DeArth-Pendley, DuRocher-Schudlich, & Smith, 2001). Although a service members' occupation put them and their partner at a high risk of stress, this should not discourage them from using different methods to control it. Prayer as well as other religious coping mechanisms, and having a belief system can help reduce their career related stress. Religious coping could be beneficial to military service members due to their dynamic work environment, which tends to separate them from other communication support sources such as face-to-face interaction with families or digital mediated communication due to various deployment or new duty stations.

Families with one or more parent involved in Operation Enduring Freedom or Operation Iraqi Freedom have found that family belief is a strong predictor of better adaptation and coping among the children (Palmer, 2008). Having a belief system may also be beneficial in relationships that do not have children. Tapping into ones belief system to utilize religious coping may be one way to prove resiliency during stressful times. Resilience is the ability to overcome obstacles and derives from the ability to not only make sense of an experience but to also provide meaning to it (Antonovsky, 1998: Patterson & Garwick, 1994).

Supportive Communication and Stress Management

Support from relational partners minimizes reactions to acute stressors (Cohen & Wills, 1985). When multiple stressors accumulate stress buffering effects of received emotional or physical support are very important (Floyd, Pauley, & Hesse, 2010). Communication support has the ability to positively affect physiological and psychological health, well-being, and predict an individual's ability to cope with stress (Clark, 2005). Supportive communication is a form of communication that allows one to assist others in need (Burleson & MacGeorge, 2002). A notable example of when communication support was seen on a large scale was after the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001 (Burleson & MacGeorge, 2002). Millions of individuals coped with the attack by extending communicative support to family, friends, and those around them. The news coverage of the attacks displayed individuals hugging one another, offering words of condolences or affirmation, as well as contacting friends and family members around the country. People sought to strengthen the bonds of those around them and afar through communication support sources such as mediated messages, phone calls, physical touch, and religious coping.

Supportive communication's impact on physiological and psychological health is important throughout all life stages due to its ability to lower or alleviate these health concerns. Because supportive communication predicts the future of one's physiological and psychological health, the overall level and type of communication support available to each person is important (Clark, 2005). The amount of attachment, level of social integration, assurance of worth, and reliable support are all factors that are relevant to measure the level of communication support (Clark, 2005).

Supportive communication can be used to combat many health risks and can be used to help enhance the longevity of one's life. The impact of communication on stress is important and relevant to society because it explains how to best alleviate stress from your own life or a loved one's life. The stress reliever techniques such as communication support and religious coping can also help improve an individual's interpersonal relationships and can be used across the lifespan. Competent communicators are able to maintain better and more effective support networks and healthier lifestyles throughout their lifespan (Pecchioni, 2005).

Supporting others is fundamental to good health (Burleson & MacGeorge, 2002). This is not always as easy as it sounds for military couples that are separated. Supportive communication as a coping mechanism for stress may be difficult to implement for military couples that are in distant locations, unable to access the internet, or have mail and package delivery delays or cancellations due to deployment to a remote location. With anywhere from hundreds to thousands of sailors on a ship, finding an available computer to use on the ship during limited down time is just one of many reasons that makes digital mediated supportive communication difficult. Cellular phone services and internet strength abroad during deployments are significantly reduced due to location, bandwidth speed, lack of free time to use these services, as well as a lack of resources. Not only can supportive communication be hard to display in mediated forms, but it is also hard to convey physical forms of intimacy such as hugging or kissing, via internet or telephone (Carter, et al. 2011).

In a previous study, deployed male soldiers responded best to stress when they received letters, emails, and care packages from their wife (Carter et al., 2011). This is

another way to express supportive communication, and is ideal when separated by distance. Packages, letters, video chats and emails can convey a sense of love and care, which displays support for deployed soldiers or distanced loved ones. The support that the deployed soldiers received from their partners contributed to marital satisfaction (Carter et al., 2011).

Floyd and colleagues (2009) discussed how intimacy as a form of supportive communication in a marital or cohabitating relationship could help alleviate stress. This could be accomplished by kissing, which is a symbol that we associate with care, love, and passion (Floyd et al., 2009). The feeling and display of care, love, and passion during a hard time can make someone's day a lot brighter and less stressful. Floyd's study displayed the benefits of romantic and intimate kissing as a form of supportive communication. The hormones released during an intimate or romantic kiss is what allows an individual to momentarily escape from and expel stress (Floyd et al., 2009). The study did not only simply recognize the effect of intimacy on stress, but it also explained the benefits intimacy had on depression and relational satisfaction.

The excessive demands of work combined with limited communication support within the workplace often leads to psychological problems such as depressive symptoms (Clark, 2005). Plenty of supportive communication would be necessary to combat stress in high demand jobs such as the military. When a person suffers from stress their blood pressure initially rises (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2011). According to the National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute, an unsafe rise in blood pressure can lead to heart failure (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2011). This is why supportive communication is important, because it can reduce deadly health

risks, especially health risks that we see more commonly during adulthood and later adulthood. Floyd and colleagues (2009), conducted an experiment that displayed how intimately kissing could help reduce stress. The chemicals released when intimately kissing reduced stress levels in the participants.

Communication support groups can be large or small, both serving the purpose to help deal with stress. Large communication support groups, such as church groups have the ability to bring people together to feel connected, special, and inclusive. Supportive communication can be displayed physically and verbally in various forms of communication patterns such as affectionate communication or intimate communication, and that provide support to those in need. Supportive communication can be in the form of praying about problems. This form of supportive communication is highly beneficial because it can occur intrapersonally or interpersonally face-to-face, via webcam, via mediated messaging, or even alone.

Religion as Communication support

Religious coping is a form of social support that can be used during times of crisis to help manage levels of stress. Religious coping can be a method in which one may seek spiritual support and religious reappraisals to help improve his or her health (Pargament, Koenig, Tarakeshwar, & Hahn, 2004). One of the reasons I was driven to study religious coping was because of the abstract meaning of what it means to be religious and how it can be viewed as something private, controversial, or even taboo to discuss to others. In one of Pargament's interviews I recall a statement from an interviewee that explained a phenomenon that many others go through (Pargament, 2001). The man explained how the sermons, readings, and hymns did not directly connect with him, but that he still

considered himself as a religious person. He also stated how he was unsure how he could consider himself religious when he is unable to connect to many parts of religious service. This man voiced the abstractions of religion and religious coping and how one may also be religious by connecting to other forms of religious coping such as prayer. Prayer is one of many religious coping mechanisms that individuals may use in time of stress, especially if they find it hard to connect to other forms of religious coping.

I will be using the brief religious coping scale to discover what role religion plays in dealing with stressful situations. The brief religious coping scale is a fourteen question questionnaire that will ask the subjects at what rate do they use religion during times of stress at work over a career-span. The scale ranges from (1) not at all to (4) a great deal. Using the answers that the subjects provided on the brief religious coping scale I will divide the subjects into groups of high religious copers and low religious copers based on the numbers they have selected for all fourteen questions. I will then compare their levels of religious coping to their levels of stress to see if there is a correlation or pattern between religious coping and stress management. The brief religious coping scale was developed by Pargament (2001) during his interviews and research on religious coping. Over the past decade there has been an increase in studies displaying the positive role that religious coping has on stress (Pargament, Feuille, & Burdzy, 2011). The powerful role of religious coping is often understudied, although it can prove to be more convenient in certain life stressor situations, such as immediate danger.

There are various ways to measure religious coping but many fall short on some important aspects (Pargament, Feuille, & Burdzy, 2011). The brief religious coping scale is one of many scales that was developed to tackle some of the limitations that other

religious coping scales encompass. The brief religious coping scale possesses many dimensions, making it a more ideal scale to use. Some of the shortcomings of other scales that the brief religious coping scale possesses are the questions that deal with dimensions including meaning, control, intimacy, life transformation, and spirituality search (Pargament, Feuille, & Burdzy, 2011). “The brief religious coping scale is also multi-modal, with cognitive, emotional, relational, and behavioral thoughts and attitudes used as religious coping methods” (Pargament, Feuille, & Burdzy, 2011). Lastly the brief religious coping scale was developed on the assumption that religious coping was multi-valent with adaptive and maladaptive strategies (Pargament, Feuille, & Burdzy, 2011). The scale displays items, which can be positive or negative coping methods. Negative coping methods are methods that display discontent in religion, blaming God, or demonic reappraisal (Pargament, Smith, Koenig, Perez, 1998). Positive coping methods are those described as seeking spiritual support, guidance, reaffirmation, or forgiveness (Pargament et al., 1998). An example of a negative coming method used in the brief religious coping scale would be “I decided the devil made this happen” whereas a positive coping method indicated in the scale would be “I sought God’s love and care.”

One well-known indicator that religion is prominent is during times of stress (Pargament, 2001). Looking at many world religions it can be seen that stress and hardships are the center of many major religions. Buddhists believe that living is felt through the suffering of physical and mental pain, negative changes, and the lack of freedom (Gard, 1962). Christianity focuses on the crucifixion of Jesus Christ (Pargament, 2001). Even though through religion and religious coping one can combat stressful situations and display resilience, religious coping is often neglected in the human

response to crises (Pargament, 2001). Lastly, In Judaism, slavery and oppression are two stressful encounters in which the religion centers around (Pargament, 2001). This demonstrates that the many religions of the world display a connection and respect of stress, hardships, and anguish.

When looking at or measuring religiosity some may think of spirituality as well. The complexity and confusion of spirituality's definition is perhaps one reason why there are not many researchers in the area of spirituality in health communication (Paal, 2013). This is even seen in Marler and Hadaway's (2002) study confirmed that individuals have a difficult time differentiating between spirituality and religiosity. Various world religions, beliefs, philosophies, and practices may find its way into spirituality, but it is broader than that of religiosity (Paal, 2013). Spirituality is a multi-dimensional construct like cognition and personality, which is one reason why there are variations in how individuals experience spirituality (Johnstone, McCormack, Yoon, & Smith, 2012). Due to the overlap of spirituality and religiosity there is little literature regarding health communication and the role spirituality in communication plays on health communication (Paal, 2013). Over half of Americans identify themselves as being religious and spiritual, where as a smaller percentage divide between being religious, spiritual, or neither (Stark, 2008). Religion/spirituality is often used to embrace both communal religious prayer qualities and individual spiritual prayer perspectives on prayer (Baesler, 2012).

The second assumption develops on how religion and spirituality complement one another. Religion/spirituality is necessary for survival and flourishing of human life because it infuses life with meaning and purpose (Baesler, 2012). In dire circumstances

spiritual freedom may provide strength, hope, gratitude, and meaning to life, which can be used for survival (Frankl, 2006).

The final two assumptions suggest prayer is spiritual communication to or with God (Baesler, 2003). Talking, listening, sharing, and dialoguing are critical components of prayer (Baesler, 1997). The various components of communication that are used to define prayer are a few reasons why communication is significant in the understanding of prayer.

Prayer may be used for many reasons and various vantage points. Prayer is practiced due to its satisfactory level as a coping resource (Spilka & Ladd, 2013). Whether prayer is in the form of religion or spirituality, it influences communication (Baesler, 2003). Some individuals choose organized religion or some deny organized affiliation and craft their own definitions and understandings (Baesler, 2003). These crafted definitions can be independent or in smaller groups (Baesler, 2003). Spirituality has the ability to contribute to mental health, general health, and reducing risky lifestyle choices (Dyess, 2011). Spirituality is not only an indicator of health (Krause, 2011), but also is a form of communication support (Roff, Simon, Nelson-Gardell, & Pleasants, 2009). Spirituality is relational and has supportive functions that help individuals cope with stress (Peterson, 2011).

With many service members relocating, changing duty stations, deploying, or going underway, turning to religious coping sources that can include computer mediated prayer may be a substitute to many. The same resource that a couple may use at home can also be used while they are separated, by praying via computer-mediated messages. The stressors of separation or deployment can be challenging, but unlike some resources

prayer as a form of positive communication can be utilized whether or not the couple is connected via computer, in person, or simply not connected at all. Online communities are used by many individuals for increased communication support and better self-efficacy in dealing with health concerns (Rains & Young, 2009).

Many people have suggested that they feel closer to God and secure with their faith after a stressful event (Emmons, Colby, & Kaiser, 1998). Religious coping offers positive attributes such as adjustment outcomes that help an individual make meaning of stressful encounters (Park, 2005). Those who utilize religious coping can experience stress-related growth, which is a positive outcome of religious coping

CHAPTER 2

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

ABC-X Theory of Family Crisis

The study of stress has occurred over many centuries and the ability to cope with it varies by individuals. Some relationships may fall apart or may become stronger through coping (Maguire, 2012). Without proper coping mechanisms or resources families may fall to a crisis. As defined by Hill (1949) a crisis can be a situation that creates a sense of sharpened insecurity or block the usual patterns of action and call for new ones. Sociologist Reuben Hill identified three variables that shaped how some families are able to flourish while others deplete from stress (Maguire, 2012). The three variables which became the points of Hill's ABC-X model of family crisis were (a) the hardship of the event, (b) the resources provided by the family, (c) what the family makes of the event or defines it as a threat or not to their goals (Hill, 1958). The ABC-X model breaks down as A (the event) interacting with B (the family's crisis resource), which interacts with C (the way the family defines the event), which produces X (the crisis) (Hill, 1958).

The stressor event and any perceived hardships that were a result of the stressor represent A. An example of this could be taking on the role of a deployed family member. When the partner deploys or relocates the one who is at home must take on the responsibilities such as paying the bills while the service member is away for a few months to a year. The crisis-meeting resources that the family has determine whether or not the family will experience the crisis, which is represented by the B factor. If the family uses positive communication as one of the possible resources, the crisis may not

be perceived as a full-blown negative critical point. Finally the definition or interpretation that the family makes of the stressor event represents the C factor. The family may define the situation as a challenge or opportunity or may look at it more negatively as a problem or difficulty (Maguire, 2012). Partners and or families that are unable to find resources to cope with stressor events may fall into a family crisis also known as the X factor in the ABC-X model (Maguire, 2012).

Although Hill's ABC-X model was huge step for stress and family crisis, it did not explain the post-crisis period (Maguire, 2012). Hamilton McCubbin and Joan Patterson (1983) made a few changes to Hill's ABC-X model, making the double ABC-X model. In the Double ABC-X model, McCubbin and Patterson (1983) depicted (aA factor) as the pile up of additional stressors and strains; (bB factor) the efforts of the family to utilize new resources; (cC factor) the way the family modifies the way they define the situation with a different meaning attached to the family's problem; and (d) the strategies designed to bring about change in the structure of the family as an effort to achieve positive adaptation.

Because families evolve over time, causing a buildup of stressors, the aA factor was added (Maguire, 2012). An example of this could be the original stressor, plus the continuing hardships, as well as daily transitions that occur over the lifespan (Maguire, 2012). When we look at the military as a unique population we can adapt the aA factor because the career as a whole is the original stressor, but when you add continuing hardships such as economic situations or physical fitness requirements, and then add the daily transition of job stability and uncertainty over the course of the career, the stressors begin to seem high and build up on top of one another.

The bB factor recognizes that new resources may be acquired as a result of emerging out of a crisis situation (Maguire, 2012). After using new resources such as prayer and other forms of positive communication, military couples may be better equipped to find a way out of future crisis or prevent a buildup of stressors. Similarly, the cC factor was added to take into account that the meaning-making activities include the entire crisis situation; which is the original crisis, added stressors, resources, and accounts of what should be done to bring back stability (Maguire, 2012).

Not only did McCubbin and Patterson (1983) add onto the ABC portion of the ABC-X model, but they also included coping separately from resources. Coping could help manage the problem, maintain morale, eliminate stressor, acquire additional resources, or change the family system (McCubbin and Patterson, 1983). The xX factor notes that the interaction of the coping factor in combination with the other three factors (aA, bB, cC), can determine the level of family functioning after the crisis (McCubbin and Patterson, 1983).

Social Penetration Theory

The development of interpersonal relationships heavily relies on social penetration theory. This theory, developed by Altman and Taylor (1973), suggests that how close people get interpersonally grows more intimate over time through the exchange of how much and how deep the information is that is exchanged. With self-disclosure, military personnel can develop and maintain interpersonal relationships. Interpersonal relationships are important for communication support networks that can be used over a career-span for coping with stress. Due to the nature of their job being secure, it initially may be challenging for these individuals to self-disclose information.

This is due to policies making it unethical for many individuals in department of defense occupations to disclose information about their job. They must ensure that any classified or confidential information remains secret. The lack of disclosure to an individual's partner can cause stress (Hornan, Bochantin, & Booth-Butterfield, 2012). Without disclosure, individuals may have a difficult time building or utilizing communication support networks. Disclosure is important because it allows service members to expose more information about him or herself, including information pertaining to the occupation and stress.

With social penetration theory, individuals are able to self-disclose information, as they feel more comfortable with each other. They may start at basic information until it leads up to more intimate information. If the rewards outweigh the costs of the relationship then individuals can perceive the relationship as worthwhile and can go from the development aspect, to maintaining the relationship. Maintaining relationships is important in a military setting for communication support networks that can be utilized throughout the career. This theory is important when trying to establish and enhance interpersonal relationships amongst service members.

While progressing through each stage of the social penetration theory, service members can exchange supportive, intimate, and affectionate communication in the form of prayer and other sources of religious support to draw a closer bond. This bond is especially needed for them due to their high stress career. This theory suggests how to establish a healthy interpersonal relationship for service members. By progressing through each stage of the social penetration theory, exchanging supportive, intimate, and affectionate communication can draw a closer bond and create or enhance interpersonal

relationships that can be utilized as communication support networks. (Hornan et al., (2012) discovered that police officers reported that having a partner who engaged in humorous and supportive communication helped relieve their stress (Hornan et al., 2012). Due to the similarities in police officers and service members I found this information to be fitting. Both occupations endure an extensive amount of stress with physical fitness testing, tests to advance in rank, combat style training and readiness, direct contact with the community, as well as life threatening situations. Both service members and police officers encounter individuals that may have a personal vendetta against their occupation as whole. Law enforcement fight the war within the country while the military deals with battles outside of the country.

Anxiety/Uncertainty Management Theory

Law enforcement careers tend to accumulate a lot of stress due to the high amounts of violence, long and bizarre work hours, and uncertainty in the job (Noblet, Rodwell, & Allisey, 2009). The United States military falls under the Department of Defense, which requires them to defend the country, just as law enforcement official's duty is to defend their communities. Although some rates or jobs in the military are law enforcement, such as Master at Arms (MA) and Military Police (MP), not all of them are. The rates or jobs that are not considered law enforcement share similar traits to law enforcement duties, as they tend to have odd work hours, high standards to meet, and a high security threat. In order for law enforcement and service members to engage in a romantic interpersonal relationship they must first be capable of effectively communicating.

Dr. William B. Gudykunst and Young Yun Kim (1984), the developers of the anxiety/uncertainty management theory looked at the components of an effective communicator. In order to be an effective communicator, Dr. William B. Gudykunst suggests that one must manage his or her anxiety around strangers. This is relevant because if a service member is unable to manage his or her anxiety around strangers, this could decrease his or her likeliness to utilize friends, family, or coworkers as sources of communication support.

At first thought, we may assume that service members are well equipped with dealing with strangers due to constantly meeting new people from boot camp, deployments, and after changing duty stations multiple times, but depending on their job or the way they manage anxiety, they may not be as equipped with dealing with strangers as one may have believed. Also witnessing a horrific event may cause difficulties in managing anxiety. The uncertainness of the military can also cause anxiety. This is seen with many service members, especially those who are part of special operation forces or are deployed in dangerous parts of the world. The uncertainty of being deployed, a criminal trying to get on base, as well as homegrown terrorist are all possible sources of stress, anxiety, and uncertainty for those in the military. According to research conducted by Norland and Gegax (2004), many soldiers grow anxious due to the uncertainty of their jobs. These individuals along with other military personnel go to work each day with the uncertainty if they will return home alive, as well as other negative thoughts such as fear of an attack, death, meeting standards, advancing, moving away from loved ones, and the fear of infidelity. All of these uncertainties and stressors can lead to stress and anxiety, ultimately hindering the development of a communication support networks.

Dr. William B. Gudykunst and Y.Y. Kim suggest that an individual can manage his or her anxiety with high self-esteem (Gudykunst & Kim, 1984). Depending on personal identities, social identities, and self-esteem, anxiety can be combated. Looking at the second axiom that Dr. Gudykunst discusses, if one's personal identities are secure then his or her anxiety and uncertainty levels may be neutral. If a service member identifies with his or her job title outside of work, then they may still harbor the attitudes, uncertainty, and anxiety associated with the occupation.

Dr. Gudykunst also looks at the motivation to interact as a source of anxiety and uncertainty. He suggests that an individual's interaction with strangers is shaped by the fulfillment of needs. The needs consist of being able to trust that others will behave, the need to feel accepted, and the need to be included. For service members, the fulfillment of needs when trying to establish interpersonal relationships differs from the needs that need to be attended to when dealing with tasks at work. The challenge for individuals in this career field is turning off the "work" switch. When a master at arms, watch stander, or gate guard is dealing with a negligent citizen trying to gain entrance to the base or command, the need to feel accepted or included may not be relevant to the situation, however when this individual transitions into his or her personal time with various social networks, he or she needs to feel these needs of fulfillment to establish and maintain the relationship for communication support.

Attachment Theory

Various attachment styles and the bond between a mother and child can determine the strength of affectionate bonds. The early experiences and interactions a child has with his or her caregiver plays an important role in psychological development (Bowlby,

1951, Lamdin & Hunter, 2012). Feelings are regulated at infancy through attachment styles with at least one caregiver. Attachment behavior and styles can alter depending on an individual's traumatic event experiences. Attachment theory is a lifespan theory that suggests how relationships between individuals are shaped at infancy (McFarlane & Bookless, 2001). How an infant interacts with his or her caregiver can determine the social and emotional development throughout the lifespan, affecting adulthood (McFarlane & Bookless, 2001). Early social interactions between a caregiver and baby shapes social interactions over the lifespan leading the baby to have anxious, avoidant, or secure attachment styles based on the interactions provided at birth throughout the early stages of life (Simpson, 1990).

Infants that receive a substantial amount of positive communication and consistent social interactions display a warm and welcoming attachment style. The theory was formed to understand major life stressors, such as loss and separation (Mikulincer, & Florian, 1998). When taking into account the stressors of the United States military, loss and separation are two forefront and common issues. Separation from family, friends, and partners are all stressors directly related to the profession. Many unmarried couples must live separately as the partner in the military deploys, goes on an underway, or receives a new duty station. This separation is a stressor, which can be managed if the individual can properly activate an attachment system learned during the early years of childhood (Mikulincer, & Florian, 1998). Attachment theory influences how we perceive others and interact with them.

Secure attachment can be utilized as an internal resource to help individuals positively cope with stressors (Mikulincer, & Florian, 1998). Adults who lack secure

attachment may be at a disadvantage to this internal resource, which is why religious coping sources as an external resource could be vital. Bowlby studied how attachment-working models could help people handle distress, using attachment as an inner resource (Mikulincer, & Florian, 1998). Bowlby's theory suggested that attachment can be viewed as an inner resource to help an individual constructively and successfully cope while facing adversities, as well as improve his or her well-being (Mikulincer, & Florian, 1998).

An individual can display an attachment style by being cold and standoffish toward others or well engaged with others as a 'people person.' Traumatic events can negatively impact attachment behavior and hinder interpersonal relationships (McFarlane & Bookless, 2001). Depending on the event, it may cause one to fear or avoid interpersonal communication. Traumatic experiences can become embedded in an individual's way of life making it difficult to become intimate, engage, or maintain interpersonal relationships. The way we respond in relationships to pain, separation, anxiety, or a perceived threat can all be traced to attachment styles that are learned during one's childhood.

Children who fail to have positive attachment styles may display poor attachment behaviors in adulthood. This can cause more stress on a military personnel, due to the service members' potential inability to positively bond or express nurturing traits. Attachment behavior can be utilized as a survival trait as it allows for a sense of security and emotional support. Love and affection are often displayed and learned via close interaction at a young age, which is why the attachment theory is important for interpersonal relationships. Reassuring parents provide their children with secure

relationships with others in the future this provides the child with more positive self-perceptions, more trusting of others, and more (Pecchioni, Wright, & Nussbaum, 2005). Neglected children may isolate themselves or become perfectionists who live in misery fighting a battle within them to excel at everything (Pecchioni et al., 2005)

Exposure to intense, dangerous, and stressful events is a norm for military activities in general and during wartime (Mikulincer, & Florian, 1998). Emotional effects of these stressors possess short-term and long-term effects on the individual (Mikulincer, & Florian, 1998). Attachment style can be used to help explain cognitive and emotional reactions in military careers (Mikulincer, & Florian, 1998). During this life stage is when the bond between a mother and child provides a sense of security and a social foundation, known as attachment (Bowlby, 1951). The Harry Harlow monkey love experiment is a great example of why supportive communication is vital for babies and infants. The study showed a monkey that received warm love from what resembled a real mother and a monkey that did not receive a sense of support from a fake wire mother. The bond with a mother and sense of warmth and safety made the monkey feel more secure whereas the monkey that did not receive support from a mother figure developed psychological problems

Lifespan Communication

Lifespan communication incorporates the learning, understanding, and maintenance of communication skills from birth to death. Communication plays a significant role from the day of birth until the end of an individual's life. At birth supportive communication, interactions, and early skin-to-skin contact is necessary (Farry, and Hotchin, 2012). Comforting communication creates an environment that

feels safe (Farry, and Hotchin, 2012). As the newborn becomes a baby and young child, communication is still important in their growth. Before young children can communicate clearly they are capable of understanding what is around them (Buckley, 2003). Crying, noises, babbling, facial expressions, waving, wiggling, and non-verbal expressions are all examples of how babies and young children communicate. Throughout the life stages humans continue to grow, develop, and adapt to communication skills. During the adult years is when communication patterns have been exposed to the most communicative patterns and techniques. As people age into later adulthood communication skills may begin to deteriorate in the sense of loss of hearing, sight, mobility, or the loss of networks in their generation.

The impact of communicative support on stress is important and relevant to society because it explains how to best alleviate stress from your own life or a loved one's life. Communication as a stress reliever technique can also help improve an individual's interpersonal relationship and can be used across the lifespan, due to studies evidence that stress can be harmful to one's health, the use of communication as a combative tool is beneficial to people across the entire lifespan. Families act as very important sources of communication support throughout the lifespan (Pecchioni, Wright, and Nussbaum, 2005). Support from family members is linked to psychological and physical well-being (Albercht, Burleson, & Goldsmith, 1994). Good communication is a key component in maintaining good health, satisfaction, and a quality filled long life (Pecchioni et al., 2005). Judgments regarding support are drawn upon from the experiences that an individual went through at a young age.

Selective Optimization with Compensation Theory

While looking at multiple generations for my study I would like to see if there are any generational differences that factor into communicative support and the usage of religious coping as a resource for stress. Generational differences may contribute to changes in communication engagement and development. Depending on the life stage that an individual is in may determine the communicative skill set he or she possesses (Baltes & Baltes, 1990). The selective optimization with compensation theory suggests how communication patterns alter throughout the lifespan (Baltes & Baltes, 1990). Optimization is the application of methods to achieve selected goals (current state versus desired state) (Baltes & Baltes, 1990). Compensation is the use of alternative methods when others become unavailable (Baltes & Baltes, 1990).

The selective optimization with compensation model suggests people of all stages of the lifespan try to maximize his or her positive experiences and minimize their negative experiences by selecting and compensating the most vital activities. Individuals choose what is important and utilize time management, as they grow older to weed out what is important and worth engaging in over other things. As individuals get older they are not able to do all of things you were once able to do. An example of this is if someone who has been an online advocate who communicates to people all over the world via internet messages for the past fifteen years but has to retire from the position due to loss of eyesight due to old age. Instead he or she may now choose to become a face-to-face advocate that does not need to rely on his or her eyesight to type the messages. This is one way the individual may optimize his or her advocacy while compensating the digital media component. This is optimization and compensation is

interactive as well, which allows for the individual to now optimize his or her advocacy abilities as an older adult struggling with vision problems. Optimization with compensation can be voluntary or involuntary depending if there is a medical need causing the change or whether there is a lack of experience or comfort level, which initiates the change.

Another example of optimization and compensation could be with technological savvy younger couples who do not have the comfort from years of experience to pray with their partner like their older adult family members do. They can compensate face-to-face prayer with prayer via text messaging. This will also optimize their texting and digital technology capabilities. This is one responding process of how different generations and cohorts deal with communication throughout the lifespan. Unlike the health concern, which initiated an involuntary change in the older adult example, the younger adult example demonstrated that optimization and compensation might be voluntary as well. It is healthy to realize when to compensate or optimize activities to find healthier alternatives or ones that work best for the individual. Older adults tend to select more meaningful and close knit friendships, and activities/hobbies that can be optimized to their fullest potential.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Participants

Using a minimum sample size of 30 participants for my study includes three groups consisting of early stage of the career (1-7 years), middle stage of the career (8-14 years), and later stage of the career (15+ years). Male and female active duty, reservist, and National Guard participant's ages 18-60 years have been recruited from military bases in Hampton Roads and Northern Virginia. I have selected to use this age group due to the possibility of generational differences and career stage differences in coping, as well as the minimum and maximum ages allowed in the military (see Appendix A for human subject's application).

Design

I used a modified Retrospective Interview Technique (RIT) (Fitzgerald & Surra, 1981) to discover the subjects' recollections of levels of stress throughout their military career as well as describe the communication support networks to which they turned. I sought to describe patterns of stress, communication support, and religious coping (RCOPE) patterns as well as perceptions of support effectiveness over time. Both supportive communication and religious coping serve as lifespan resources to manage stress.

Research Questions

Previous research has not yet provided a clear description of the processes of communication support (including religious support) in response to occupational stress

experienced by military members over the course of their careers. The following seven questions were asked in order to begin to provide this data:

RQ 1: What do the levels of occupational stress experienced by military personal look like over the course of a military career?

RQ 2: What kinds of sources of communication support do military personal turn to manage occupational stress over the course of a military career?

RQ 3: Do sources of communication support consulted by military personal change over the course of a military career?

RQ 4: How effective do military personal report the supportive communication outlets they chose to help manage occupational stress to be?

RQ 5: To what extent, if any, do military personal turn to sources of religious communicative support during stressful periods?

RQ 6: Do sources of religious communicative support change over the course of a military career?

RQ 7: As religious coping of military personnel increases do average levels of occupational stress experienced over the lifespan of military careers decrease?

Procedures

I recruited a non-random, convenience sample of active duty, reservist, National Guard, veteran, and retired service members in Northern Virginia and Hampton Roads. I did this by utilizing a snowball sampling method as well as my networking capabilities by talking to individuals who I have worked with on base and at military amenities. In order to participate, subjects must have been 18 years old, and have been on active

military duty for at least one year. I attempted to recruit an equal number of males and females and endeavored to recruit a minimum sample size of 30 participants.

The interviews were conducted in person at public locations of convenience to the participants such as in the Graduate Research and Resources room at Old Dominion University, Borjo's coffee shop, and similar locations. The majority of the Interviews took approximately 15-30 minutes, but depending on the depth of information disclosed, or the length of the career the interviews lasted up to an hour. First, participants were given a sheet that described the study (see Appendix A). All responses were recorded on a form that contained a participant number. No information identifying the participant was recorded on the form. Thus, responses are anonymous.

First, I asked for the following demographic data: Male/female, birth year, branch/service, years of service, ethnic background, years of formal education, and relational status.

Second, following RIT procedures (Fitzgerald & Surra, 1981), I showed participants a grid that contains a horizontal line indicating years of military service and a vertical line indicating perceived amount of occupational stress (using a scale of 1-low to 10-high). I asked them to indicate on the grid the level of occupational stress experienced for each period of service followed by: What sources of communication support did you use to help manage occupational stress during this particular period? To what extent did you turn to religious coping strategies to help you during each period of time? And, how effective were these outlets in helping you to manage occupational stress?

And third, I administered the Religious Coping Scale (Pargament, Feuille, & Burdzy, 2011), to measure religious coping with life stressors and how religion plays a

part on stress management and dealing with crisis. Participants were then thanked for their assistance. For those interested, I offered to provide a separate card for them to list their email address if they would like me to send them a short summary of the results of the research.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

Demographics

Before beginning the study, the College of Arts & Letters Human Subjects Committee approved the data collection protocol as being exempt from full IRB review (HSR # 674525-2) and to be in compliance with standards for protecting human subjects. I then recruited a convenience sample of forty-one military service members for this study by approaching individuals at various military installations (Naval Station Norfolk, Langley AFB, Joint Expeditionary Base Little Creek, Quantico, Camp Allen, USCG Base Portsmouth) and on campus at Old Dominion University. Old Dominion University Student Veterans Association also supported my recruitment by emailing student veterans and military affiliated students. This however did not provide any participants other than the individual who sent the email.

As a military dependent I was able to access the bases to interview some of my participants, who then directed me to others to interview. Even with access and IRB approval, I also asked permission from base police to conduct interviews on the facility. Although I conducted recruited on military installations, nearly all of the interviews took place on campus or at a local coffee shop. My next strategy after conducting a few initial interviews was to recruit at various base-sponsored events such as bowling, outdoor movies on the lawn, the gym, and the air show. During these conversations I discussed my research and provided my contact information to those who were interested. The success rate of this approach was very high, as those who approached me first tended to be more interested in participating. In addition, some of the individuals assisted in

recruiting their peers for additional participants. Some of the participants who recruited their peers recruited individuals that could only be accessed via video chat or telephone. Of the forty-one participants three were interviewed over the telephone and two were interviewed via Skype video messaging and the remainder face to face.

Eight-three percent were males and 17% were females. The age range of participants was between the ages 20 and 54. Their average age was 30-years old ($SD = 9.3$ years). The majority of the participants identified their race as Caucasian (59%), followed by African-American (24%), Hispanic (10%), Asian-American (5%), and Native-American (2%). Most participants reported to have completed some college (44%), followed by those with a high school diploma at (24%), bachelor's degrees (22%), and graduate degrees (10%). Thus, with 76% of the participants attending some college, the sample can be considered moderately well-educated. As for participants' relational status, nearly half of the participants were single (49%), with 17% married, 12% exclusively dating relationship, 12% engaged, 5% cohabitating but not married, and separated 5%.

The following branches of the military services were represented in the final sample (with accompanying participation percentages): Navy (34%), Marine Corps (32%), Army (24%), Air Force (7%), and Coast Guard (2%). Seventy-five percent of the participants reported that they were active duty, with the remainder serving in the National Guard (14%), Reservist (5%), Veteran (2%), and Retired (2%). The range of years of service in the military ranged from 1.5 years to 28 years. The mean number of years of service in the military was 8.2 years, median 5 years, and the standard deviation of 7.48. Twenty-six percent of participants began their military career in year 2012,

followed by 2010 and 2011 (with 11.6% respectively). The most frequently reported year that the participants joined was 2005, with the entire sample joining between 1981 and 2013.

Study participants reported that they perform a wide variety of jobs within the military. Arranged alphabetically (and noting the reported frequency in the sample) the following jobs were held by participants in the study:

Aviation Electricians Mate (1), Aviation Maintenance Administration (1), Battalion Chemical Officer (1), Cadet (1), Cannon Crew (3), Combat Instructor (1), Corpsman (1), Electro Optical Ordinance Repair (1), Engineer (2), Human Resources (2), Infantry (4), Intel (1), iT (2), Jet Engine Mechanic (1), Marine Scout Sniper (1), Master at Arms (2), Mechanic (2), Motor T (3), Musician (2), Ordinance Officer (1), Pilot (3), Seabee (1), Security Forces (1), Supply Clerk (2), and Surface Warfare Officer (1).

Reported Occupational Stress by Job Type. To some extent, all of these jobs in the military carry some degree of occupational stress. Of the various jobs represented in the sample, it is clear however that some participants would be likely to experience higher levels of occupational danger than others. For example, those working with ordinance, cannons, and with dangerous machines face threats to their personal safety that are different from those holding desk jobs. However, because the sample does not contain a wide variety participants or a large-enough sample representing any given job, this study cannot draw conclusions about the career-span occupational stress level across all of the jobs within the sample. However, this study can report the career-span stress rate among a small sample of the various jobs in the military as preliminary data. Although no

conclusions can be drawn about each job individually, the list of overall average reported occupational stress by job does begin to suggest and illustrate an important point that is a feature of the various models of stress (e.g., ABC-X) reviewed in chapters 1 and chapter 2; Occupational stress is in the eye of the beholder.

Using a scale from 1 = low occupational stress to 10 = high occupational stress (reported for each year of service), here is a list of the subjects' average career-span stress ratings organized by job (arranged from low reported occupational stress to high occupational stress): iT (Information Technology) (2), Cadet (3), Corpsman (4), Engineer (4), Master at Arms (4), Marine Scout Sniper (4), Electro Optical Ordinance Repair (5), Intel (5), Musician (5), Seabee (5), Security Forces (5), HR/Administration (6), Infantry (6), Motor T (6), Supply Clerk (6), AE (Aviation Electricians Mate) (7), AZ (Aviation Maintenance Administration) (7), Cannon Crew (7), Combat Instructor (7), Jet Engine Mechanic (7), Mechanic (7), Surface Warfare Officer (7), Ordinance Officer (8), Pilot (8), and Battalion Chemical Officer (10). To make this list more informative, I grouped jobs that scored an average occupational stress score of one through five into a low-occupational stress jobs group and jobs that scored six through ten into a high occupational stressful jobs group. Here are jobs in the low occupational stress group: Information Technology, Cadet, Corpsman, Engineer, Master at Arms, Marine Scout Sniper, Electro Optical Ordinance Repair, Intel, Musician, Seabee, and Security Forces were all rated as low stress jobs in this study. And, here are the jobs in this high occupational stress group: HR/Administration, Infantry, Motor T, Supply Clerk, AE, AZ, Cannon Crew, Combat Instructor, Jet Engine Mechanic, Mechanic, Surface Warfare Officer, Ordinance Officer, Pilot, and Battalion Chemical Officer.

Grouping the data this way further highlights (and supports the ABC-X model) that occupational stressors are in the eye of the beholder. For example, two musicians reported high levels of occupational stress with both respondents indicating that they joined the military to play music, but ended up shouldering lots of administrative work, were forced to stay in shape, and also experience deployment. Further, the average stress levels of those who were infantry (which included the jobs of maintaining combat weapons, aid in reconnaissance missions, process prisoners of war, and engage in land combat) (Powers, n.d.), and assumed to be more occupationally stressful positions were high but only slightly higher than the musicians.

Respondents in the infantry reported to perceive deploying as “exciting” and they did not look at it as stressful when compared to adjusting as compared to coming back home, training, and other parts of their jobs. A Marine Scout Sniper reported a low level of stress whereas the four infantrymen indicated a high level of stress. The MOS (Military Occupational Specialty) of a Marine Scout Sniper and infantryman are different. A Marine Scout Sniper is a secondary MOS within infantry, so it is also surprising that the Marine Scout Sniper (another form of an infantryman) reported lower on career-span occupational stress compared to other infantrymen. Another finding further illustrated that occupational stress is in the eye of the beholder. The Master at Arms reported experiencing comparatively lower occupational stress. Masters of Arms protect the gate, work long hours on holidays and weekends, and perform many duties identical to municipal police officers. Similarly, a Corpsman’s responsibilities include providing first aid, medical treatment, and hospital assistance. Here too one Corpsman reported a low career-span occupational stress average, which is surprising as providing

medical treatment and having other's lives in your hand is assumed to be occupationally stressful.

Data Analysis

A series of research questions were raised in chapter three. These research questions are used to frame the data analysis report that follows in this section. Also, since the general purpose of the study is descriptive and exploratory, in addition to tests run to address the research questions, supplementary tests were run on the data as perceived needed. These are also described and discussed below.

RQ 1: What do the levels of occupational stress experienced by military personal look like over the military career-span?

Data to answer this question came from the modified Retrospective Interviewing Technique (RIT) where respondents used a blank graph on a sheet of paper to draw a curve of their perceived levels of occupational stress with points at each year of military service (career-span), where the X-axis indicated levels of perceived occupational stress from 0 (low) to 10 (high) and the Y-axis indicated years of service. After collecting the perceived level of occupational stress for each year, I then constructed a career-span average occupational stress score by adding together the stress levels for each year of service and dividing by the number of years served. For the forty-one participants I used a scale ranging 0 to 10, to calculate the mean occupational stress score for the entire sample which was 5.89 (SD = 2.98). Table 1 displays the reported mean occupational stress scores (and standard deviations) by year of service for the sample.

Table 1. Mean Occupational Stress Scores across Years of Service

| Year of Service | Mean and SD of Reported Occupational Stress Score | Number of Respondents |
|------------------------|--|------------------------------|
| Year 1 | Mean = 5.31, SD = 2.46 | 41 |
| Year 2 | Mean = 4.50, SD = 2.45 | 40 |
| Year 3 | Mean = 4.30, SD = 2.80 | 34 |
| Year 4 | Mean = 3.80, SD = 2.65 | 27 |
| Year 5 | Mean = 4.17, SD = 2.53 | 22 |
| Year 6 | Mean = 4.69, SD = 2.66 | 17 |
| Year 7 | Mean = 4.57, SD = 2.13 | 15 |
| Year 8 | Mean = 5.00, SD = 2.25 | 14 |
| Year 9 | Mean = 5.42, SD = 2.32 | 14 |
| Year 10 | Mean = 6.14, SD = 2.26 | 12 |
| Year 11 | Mean = 6.14, SD = 2.79 | 12 |
| Year 12 | Mean = 6.35, SD = 2.93 | 11 |
| Year 13 | Mean = 6.45, SD = 2.54 | 11 |
| Year 14 | Mean = 6.50, SD = 3.37 | 10 |
| Year 15 | Mean = 4.36, SD = 3.01 | 8 |
| Year 16 | Mean = 5.33, SD = 2.94 | 7 |
| Year 17 | Mean = 6.20, SD = 2.86 | 6 |
| Year 18 | Mean = 6.60, SD = 2.70 | 6 |
| Year 19 | Mean = 6.50, SD = 2.89 | 5 |

Table 1. (Continued)

| | | |
|---------|------------------------|---|
| Year 20 | Mean = 6.00, SD = 4.58 | 4 |
| Year 21 | Mean = 5.50, SD = 6.36 | 3 |
| Year 22 | Mean = 6.00, SD = 4.58 | 3 |
| Year 23 | Mean = 6.00, SD = 4.58 | 3 |
| Year 24 | Mean = 5.33, SD = 4.50 | 3 |
| Year 25 | Mean = 5.33, SD = 4.51 | 3 |

As seen in Table 1, there is a decline in the average occupational stress scores reported between year one and year four. Further, of the first five years, year one is the highest year and year four is the lowest of reported occupational stress. Although some participants served more than 20 years, a limitation of this sample is that most of the sample's participants had served five years. To further support the claim of a drop in average occupational stress from year one to year four, a paired t-test was run to assess if a statistically significant difference existed between mean stress scores reported for year one is different than year four. A paired t-test was used because reported stress scores of years one and year four are within subjects and thus arguably not independent of each other. The test was statistically significant ($t(25) = 2.55, p < 0.017$). This means that for this sample, the reported average occupational stress did change from year one to year four and also may change over the course of a military career-span. The average reported occupational stress decreased to 3.81 ($sd = 2.65$) in year four from 5.21 ($sd = 2.58$) in year one. Thus, occupational stress among military personnel should be viewed as a dynamic process occurring over the course of a career-span.

Also in Table 1, although the numbers of respondents with careers longer than five years are low, we see that reported stress levels may rise later in years of service. Again, although too few subjects were included that represented a given year (a study limitation that I discuss in Chapter 5), the table does strongly suggest that occupational stress continues over entire military career-span in this sample. And, although later career circumstances may differ from earlier (e.g., increased experience levels, preparing for retirement from the military, and so on), this study's results support the conceptual utility of adopting a career-span approach in future studies of occupational stress, because it is clear that perceptions of stress are not static, but rather are dynamic and change over time and circumstances.

RQ 2: What sources of communication support do military personnel report they turn to in order to help manage occupational stress over the course of a military career?

Data to address this question came from the modified RIT, specifically, when I asked respondents to report the resources they turned to in order to help manage the occupational stress occurring during each year of military service. The sources of support that the forty-one participants reported were (arranged from most-often reported to least-often reported): Family (87.8%), Coworker (69.8%), and Civilian Friends (43.9%), followed by Superiors (16.3%) and Counselors (11.6%). Religion (9.8%), Chaplain (9.8%), church (9.8%), and Prayer (9.8%) were next followed by the Bible (4.9%), Psychologists (4.9%), Mentors (4.7%), roommates (2.4%), and even strangers (2.4%) (People met in bars).

As the majority of the participants had served five years, I wanted to take a closer look at the sources of communication support received during these years of the twenty-

one participants who served five years or less. Between year one and year five, 38% of the respondents turned to civilian friends as sources of communication support (outside the military). Thus, when experiencing occupational stress most respondents turned to a friend inside the military. As in any occupation, sources that are perceived to be of most use in managing occupational stress are often those that are proximal and found within organizations (e.g., assumed to be able to provide instrumental support). In contrast, during the first five years, sixty-two percent of participants did turn to “family” (outside the military). However, it is not clear precisely who participants included when using the term “family,” as during the first five-years 10% of the participants specifically reported they turned to their parents for support and 10% turned to their siblings. And, less than half of the sample was married (24%) and those individuals turning to his or her spouse for communication support. Thus, “family” may include siblings and extended family, but as this was asked as an open-ended question in this study, the exact make-up of this category is not known (and is something to consider in future studies). Chaplains were also an under-consulted resource because only 14% reported consulting him or her during the first five years. In general, religion (as a source of support to manage occupational stress) was also an infrequently reported resource with only 14% saying that they turned to religion in times of occupational stress. Among the general categories of religion, “church” was reported by 14%, the Bible was used by 10% of the subjects, and Priest by 5%.

Once again, the results indicate then when managing occupational stress the respondents in this sample show that military participants turn to those in their immediate environment. That is, in the overall sample, seventy-one percent of participants talked to

coworkers. Although their superiors were close by, only 19% of participants turned to them for communication support in managing occupational stress. Mentors were reported as a resource by only 10% of the participants, followed by psychologists 10%, and counselors 10%. Only one subject reported talking to their roommate and one even reported consulting strangers. The subject who discussed how he turned to strangers in a bar settings for communicative support, reported that strangers do not carry the baggage like someone who knows him. He stated that he found it easier to talk to someone he did not know about work stressors because the information would not be traced back to him. Also, if the stranger judged him, it did not matter, as he would never see him or her again. This was an interesting finding, because sometimes some military service members may find it difficult to talk to others whom are in the military, perhaps out of fear of repercussions of some kind. For example, it would make sense to seek the counsel of experienced others when managing occupational stressors, however in the military doing so may be perceived as a signal of the person's fitness (or lack thereof) for performing a particular duty. As the military is a tightly structured hierarchy, asking for guidance may be detrimental to essential career advancement.

Additional exploratory tests were run. I explored potential relationships between reported average occupational stress over a military career-span and age and education level by running Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient tests (Pearson r) to see if there were any significant relationships. No statistically significant correlations were found between average reported occupational career-span stress and age or years of education. That is, as education and age increased there were no proportional increases

(or decreases) in average reported occupational career-span stress. Occupational stress appears to be a constant for all ages and levels of education.

RQ 3: Do sources of communication support consulted by military personnel change over the span of a military career?

Data to address this RQ came from the modified RIT. I created a table to show the frequency counts of how often a given source appeared during particular time period.

Table 2 shows the types of sources that appear in each period. The types and frequency of sources of communication support used by year are listed in the table below based on communication support within the military, communication support from those outside of the military, and religious sources.

**Table 2. Frequencies of Sources of Communicative Support Consulted
by Year: Inside the Military, Outside the Military and Religious**

| Year of Service | Sources of Support Consulted Inside the Military (e.g., superiors, coworkers, mentor, and counselor) | Sources of Support Consulted Outside the Military (e.g., civilian friends, family, and roommate) | Sources of Social Consulted Religious (e.g., chaplain, church, religion, and Bible) | Number of Respondents |
|------------------------|---|---|--|------------------------------|
| 1 | 17 | 18 | 7 | 41 |
| 2 | 16 | 22 | 7 | 40 |
| 3 | 15 | 15 | 6 | 34 |
| 4 | 13 | 11 | 3 | 27 |
| 5 | 13 | 7 | 3 | 22 |
| 6 | 8 | 6 | 0 | 17 |
| 7 | 8 | 4 | 1 | 15 |
| 8 | 6 | 13 | 2 | 14 |

Table 2. (Continued)

| | | | | |
|----|---|---|---|----|
| 9 | 9 | 4 | 1 | 14 |
| 10 | 4 | 2 | 1 | 12 |
| 11 | 4 | 4 | 1 | 12 |
| 12 | 3 | 4 | 1 | 11 |
| 13 | 2 | 5 | 1 | 11 |
| 14 | 2 | 4 | 1 | 10 |
| 15 | 3 | 4 | 2 | 8 |
| 16 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 7 |
| 17 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 6 |
| 18 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 6 |
| 19 | 1 | 2 | 1 | 5 |
| 20 | 0 | 2 | 1 | 4 |
| 21 | 0 | 2 | 1 | 3 |
| 22 | 0 | 2 | 1 | 3 |
| 23 | 0 | 2 | 1 | 3 |
| 24 | 0 | 2 | 1 | 3 |
| 25 | 0 | 2 | 1 | 3 |

The numbers in each column indicates the frequency that the sample reported using a particular cluster of support by year. As the data in this table are at the nominal-level, a Chi-square test was run using the frequency counts from the first five years to see if there were frequency count differences by source and year. The result [chi-square (8) = 12.74, $p > .1211$] was not statistically significant. That is, the patterns of the frequency counts of sources consulted by year are proportionally more similar than different across the first five years. Further, sources both inside and outside the military are consulted at a proportionally similar frequency by year although there are differences between the frequency counts of religious sources consulted by military (when compared to other sources) when managing occupational stress.

The study does not have enough participants in each year of service to run a Chi-square to test for proportional difference over the entire 20-year career-span. However, data do suggest that there may be a general decline in the number of communication support sources consulted over time (although the numbers of respondents are too few to conclude this with confidence). This is an important finding. The earlier section showed that there was a decline in occupational stress over the first five years. It would also seem that over time, as for example when people become more proficient in their jobs, that they might also narrow the number of people to which we turn for support when managing occupational stress. This finding will be discussed in chapter five.

Over a military career in terms of consulting religious sources of communicative support there may also be unique sources that appear during a career-span. Early career sources of religious support varied among the Bible, chaplain, church, prayer, and religion. During boot camp, service members are given time off to attend church services on Sundays and to read the Bible. This sets a foundation for the first few years allowing service members to utilize various forms of religious sources for coping and communication support. One participant stated that although he attended church services to get out of cleaning on Sundays (year 1), he soon realized the healing nature and positive support from attending church, which lead him to turn to church and the Bible for communicative support during stressful time periods at work in later periods. During the first five years, especially year one, with the majority of the participants being away from family and not having ready access cellular phones or social media to connect to their friends and family, it makes sense that religion would be included as source of communication support during these early years. Not yet knowing coworkers, not being

assigned a mentor yet, or fearing superiors due to a lack of knowledge on the stern power structure are all possible reasons as to why religious sources were turned to during the early years.

Although the numbers of respondents are too few to draw conclusions, sources of communicative support reported to have been consulted in the later years were family, superiors, and the chaplain. Due to the limited participants in the middle and later years it is not possible to describe the sources of communication support utilized during these time periods (something that is discussed in chapter 5). The few participants who did indicate their communication support networks in the later years utilized sources that are similar to the start of their careers. These individuals turned to their families, superiors, and chaplain. In the later years, participants also begin to think about retirement. This is an important life step to discuss with family members and superiors to ensure a smooth transition. Also during the later years, participants are more likely to have started a family of their own in which they are now responsible to think about others in their everyday work life and when considering retirement. Turning to the chaplain, family members, and superiors would be a wise choice at this stage of the career considering the added responsibilities and major life decisions.

Lastly, although too few participants with long careers (15-20 year) were in the sample to allow me to draw firm conclusions, a few career-span sources of occupational communication support do appear throughout the entire career-span: coworkers, families, and chaplains. This could be due to the fact that family is a proximal, lifespan group that are available across a career-span and provide a consistent source of communicative support to manage occupational stress and more. The chaplain is introduced during the

early years of the career and can be utilized throughout (although far less often than coworkers and family). Those who indicated that they reached out to the chaplain at the beginning of their career may be the same ones who utilized it throughout it as a reliable consistent source. Over time, coworkers are proximal, and grow together through experience and rank. This could potentially demonstrate why coworkers are utilized as a career-span support system. Superiors, roommates, and civilian friends have a higher chance of changing over the course of a career, but families typically may change less so, making it no surprise that families were heavily used as a source of occupational support across the span of a military career.

RQ 4: How helpful do military personnel perceive supportive communication outlets in managing occupational stress across a career-span?

Using a scale of 0 (low helpfulness) and 10 (high helpfulness), subjects were asked to rate their overall perception of helpfulness of communicative support of their network of resources when dealing with occupational stress over the course of their career-span. The average rating of helpfulness of communicative support across a military career-span for the forty-one participants was 7.90 ($sd = 1.87$). Thus, for this sample, the majority of military service members reported a high degree of perceived helpfulness from their communication support networks in coping with occupational stress. However, as year by year perceptions of communication support were not gathered, nor was each source of support given by participants rated, and a single-item measure was used, the details of this overall perception remain to be unpacked in future studies.

RQ 5: To what extent, if any, do military personnel turn to sources of religious communicative support during stressful periods?

All participants were given the Brief Religious Coping Scale (Pargament et al., 2011) that measures the extent to which religion is used to frame the management of problems in everyday life. Cronbach's alpha was found to be .88 (indicating a high internal consistency among respondents and good measurement reliability). The RCOPE mean for the sample was 23.59 ($sd = 8.59$). RCOPE scale ranges from a low of 14 to a high of 56 and mid-score of 35. Thus, the mean score of the sample indicates the average respondent reported a below average likelihood to frame managing everyday problems in religious terms.

Second, a Pearson product moment correlation was run to test the relationship, if any, between RCOPE and average occupational career-span stress. The results indicate there was no statistically significant relationship between RCOPE and occupational career-span stress. That is, for this sample, RCOPE did not vary with occupational career-span stress.

Third, the sample was divided using a median split into low-religious copers (scores 14-35) and high religious copers (scores 36-56). Of the forty-one participants, thirty-six (88%) were low in religious coping and only five scored high in religious coping (12%). The low scores and low percentages of those integrating religion into their coping, as well as the reports of few sources of religion consulted for communication support, finds that this sample, in general, did not report to turn to religion when managing occupational stress. In some ways this may make sense as among strategies to manage occupational stress, religion might not generally be perceived as a first source to

consult (perhaps something to consult later or not at all). However, a different pattern emerged in the data for the five who reported to integrate religion into their approaches to coping with stress.

Fourth, although there are too few subject upon which to draw firm conclusions, I decided to more closely examine the five subjects who scored high in religious coping practices in terms of career-span occupational stress and their choices of communicative support. The results are that high RCOPE subjects had attended college. Four identified themselves as African-American and one Caucasian. Three were single. Of the high religiously-coping individuals four have served at least two terms in the military. The majority of those with high religious coping were females and active duty. Of those who scored high in high religious coping, two were in the Navy, two in the Army, and one was in the Marine Corps. Across the career-span of high RCOPE scorers the types of communication support did not drastically change. Many subjects continued using the same support systems throughout their career. Curiously, religion per se did not seem to play a role in most of the participants in managing occupational stress but one hundred percent of high RCOPE scorers reported they turned to family and coworkers for communication support, while forty percent turned to civilian friends and siblings. As stated previously in chapter 1 and chapter 2 religious coping may be negative if one places blame on religion or perceives religious coping negatively. After dividing the questions on the Brief RCOPE Scale based on positive religious coping (questions 1-7) and negative religious coping (questions 8-14) I ran two Pearson r tests to see if there was a correlation between positive RCOPE and negative RCOPE on levels of stress, however

no correlations were found between the variables. Future research should be conducted on the affects that negative religious coping has on stress levels.

RQ 6: Do sources of religious communicative support change over the course of a military career?

Data were collected to address this question using the RIT. All participants reported that the sources of religious support they turned to during stressful time periods were the Bible, chaplain, church, prayer, and religion. The Bible was reported to be used during the first few years and during a first enlistment by some of the subjects. This could potentially be due to scheduled reading time during boot camp and the lack of internet or telephone access. As the participants entered their later years of service religious communication support decreased in usage. The chaplain appeared to play a prominent role in the later years after year eleven. Some participants stated that they turned to religion, which is vague but did not offer an explanation to what sources of religion they turned to. Those who suggested they turned to religion were still included in the overall religious communication support sources used by year over a military career-span. The frequencies of types of religious communication support consulted by year are listed in Table 3. As the table indicates, although not often consulted, chaplains are a career-span source of support for some military members. After year six, there is less diversity of the religious sources consulted in relationship to managing occupational stress.

Table 3. Frequencies of Sources of Religious Support by Year of Military Service

| Year | Chaplain | Church | Bible | Prayer | Priest | Religion |
|------|----------|--------|-------|--------|--------|----------|
| 1 | 1 | 4 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| 2 | 1 | 3 | 3 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| 3 | 1 | 3 | 3 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| 4 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| 5 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| 6 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| 7 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| 8 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 |
| 9 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| 10 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| 11 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 |
| 12 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 |
| 13 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| 14 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| 15 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| 16 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| 17 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| 18 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| 19 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| 20 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| 21 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| 22 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| 23 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| 24 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| 25 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |

As seen in Table 3, over a military career-span, religious communicative support tends to decrease. During the first enlistment, year's one through five, multiple forms of religious communicative support were utilized such as the bible, chaplain, church, prayer, and religion. During year seven is when we begin to see the decrease of all religious communicative support items except for the chaplain. It is important to note that chaplains were utilized the most during the career-span years beyond year eleven. The

amount of people who utilized religious communicative support also decreased after the first few years, going from seven people in years one through three, to three people in years four and five, two people in year eight, and one person in year seven and year nine through twenty-five. In years one through three, church appeared to be used at its highest rates. Church was used as a coping resource 10 times in the first three years and only three times after that. Further research is needed on the reasoning church is used most frequently during the early years of a military career, but based on some of the interviews, subjects stated that church was utilized heavily during boot camp as it was the only consistent hour long break received.

RQ 7: As religious coping scores of military personnel increases do average levels of occupational stress experienced over the lifespan of military careers decrease?

There was no significant correlation between religious coping scores and occupational stress for this sample. However, there was a moderate and significant negative correlation found between religious coping and the average rate of rate of helpfulness communicative support provided during stressful periods across a military career ($r = -.31, p < .048$). That is, as participants' perceptions of the helpfulness of their non-religious sources of support declined in perceptions of helpfulness, religious coping scores increased. However, with my sample being so low in religious coping scores it is hard to understand the full extent that religious coping has on occupational stress in military careers, but for a few individuals that did utilize religious coping they rated it as being helpful in managing stress. And this significant correlation shows that religious-copers who turn to religion seem to perceive the helpfulness of their support systems to be lacking. This makes sense in a general way as some people may turn to religion when

other sources of communicative support are perceived to be less helpful. Religious coping may have helped decrease stress over the lifespan of military careers of these individuals due to the convenience of its access compared to some of the other forms of communication support. Whether it is during a deployment, late hours, or while on duty, religious coping can be utilized at any time and can even be used discreetly. Having a communicative support that can be deployed, as a source during any situation is beneficial across a career-span, due to its consistency, stability, and convenience.

Summary of Results

Seven research questions framed the study. Among my sample, results show a significant decline in average reported occupational stress from years one through four year, and suggest that levels may rise again in year ten and beyond. The sample size included forty-one participants in year one, but dropped to eleven participants (who had careers ten years or longer (and continued to decrease as the years went on). To accurately depict what occupational stress looks like over actively occurring military career-spans, a larger sample size is need for each career-span increment, for example, perhaps 40 participants for each five-year increment over the course of a typical 20-year military career (n=800 people).

Looking at the various types resources within communication support networks that military personnel utilized for occupational stress was an important part of this study (due to the lack of prior research on types of communication support used amongst the military). The participants reported communication support networks that included sources inside of the military, sources outside of the military and religious sources. It is clear that this sample utilized religious support sources the least. And those who did use

religious support tended to use them during the first year and the last few years of the career. Further, sources of support within support networks were perceived differently and with different levels of effectiveness. For example, when perceptions of the effectiveness of communication support networks declined, religious coping increased (i.e., turning to God, when communication support networks failed to provide support).

Over the span of a military career communication support sources do change and were divided between early career, late career, and career span sources. Although low, religion tended to be an early career source, while external sources (family, friends, roommates, etc.), internal sources (coworkers, superiors, mentors, etc.), and religious sources tend to be used in the later years of a career, and external sources and religion were used as career-span resources. Overall, military personnel reported that these forms of communication support were perceived to be effective, rating communication support helpfulness in dealing with occupational stress a 7.9 out of 10.

Of the sample, only five participants utilized religion to frame problems to help them cope. The RCOPE scores indicate that these five participants may also use also religious support in other aspects of their lives. But for the sample as a whole, subjects scored low in religious coping and reported to consult only a few religious sources (i.e., the chaplain). Over the military career-span, the sample reported different religious support sources were utilized. The Bible and church were reported to be used in the first few years of service compared to other sources of religious support. However, the Bible and church (as sources of support when managing occupational stress) also diminished after the first few years and were not present at all in the later years of a military career. Chaplains were utilized more than other resources across the military career-span, and

were the only sources of religious support utilized in the later years. As stated previously, results indicate that the levels of stress and communication support may increase over the later years of a military career. However, the numbers of those individuals scoring high in religious coping were few in this study and no correlation was found between levels of religious coping and levels of reported occupational stress during the first five years of service.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

Based on a review of the literature about stress, coping with stress, and theories of stress management, as well as military occupational stress, this thesis had two goals: extend this literature into increasing our understanding of coping with occupational stress across military career-spans by means of an examination of patterns of sources of communication support and, second, ascertain the extent to which religion might (or might not) play a role among sources of support. Previous research has not examined the notion that occupational stress is experienced over time, nor has this idea been explored within the context of military career spans. Further, this study was interested in examining the role of religion as a kind of source of support in managing occupational stress across military career spans and this too represents a new frontier in research in communication and communication support. In this chapter I will review the findings of the study, show how the findings contribute to existing research, review the limitations of the study, and conclude with suggestions for future research.

Review of the Findings of the Study

Overall, when looking at occupational stress and communication support among military personnel, a number of interesting findings emerged. First, in my sample, occupational stress decreased until the fourth year and began to increase again in year ten and beyond. Although the levels of stress gradually increased in the later years, the number of participants with careers beyond five decreased. Although I had forty-one participants in total, the number of those whose careers went beyond five years dropped, for example to only eleven participants with ten-year careers, and continued to decrease

as the years went on. To accurately depict what occupational stress looks like over an entire 20-year military career, more participants would be needed that would include those ranging from 20 years to the usual minimum of four. The minimum number of years served needed for this study was one year. Looking at the whole picture we can see that occupational stress tends to change over a military career with high points at the beginning mainly associated with boot camp and than high points again toward the end of the career associated with retirement.

Second, looking at the various types of communication support networks that military personnel utilized for occupational stress was an important part of this study due to the lack of research on types of communication support used amongst the military. The participants reported communication support networks that included sources inside of the military, sources outside of the military, and religious sources. This sample utilized religious support the least. Those who did use religious support tended to use it the first year and the last few years of the career. Over a career-span the subjects reported that they turned to various sources and networks of communication support.

Third, over the span of military careers communication support sources changed and were different in early career, late career, and across the course of careers. For example, religion tended to be an early career source, while external sources (family, friends, roommates, etc.), internal sources (coworkers, superiors, mentors, etc.), with some religious sources tend to be used in the later years of a career, as well as some external sources and religion were used as career-span resources.

Fourth, overall military personnel reported that these forms of communication support were effective at providing adequate occupational support. They rated

communication support helpfulness in dealing with occupational stress as a 7.9 (with a high of 10 and a low of 1). Overall, communication support was a helpful resource for service members when coping with occupational stress.

Fifth, as previously stated sources of communication support consulted by military personnel changed over the given spans of military careers of the subjects in this study. During the early years religious support was turned to most frequently for occupational stress management; during the middle years, family and friends were turned to, while religious support was again turned to most frequently again in the later years. Due to the decline in participants with longer career spans, the reliability of stress management resources cannot be forecasted for the sample.

Sixth, religious sources fluctuated over the career span. Religious resources were heavily used in the beginning of participants' careers and again at the conclusion of those participants with longer careers. Many participants stated that they utilized religious resources during boot camp due to limited alternative sources of support, while those who used religious support during their the latter parts of their careers considered it primary choice because along with family, it was a source that was around for the longest duration of time, as a familiar and continuous source of occupational support.

Seventh, a low level of religiosity in this sample was found as well as few service members who turned to religious support for occupational stress. Of the sample only five participants utilized religion as a consistent resource to cope with occupational stress. Most participants reported that they used religious support in other parts of their lives, but rarely when dealing with occupational stress. Looking more closely over the career span if those who did turn to religion, the study also found different religious support sources

were utilized. The Bible and church played a larger role in the first few years of service compared to other sources of religious support such as the Chaplain. However, the Bible and church diminished after the first few years and were not present at all in the later years of a military career. Chaplains were utilized relatively consistently across the career-span, and were the only sources of religious support utilized in the later years. As stated previously, the levels of stress and communication support increased over the later years of a military career. However, in part because the religious coping mean score was low for this sample a significant correlation was not found between levels of religious coping and levels of stress.

Contribution to Existing Research

The ABC-X model of family crisis (Hill, 1958) suggests that individuals and groups respond to stressors in a patterned way: (a) the event interacts with (b) the family's crisis resources, which interacts with (c) the way the family defines the event, which produces the crisis (X). The key feature of the model is how the stressor is perceived shapes the way that stressors handled. In the military, like life, the same jobs can experience differently, and prompt different perceptions of stressors as well as coping sequences. . For example, military jobs that would appear to be stressful, such as Infantry, Master at Arms, or Corpsman (made stressful in part due to challenging tasks such as deploying) were not perceived as stressful to many of these individuals, whereas Musicians, for example, found their jobs to be highly stressful (in part due to the same tasks such as deploying). The way that Infantry-men defined the stressor of "deployment" appeared to be the opposite of how Musicians defined this exact stressor. The ABC-X model also illustrates how supporting resources can interact with how a

situation is perceived (e.g., changing perceptions about the extent of stress—making them better or worse). This is why it is important to discover the various communication support resources utilized (as sometimes sources might diminish rather than facilitate support). Depending on the time frame of the career, certain types communication support resources have the potential to be more beneficial than others, when perceiving the stressfulness of the job.

The use of religious communication support in the later years may suggest the potential utility of using social penetration theory (Altman & Taylor, 1973) to explain this pattern. The social penetration theory suggests that interpersonal relationships grow from the breadth and depth of information disclosed, so the longer one source is utilized information of greater breadth and depth is disclosed creating a closer bond. Respondents who utilized religious support during the early and later years suggested that ties with sources such as chaplains were enhanced and maintained over time by repeated contact over the career.

The anxiety uncertainty management theory (Gudykunst, 1984) suggests that those who cannot manage their anxiety around others may have a difficult time being an effective communicator. For those who may have a hard time reducing their anxiety, private religious support sources may be utilized as an effective coping mechanism. As seen in the study, religious communication support can come in intrapersonal forms such as via prayer or reading the Bible. The discovery of religious support being utilized over multiple periods of a military career is curious as it seems to parallel times of high occupational stress, periods of time when those who struggle with anxiety uncertainty management might need the support the most. The finding that some military members

turn to religious support sources in times of occupational stress when other social sources may be lacking adds evidence to literature about stress management that the individuals' needs for support during times of stress is a strong motivator among all, including those who may find it difficult to interact with others and are hesitant to ask for help.

In a similar fashion, of the forty-one participants, two stated that they do not like to talk to others and frequently turned inward to themselves for communication support rather than utilizing others. Although the exact reason is unknown as to why these two individuals resisted interpersonal communication support, weak attachment styles could be a possible reason. Attachment theory (Bowlby, 1951) is a lifespan theory that is shaped at birth and carried on until death. Individuals that possess weak attachment styles may not see the necessity in turning to others for communication support, or simply not have adequate experience in it. With the finding that religious support and stress management are potentially related when sources of communication support are blocked, individuals with insecure attachment styles may utilize religious coping such as prayer, religious services, or the bible/religious text to help cope with career-span occupational stressors.

Limitations of the Study

This thesis makes a contribution to the communication, support and occupational stress literatures, as it reports an exploratory descriptive study that adds information for use by future studies. However, there are a few limitations that should be discussed that should be considered in future studies.

First, I would gather a larger sample that would include more individuals of varying career-spans as well as ranks. Instead of studying only 41 subjects that mostly

represented early career military, I would increase the number of subjects, and include more middle and later career individuals. One way to do this is by studying individuals over the career span in a longitudinal study, or perhaps gathering retrospective data from veterans reflecting back over the course of their careers.

Second, future studies could also recruit a sample of individuals higher in Religious Coping (RCOPE) to further examine the correlations, if any, between RCOPE and education, as well as differences among races, and genders, as well as the extent to which RCOPE might shape choices to turn to (or not) sources of communicative support. This study did find a negative correlation between RCOPE and perceptions of the quality of communication support, that is, as perceptions of the quality of human communicative support decreased RCOPE increased, or in other words if they did not find support in people, they turned to religion. Also those who exhibited high religious coping in my study were more educated and were predominately African-American. A larger sample size might have helped yield more diversity in years in the military, stressors, communication support utilized, and religious coping. Due to the small sample size there was a lack of diversity in subjects. Future research should be sure to sample religious military personnel to study the effects of the various religious coping resources that are used throughout a military career. These studies should ask questions pertaining to the level of religiosity in military personnel prior to joining as well as collect data regarding their current affiliation to religion and religiosity. Future studies should also ask the subjects to rate the overall perceived effectiveness of their use of religiosity. Questions regarding religiosity should be asked regarding the use of religion in military career related context and outside of a military career in a personal life context to discover if

religion is used differently. I believe that these questions are necessary to discover a better correlation and usefulness of religiosity as a coping mechanism.

Third, the forms of stress should also be expanded in future studies. Instead of just looking at occupational stress, a variety of life stressors could be looked at, as individuals may utilize different sources for different stressors. Although some participants stated that they are religious, many stated that they do not use religion for work related stressors but instead keep work and religion separate. Religious coping may also be used more for stressors other than occupational stressors as stated by a few of the subjects, for example, one subject stated that during the rigorous training and battle of flight school he learned that his daughter had a tumor. This subject stated that he used religious coping to deal with stressors of a sick child, but he did not use it for the stressors of flight school at his job during the ordeal. Another subject stated that while on his third deployment he was going through a divorce in which he used prayer to cope with the stressors of the divorce but talked to his military buddies to help cope with the stressors of the deployment. This could help yield significant results in the broader context of military stress and religious coping. Also, the wording of items in RCOPE as well as about the use of religious sources of support might be worded as more inclusively, ensuring that words connected only to Christianity are not the only ones used (e.g., Bible or church). Because reporting about religion is a private topic like in this study this information should be confidential and collected via a self-report survey for subjects (instead of a read out loud or face to face interview question). Completing the RCOPE measure was not perceived well by subjects, with many asking to answer the questions alone, stating their discomfort in answering the questions, or stating to select 1-

not at all for any questions regarding religion. It seemed to me that many subjects in this study did not feel comfortable reporting religious preferences. This of course would limit the validity of results of the RCOPE and religious support questions. Future studies might also measure other variables such as religiosity (e. g, via an online instrument prior to the interview) and then stratify the sample using these results to focus more on those high in religiosity.

Fourth, future studies should make sure to survey a proportionate amount of males and females, as few females were included in the sample. Females are under-represented in the military and I used convenience and snowball sampling. Instead of using convenience or snowball sampling I should change the recruiting plan to include more women.

Fifth, a systematic network analysis of communication support for each year would be another interesting element for future study. Tracking how ones' social network shifts over the years of service could provide insight on the most beneficial sources of communication support during times of stress. I believe that with including a greater variation of years served and taking a closer look at those who have served longer terms, could potentially yield useful information and further the understanding of a wider variety of service members. Including veterans and retirees could also bring added information about the historical contexts in which members serve. It may be that the individuals in this study are using what they perceive to be the most effective sources of communication support and that currently religion may not figure largely, whereas it may have among members serving 10 – 20 years prior.

This would provide historical knowledge and data and at more a complete picture from a life span point of view. The military is a high stress job similar to that of first responders, these individuals could be looked at in a future study to discover what the stressors and communication support systems look like across similar high stress occupations.

Suggestions for Future Research

Prayer

In addition to recruiting individuals with higher levels of religious coping, prayer should be looked at more closely and specifically as an element to control stress. Prayer, for example, can be religious, spiritual, private, public, mediated, interpersonal, or even as simple as meditating during yoga. Prayer is a form of communication with God that can be used for stressful problems. It is also just one of many options associated with religious coping. The Relational Prayer Theory (Baesler, 2003; Baesler & Ladd, 2009) showed the various types of prayer and the influences of them. The different types of prayers suggested, have been able to predict various health outcomes (Baesler, 2008). The theory suggests that there is public prayer, private prayer, active prayer, and receptive prayer (Baesler, 2008). Active prayer is prayer in the form of petitioning or giving thanks, whereas receptive prayer is in the form meditating or contemplating (Baesler, 2008). Taking a closer look at the various functions of prayer in future studies could help discover resources in an assortment of ways to handle stress.

Relational prayer theory has the ability to predict different types of prayer and outcomes of prayer (Baesler, 2012). Although many associate prayer with religion, it is not always a religious form of communication. Prayer can be in the form of many

religions, spiritualities, petitions, thanksgivings, contemplations, private or public, meditation, mediated or interpersonal. This is why future studies should look at the use of prayer as a separate factor from religion. Relational prayer theory also discusses how prayer can predict many different health outcomes (Baesler, 2008). If there is evidence that prayer can be used to manage health, than research should investigate its impact on stress and mental health among military members. When prayer is used it can be active in the form of petitions or it can be receptive such as in the form of meditating, providing multiple outlets for those in the military who may need a variety of options.

The way prayer is used is not limited to active or receptive, as it can vary and alternate between these two forms over a period of time. Interpersonal relationships and media with religious or spiritual content can influence prayer in relationships. Demographics such as age and gender may play a role on whether or not an individual utilizes prayer. Religion and spirituality of friends and media sources also act as a contributor to the use of prayer. Depending on these prayer inputs, an individual may utilize different prayer processes such as active prayers or receptive prayers to rationalize the quality or quantity of prayer depending on the crisis. Once an individual's prayer inputs lead to a prayer process prayer outcomes begin to develop. Prayer and military stressors should be studied because prayer inevitably increases physical, psychological, and spiritual health outcomes.

The likelihood that an individual will use religion to cope with stress will be higher among those who are active in religion (Pargament, 2001). Although prayer can be seen as one aspect of religious coping, it is not inherently religious. This highlights

why more studies should collect data on the use of prayer to see if there is a pattern of its usage among those who are not high religious copers.

Models of Stress Management

The study provides evidence that argues for the need to consider expanding models of stress-management to include a time dimension. Based on the responses from the subjects, stress is an inevitable part of a military career but can be managed by utilizing various sources of communicative support. The subjects listed stressors and several sources that can be turned to, including sources within the career, sources outside of the career, and religious sources. Instead of having subjects recall communication support sources and stressors, a list of various communication support sources as well as various perceived stressors should be provided to help ensure consistency, and help participants select the stressors they endured and sources they used. The stress management sources that the participants listed appeared to be beneficial throughout the career, which suggests that there is evidence supporting the use of communication support among military personnel over the span of a career. A time dimension should be utilized to develop a better understanding of which sources may offer the most help during each stage of a military career.

A military career span can be broken up into three segments; early years 1-6, middle years 7-14, and later years 15+. The years of a military career need to be divided when expanding stress management models, due to the differences in stress and coping sources over the career. Models of stress management also need to explore religious coping over a lifespan and career-span. Religion should be divided among types of religious coping that is prayer, religious texts, and religious services, different religions,

and the use of religion by generations. As the role of religion becomes less dominant in recent generations, models of stress management should take a look at the role that generational differences impact the utilization of religious support. If evidence reveals that religion is more prominent among earlier generations, it would come to no surprise why religious support was utilized highly by those in the later years, as these individuals in the study came from the baby boomer generation.

More evidence is needed to discover if various types of religious coping is more beneficial than others by year, as well as if different religions play a different role with managing stress over a career-span. In the earlier years religious services may be more prominent due to the allotted time to attend services in boot camp, where as prayer and the bible or religious texts may be utilized more during the middle years of the career due to the higher work demand, less free time, and more responsibility with rank.

Future stress management models should also divide participants by military rank and branch. The rank of an individual may also offer some insight on the amount of stress endured as well as how they choose to cope with it. As ranks progress over time, responsibilities, jobs, and tasks change, which could incur stress. There is an unknown difference in communication support among various branches of the military. Additional research should track stress management and stressors of those by branch to indicate if there is any difference in each of these branches. Each branch has different jobs and stressors, making it unreliable to lump the stressors and stress management of all branches within the military into one category.

Currently, for a variety of reasons some religions may be experiencing controversies (e. g., Muslim), and should also be looked more closely at to determine

how they cope as well as if there are differences in their sources of support. Individuals of some religions may feel less comfortable to turn to religion for military occupational stress or may lack religious acceptance or support from others (for fear of discrimination).

Selective optimization with compensation needs to be further studied in future research as far as its correlation with stress management. There is a possibility that stress may be managed inherently different by those who are of different generations due to the need to optimize certain qualities that have changed due to their aging bodies. As individuals age or spend more time in the military their hearing may suffer from old age or from the years of loud jets, firing ranges, bombs, or ships. Those who suffer from hearing loss or the loss of other functions due to age or time spent in the military may opt to optimize one form of communication support in order to compensate for what has become weakened. The results of my study have presented that religious communication support was highly utilized in the later years of the career, which may be an indicator that those who serve later or longer years in the military use selective optimization with compensation to optimize religious coping. Future studies would need to take a closer look as to why religious coping was optimized in the later years and what it was being compensated for. Throughout various stages of a military career, three different categories of communication support were employed. The shift from utilizing communication support within the military, communication support outside of the military, and religious coping may offer some insight on how selective optimization with compensation is used across generations and a military career-span.

Utility of a Career-Span Approach to Occupational Stress

The study concludes there is evidence that warrants further study of the utility of the concept of “career- span” in future research of occupational stress and the communicative management of occupational stress. A career-span approach was taken when looking at communication support resources, indicating that there is a difference in the utilization of communication support over a career-span, as well as a difference in stressors over a career-span. Dividing a military career into three time periods, differences in communicative support used varied slightly over each time frame of the career as well as the sources used consistently across the span of the entire career. A career is a dynamic part of an individual’s life with constant changes and fluctuations in daily activities. Because of the difference in occupation, location, and social networks at various times of a career, it is important to note the influences of communicative support and occupational stressors across a career-span. The information that is most beneficial in the earlier years may not be as beneficial in the middle years, late years, or career-span.

Military Career-Span Occupational Stress Management

The study concludes there is evidence that warrant extending a career-span approach to future studies of understanding occupational stress and communication support in military contexts (in future research and educational interventions). The military is a unique institute that garnishes a variety of stressors and stress management options. A military career varies from civilian careers in ways such as a legally binding contract, last minute schedule changes, restriction in personal appearance, duty to deploy and or relocate multiple times, responsibility to protect the country, and being on call 24

hours a day seven days a week, which is why it is important to separate the two fields and conduct future studies not only on occupational stress across a career but also military occupational stress across a career. Future studies should compare the similarities and differences that appear in occupational stressors and communicative stress management resources used by those in military jobs versus stressors and communicative stress management resources used by those in the civilian sector.

When looking at a career-span it is also important to look at veterans and retirees as well. Veterans and retirees may serve important insight on past stressors and communication support used. Depending on the years that the service member has served could also dictate stressors or communication support used. If a service member served during times of high threat to national security, during and immediately after the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, or major wars their perception of stress and communicative support utilized may differ than those who served during peaceful times.

Expanding the Concept of Communication Support Networks to Include Religious and Spiritual Sources

Finally, the study concludes there is evidence that warrants the need to expand the concept of military communication support networks to include religious and spiritual sources in future research. Many of the participants suggested that they utilize religious support to manage stress in other parts of their life but not in job related stressors. More research needs to be conducted to determine why religious support may be used more frequently or relied upon in stressors outside of the military occupation.

Religious coping was low in the sample, which is why future researchers interested in religion need to also look closer at those higher in religiosity in the military.

More religious subjects should be evaluated by seeking service members who attend religious service regularly or utilize religion frequently. Based on those who were high religious-copers, some of them identified with being religious prior to joining the military where as some did not. Future studies should evaluate the difference in those who have always been religious versus those who are new to practicing a religion. Those who have identified with using religion for longer periods of time may see religious coping as a stable long-term support system, prompting them to use it more frequently or consistently over the career-span.

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APPENDIX A

MANAGING STRESS AT WORK INTERVIEW

You are being asked to participate in an interview survey study whose general purpose is to better understand the various kinds of communication resources that might be used by those in the military as they manage occupational stress. The interview should take a maximum of 20 minutes. The information is being gathered for use in a graduate thesis in Lifespan & Digital Communication at Old Dominion University and may also be used in papers and publications based on the thesis. My Thesis Director is: Dr. Thomas Socha, tsocha@odu.edu, 757-683-3833

The information you provide is anonymous. No identifying information is gathered. If you are uncomfortable with any question, we will skip it. If you wish to stop your participation in the interview at any time, just let me know and we will conclude the interview. If you have any questions about your rights as a participant in this study either Dr. Socha or I would be happy help.

Are you ready to begin the survey?

1. Are you Male or Female?

___ Male

___ Female

2. In what year were you born?

3. In what branch of the military do you serve and what is your current status?

___ Air Force

___ Army

___ Coast Guard

☐ Marines
☐ Navy

☐ Active Duty
☐ Reservist
☐ Guard

4. How many years have you been in the military? What year did you join?

5. What is your current job in the military?

6. What other kinds of jobs have you held in the military (from earliest to most recent)?

7. What is your race?

☐ Hispanic
☐ Caucasian
☐ African American
☐ Asian
☐ Native American

8. What is the highest level of education completed?

☐ High School
☐ Some College
☐ Bachelors Degree
☐ Graduate Degree

9. What is your current relational status?

☐ Exclusively dating relationship
☐ Cohabiting but not married
☐ Engaged
☐ Married
☐ Single

10. There are lots of kinds of stress. I am interested in understanding stress experienced on the job at different points throughout a military career.

Let's look at the chart. On the left, you will see a scale that indicates (from low to high) the level of stress that you perceived to experience related to your job in the military. At the bottom, you will see listed the years served in the military.

- A. Please think about your first years of military service. During the first time period please indicate your perceived level of job related stress by placing a dot on the graph.

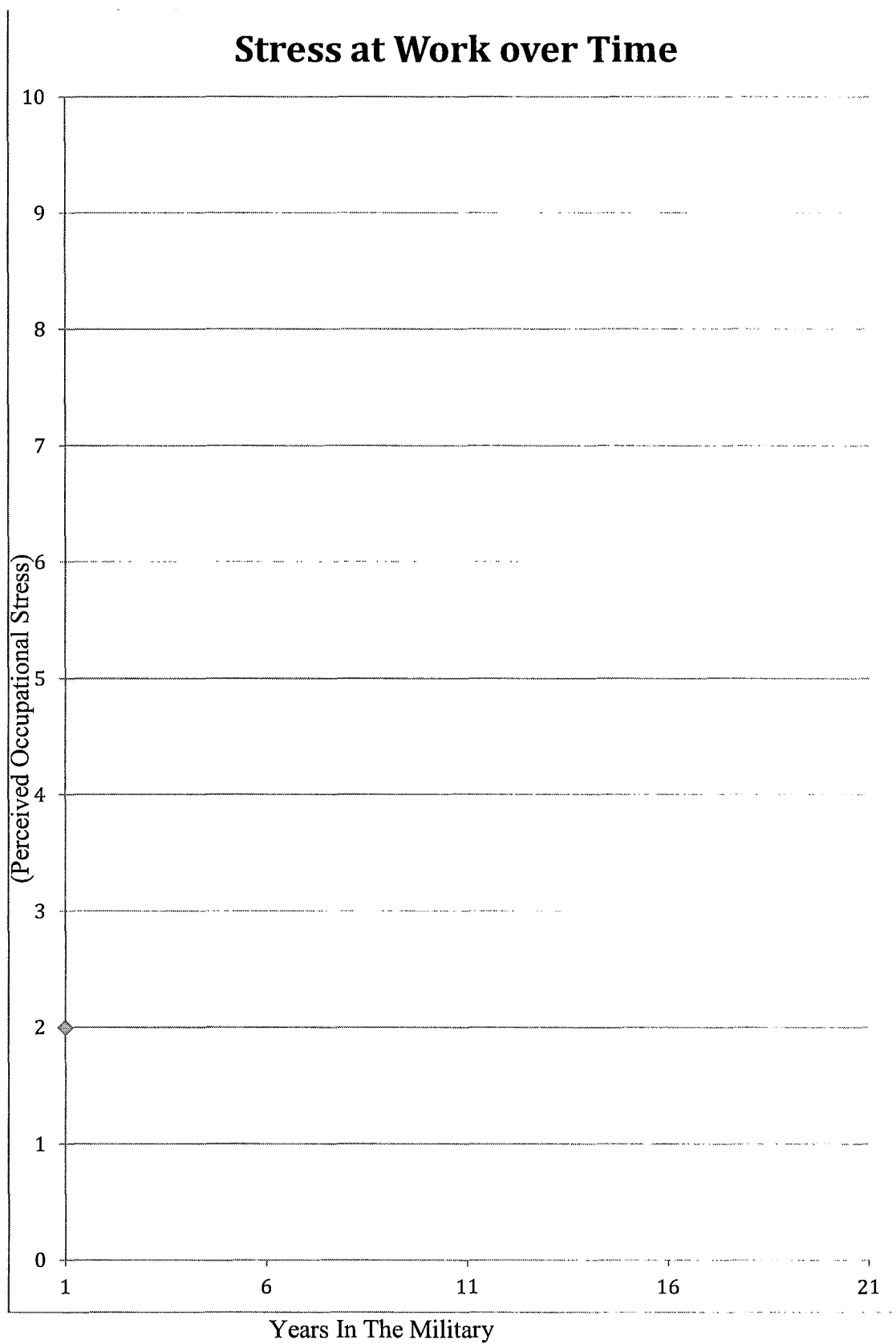
- B. For this time period I have three questions:

- 1) First, communication support can come in many forms such as talking to others. Can you tell me about the sources of communication support you used to help you manage occupational stress during this particular period?

Prompt if needed: For example, did you talk with a friend? Or, who did you speak with?

- 2) Second, among the many kinds of communication support we might turn to include religious and spiritual resources. Did you turn to religious or spiritual resources to help you during this particular period of time? If so, what were they?
- 3) And third, think about the communicative support outlets you turned to during this time period in managing occupational stress. On a scale from 1 (not helpful) to 10 (Very helpful) how would you rate the overall effectiveness of your communicative support in helping you to manage job-related stress during this particular time?

- C. Let's move on to the next time period and do the same. Please indicate your perceived level of job-related stress on the chart, and let's go through the three questions.



11. Finally, I have a few more final questions about sources of communicative support.

There are many ways to manage stress at work. In general, as you experienced stress on the job over the course of your military career, I am interested in knowing to what extent you performed or experienced the following during times of stress at work.

Please use the following scale to respond to each item:

- 1 – not at all
- 2 – somewhat
- 3 – quite a bit
- 4 – a great deal

During times of stress at work:

- | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. I looked for a stronger connection with God. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 2. I sought God's love and care. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 3. I sought help from God in letting go of my anger. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 4. I tried to put my plans into action together with God. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 5. I tried to see how God might be trying to strengthen me in this situation. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 6. I asked forgiveness for my sins. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 7. I focused on religion to stop worrying about my problems. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 8. I wondered whether God had abandoned me. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 9. I felt punished by God for my lack of devotion. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 10. I wondered what I did for God to punish me. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 11. I questioned God's love for me. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 12. I wondered whether my church had abandoned me. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 13. I decided the devil made this happen. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 14. I questioned the power of God. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |

Thank you for your participation. If you would like me to send you information about the results of my thesis please email me: smitc046@odu.edu

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