

The Relationship between Incidental Emotions, Risk Perceptions and Type of Army Service

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Abstract : Military service in general, and in combat units in particular, can be physically and psychologically stressful. Therefore, type of service may have significant implications for soldiers during and after their military service including emotions, judgments and risk perceptions. Previous studies have focused on risk propensity and risky behavior among soldiers, however there is still lack of knowledge on the impact of type of army service on risk perceptions. The current study examines the effect of type of army service (combat versus non-combat service) and negative incidental emotions on risk perceptions. In 2014 a survey was conducted among 153 combat and non-combat Israeli soldiers. The survey was distributed in train stations and central bus stations in various places in Israel among soldiers waiting for the train/bus. Participants answered questions related to the levels of incidental negative emotions they felt, to their risk perceptions (chances to be hurt by terror attack, by violent crime and by car accident), and personal details including type of army service. The data in this research is unique because military service in Israel is compulsory, so that the Israeli population serving in the army is wide and diversified. The results indicate that currently serving combat participants were more pessimistic in their risk perceptions (for all type of risks) compared to the currently serving non-combat participants. Since combat participants probably experienced severe and distressing situations during their service, they became more pessimistic regarding their probabilities of being hurt in different situations in life. This result supports the availability heuristic theory and the findings of previous studies indicating that those who directly experience distressing events tend to overestimate danger. The findings also indicate that soldiers who feel higher levels of incidental fear and anger have pessimistic risk perceptions. In addition, respondents who experienced combat army service also have pessimistic risk perceptions if they feel higher levels of fear. In addition, the findings suggest that higher levels of the incidental emotions of fear and anger are related to more pessimistic risk perceptions. These results can be explained by the compulsory army service in Israel that constitutes a focused threat to soldiers' safety during their period of service. Thus, in this stressful environment, negative incidental emotions even during routine times correlate with higher risk perceptions. In conclusion, the current study results suggest that combat army service shapes risk perceptions and the way young people control their negative incidental emotions in everyday life. Recognizing the factors affecting risk perceptions among soldiers is important for better understanding the impact of army service on young people.

Keywords : army service, combat soldiers, incidental emotions, risk perceptions

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