

Team Resilience in the IDF – Model and Intervention Scheme

Tal Polachek

IDF/Behavioral Science Department
Adad 17, Lehavim 85338
ISRAEL

tal_polachek@yahoo.com

Adi Shirazki

IDF/Leadership Development School
Herzel 1b, Zihron-Yaakov 3090201
ISRAEL

adish74@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

The characteristics of the classical war phenomena include disruptive factors affecting the capability of individuals and/or teams in combat to keep fighting. Classical disruptive factors of fighting include physical strain, fear for one's life, sleep deprivation, hunger etc. and on top of those in the last decades soldiers also face growing complexity in terms of multi-dimensional fighting surroundings and the hybrid nature of conflicts where civilians, guerilla forces and formal armies are all present in fighting zones. Military forces can improve their capabilities of dealing with such disruptive factors, by developing the resilience of the troops. Tough fighting in teams is a common strategy among combat units. Most of the programs which aim at developing resilience, as well as the research in that field, focus on the individual level. Indeed, a team comprising of highly resilient individuals may have positive effect on performance at combat situations and preservation of good mental state through and after the events, nevertheless, it seems that "the whole is more than the sum of its parts" and there are certain features of resilience that exist only at the team level. In the IDF we acknowledged the importance of 'team level resilience' as a crucial complementing factor to the individual soldier resilience. It enhances both individual function and team performance in combat situations. This article describes the model of "Unit Resilience Program" that was developed recently to conceptualize both the individual and team resilience in the IDF. The model was based on theoretical screening as well as field data analysis. It reflects a cooperation of several professional departments, in the IDF: Leadership Development School (L.D.S), the Mental Health Department (M.H.D) and the Behavioral Science Department (B.S.D).

1.0 THE RESILIENCE MODEL

The model conceptualizes resilience as a set of several competencies, in the individual and team level. When these are reasonably present, there is higher potential for the individual and team to cope during the stress of combat situation, to enhance operational continuity and to mild traumatic aftereffects. The model distinguishes between the resilience of the individual which, relies on resources of physical, emotional, perceptual- cognitive, motivational and social resources and resilience at the team level which compound from resilience facilitating leadership, task cohesion, collective efficacy, positive social and emotional climate, and shared locus of control. The model also refers to the reciprocal relationship between the individual and team elements.

The commander – the team leader, is an essential pivot in that model: As an individual in a leading role, he is expected to demonstrate high resilience when dealing with his own stress, as well as to act as role model to his soldiers. Moreover, as the commander and leader of the team he is essential as the facilitator for the team resilience developing process during the preparation stages. During operational activity the team/unit leader also holds a mediating role that has the potential to influence the volume of perceived stress factors.

In addition, the article suggests a preliminary measurement of the IDF resilience scheme's effectiveness as well as potential predicting measure of the team resilience in combat situation.

1.1 Fighting Unit Resilience Program

The FIGHTING UNIT RESILIENCE PROGRAM is aimed to support the combating unit when facing challenges, stress and even life threatening situations during fighting and to support the quality of their recovery and returning to routine function after such experiences. The program relies on accumulated academic research and field evidence from different sources (including the American CSF - Cornum, Matthews & Seligman, (2011) combined with knowledge and insights of military psychology in the IDF.

The program uniqueness expressed by 2 aspects:

Firstly, it provides conceptual frame consists of three complementary aspects, which together can create the infrastructure for enhanced resilience of the combating unit: The individual (intra- personal) resilience, the unit/team (group as a whole) resilience and the aspect of leadership role in promoting resilience.

Secondly the program aims at providing solution for resilience enhancement to the many, this is an innovative approach since other existed programs, to date, are depended on professional intensive involvement and designed for small and unique forces. The program suggested relies on rational of low intensity CBT principles and group dynamic logics. So that tactic level commanders can easily learn and apply the program's tools which enable continues assimilation.

Unit resilience is defined as **the ability of soldiers, commanders and units to adapt and to operate successfully through and after stressful and threatening events that challenge the function of the unit and completing the mission.**

This definition refers to resilience as a set of acquired competencies that can be developed through a continuous process (Connor & Davidson, 2003). Soldiers' commanders and fighting teams can acquire practical tools that can help them to respond adaptively and effectively when facing threatening and stressful experiences. These skills can also contribute to their successful and quick recuperation (Meredith, Sherbourne, Gaillot, Hansell, Ritschard, Parker & Wrenn, 2011).

Resilience at the individual (soldier /commander) level is the ratio of frequency and volume of stressful experiences relative to the person's available physical, emotional, perceptual- cognitive, motivational and social resources (Matthews, 2014). At the unit/ team (group) level there are resources which are unique to the team level and derived from the team/ group dynamics and the team's group relations with its leader: Task cohesion, collective efficacy, shared inner locus of control, and positive climate (Meredith et al, 2011, Matthews, 2014, Cornum, Matthews & Seligman, 2011).

Resilience is not a stable characteristic, it can fade when facing frequent adversity, just like a battery that is overused (Smith, Dalen, Wiggins, Tooley, Christopher & Bernard, 2008). Especially in the tense and complex reality of military service. Therefore, the better we equip soldiers and units with these competencies and teach them the skills to maintain them, the higher the chances for effective coping adapting and recuperation (Meredith et al, 2011).

In current times, due to the information revolution and the variety and quantity of technological developments, the pace of changes has done a qualitative leap. The characteristic of our era forces us humans to experience volatility handle complexity adapt quickly to frequent changes as well as to recover quickly from stressful events and crises. The military reality is no different. The army operates in surrounding rich in complexity and ambiguity (Matthews, 2014). The reality in our region is volatile and tense, the enemy's creativity forces the IDF to respond to changes all the time and seek for solutions that are innovative and flexible. Moreover, the future fighting conceptions are heading towards growing multi-tasking operational action in small and flexible structures. Quick learning and adjustments will be crucial abilities in fighting;

alongside with the ability for quick construction and deconstruction of fighting teams, small forces will fight independently scattered on the battle field. All These characteristics of the future battle field require high resilience of fighting soldiers, teams and their leaders (Matthews, 2014).

In response to the typical generic challenges of present times and (which emphasize the importance in coping with pressures and effective adapting to frequent changes), theoretical and applied research of resilience has widened. There is accumulating proof to the effectiveness of developing resilience as a protective step when preparing for stressful events and adversity. Around us many resilience programs were and are developed, to provide coping skills for variety of life areas and populations (Masten, & Reed, 2002, Luthar, 2015, Masten, 2018).

There are programs for children and/or communities in high risk environments, programs for first line workers (paramedics, firefighters etc.) and there are also resilience programs in other army forces and in business organizations (Meredith et al, 2011, Cornum, Matthews & Seligman, 2011, Wolmer, Hamiel, Pardo-Aviv, Laor, & Center, 2018). It seems that time has come for equivocal development in the IDF. Currently most efforts in preparing the troops for coping with typical stressors of fighting focus on exposure to difficult and sometimes even overwhelming fighting conditions, through variety of simulation techniques. The fundamental edition in the IDF-RESILIENCE SCHEME is the preliminary preparation of individual soldiers' commanders and fighting units/ teams to such encounters by equipping them with:

- a. Inter- personal tools to regulate and manage automatic fear and stress reactions and cognitive tools to support motivation and positive thinking.
- b. Intra- personal tools designed to enhance team building and promoting communication skills and within the fighting unit
- c. Group level tools to promote quick and effective team construction reconstruction.

1.1.1 Why it is important to develop the fighting team's resilience

- It is possible to develop units and teams to become more resilient.
- A team comprising of highly resilient individuals has positive effect on performance at combat situations and preservation of good mental state through and after the events, nevertheless, it seems that "the whole is more than the sum of its parts" and there are certain features of resilience that exist only at the team level and need to be taught and trained in advance.
- In an era in which it is becoming difficult to overcome the enemy by kinetic means and classical fighting methods are changing, the resilience of the team/unit is a crucial resource before during and after fighting.
- The future vision of the warfare on land suggests that young commanders in the tactic level, will have to deal with prolonged periods of independent fighting, frequent changes that require quick adjustments including construction and deconstruction of fighting teams. These conditions are negative predictor to the soldier well-being and effective function of the team/unit. In such situations the need for better awareness and expertise of low-level commanders for individual and team resilience enhancing and maintaining techniques, is crucial.
- The IDF due to the structure of its training programs and its values of self and team development offers good platform to reach the many. Such Program if applied successfully can have influence in the national level.

1.1.1.1 The components of Fighting unit resilience

Components of individual resilience:

Only part of one's resilience can be explained as personal born traits and/or characteristics acquired in the early childhood. The literature refers to these components as Hardiness (it includes characteristics of optimistic tendencies stamina, decisiveness and resourcefulness (Bartone, Kelly, & Matthews, 2013). The literature While hardiness defined as a trait that a person has or has not, resilience is a wider phenomenon that can be developed. In the Model we suggest that individual resilience relies on 5 core competencies. Enhancing these core competencies enriches the individual resilience resources.

Physical competency: Fit and healthy body that can handle pressures and difficult environmental conditions- developing the fighter gradually to tolerate physical pressures and inconvenience make him/her more resilient to extreme conditions. Therefore, awareness to Bartone et al (2013) the body condition and maintaining good nutrition, and fitness is an important factor in resilience developing.

Emotional competency: The ability to feel calmness clarity and focus under threatening or conflictual situations is concerning one's ability to regulate one's emotional energy. The body plays an important part in regulating this energy. By operating correctly physical mechanisms, negative emotions such as fear, frustration and anger, can be controlled and thus influence the quality of function.

Perceptive-cognitive competency: cognitive patterns and beliefs influence the way a person perceives reality and direct one's reactions accordingly. The same situation can be perceived as threatening and overwhelming or controllable and solvable depending on the person's perception of it. Learning the human cognitive biases and the automatic individual cognitive patterns and understanding how to break negative and ineffective thinking patterns can change reaction to difficult and threatening reality.

Motivational competency: As Nietzsche said: "those who have a 'Why' to live, bear almost any 'How'". Personal motivations such as preserving self - esteem or dignity, caring for others, or validating need for achievement, as well as deep connection to oneself values and the values of the unit/ the army or any social group, can serve in times of hardship as a directive and supportive resource. Spiritual faith (religious or other), can also support one's coping and maintain resilience in times of need.

Social competency: Strong and meaningful social relations inside the unit and on outer circles promotes the sense of psychological security of the individual soldier and on the same time having good and strong social relations enhance the practice of social skills and social positive behaviours e.i: empathy, altruism, communication and compassion. Thus, nurturing positive social relations serve as important resources in times of pressure and conflict that contribute to the individual and the team.

Application:

The program provides cognitive and physical tools designed to strengthen emotional and physical regulation and effective thinking. The motivational and mental component is addressed by the strong and established mechanism of the army's generic values education. Sense making of the commanders in time of challenge and adversity is important in maintaining resilience, hence commanders in the tactic level should be taught and train to the relevant skills. The social component requires the attention of commanders to the soldier's social support and social relations inside and outside of the unit they should apply actions that promote values and behaviours of good and supportive relations within their teams/units.

Team resilience and how to develop and nurture it:

The resilience of the fighting team or unit is somewhat affected by the individual resilience of its members,

but their individual resilience alone cannot stand for certain qualities of the team/unit resilience. The ability to adjust and to react flexibly to challenges, and to recover from crisis, while maintaining the framework of the team and the focus on the mission, require much more than resilient team members. Team level resilience is a crucial complementing factor to the individual soldier resilience. It enhances both individual function and team function and performance at its mission. Team/unit resilience is comprised of certain unique competencies:

Task cohesion, Collective efficacy, Positive social and emotional climate, and

Task cohesion refers to shared values norms and perceptions of all team members that achieving the task goals and performing in high standards comes first. In order to achieve that the team develops mechanisms of cooperation communication, support. Thus, it can tackle unexpected problems and obstacles during action and can compensate one another performance. Teams that are high in Task cohesion form also mechanisms for progressing learning/

Collective efficacy refers to the confidence of team members in the capability of the team to carry its tasks and to achieve its goals successfully.

Shared locus of control refers to the strong shared perceptions of the team members about the team responsibility to the outcome of the team actions and their influence

Positive social and emotional climate means nurturing good communication, mutual trust and nurturing values of altruism and consideration as well as maintaining positive atmosphere and humoristic attitude when facing difficulties and obstacles.

Application:

The tools that are developed for the team level, designed mainly for the team/unit leaders- first socio and psycho education tools that provide the basic understanding about team resilience and how to develop and maintain it and then practical tools and techniques for quick team building and adjustment, that can support the tactic forces commander who need to respond to the growing pace of events during fighting.

1.1.1.2 Resilience facilitative leadership

Resilience reside in the official IDF definition for leadership as one of its components it is an important factor that its presence supports the commander coping with personal threats and challenges as any other soldier and much more due to his leading role.

Aside from the personal aspect to the army leader, in FURP the commander plays a key role in assimilating the necessary knowledge skills and values in his unit. In the model we describe his three roles in assimilating and developing resilience of the fighting team/unit.

The commander/ leader as a facilitator: Since resilience is enhanced and maintained through a continuous and complex process, the team commander has an important role in teaching (or cooperate with others to teach), his people the basic knowledge and skills of the resilience training program. The leader is also responsible for keeping the resilience training routines and supervise the individual and team progress.

The leader as a role-model: The leader in his daily routines of practicing the resilience enhancing and maintaining techniques taught in the program, act as a role model to his people, and by that encourage them to practice too. When encountering challenges and threats the leader's regulated reactions and his use of

relevant skills and tools can set an example for his team/unit and positively influence both his soldiers as coping individuals and the team climate.

The leader as a mediator: creating clear and framed picture of reality in a way that remind the individual soldier and the team/unit, their strengths and capabilities and skills. By doing that he offers hope and optimism during and after experiencing challenge or crisis, this can serve as an important factor in preserving and re-charging resilience resources.

Application:

Developing the commander as a resilience developer is done in two stages:

At the first stage the program focuses on acquisition of individual tools such as emotion regulation and positive cognitive training and it involve learning and practice. At the second stage the leader learns the framework and tools for developing team resilience. Simultaneously his role identity as a resilience developer need to be addressed.

1.1.1.3 How IDF-RESILIENCE SCHEME Is Implemented

1. Every commander who leads a fighting unit/team should keep in mind the importance of resilience resources and their contribution to the individual and team/unit in fighting.
2. In developing the individual skills for enhancing and maintaining resilience repetitive practice is needed in order to achieve enough levels of implementation meaning, the ability for automatic recall. After achieving that level, repetitive practice continues in order to maintain the competency. This principle is very much like other basic military skills and the methods of their implementation in training.
3. The tactic commander (team leader), is responsible to train and develop his soldiers in every aspect (professionally and mentally). He or she builds them as soldiers and eventually the commander, or his successor will operate them in action. Thus, when applying resilience training, the tactic commander should train alongside the soldiers so that methods language and actions can become common knowledge and even habits, norms and values of the team/unit.
4. Professional knowledge and skills can be first taught by experts, nevertheless, the efficient and effective implementation is the responsibility of commanders. They should keep the training routines and identify gaps in the implementation process where professional support might be needed.
5. In order to enhance implementation it is recommended to identify suitable and oriented commanders within the units and grant them the training and qualifications to serve as resilience officers on the field.
6. The Knowledge and skills are generic in nature. The program can fit every situation that drive a person and/ or a team out of their comfort zones and enable to use tactics that were acquired in advance in order to stable the reaction and function effectively. Therefore, it can and should be practice in all military contexts. The more the skills of the program Will be practiced in a varied environment the greater the chance the skills will be automatically used in actual combat situations.
7. The training of soldiers and unit by the Principles and tools can start from day one in the army and progress as part of the general training of the soldier in similar way to all others basic skills and

competencies the soldier acquire in his ongoing training. Maintenance and recharging should be applied in accordance with the soldier activity until his release from service.

8. Resilience it is not endless it can be compared to a rechargeable battery that must be recharged after use. Commanders should be aware of that, create and allow opportunities for recharging.
9. Psychologists from the Leadership Development School and (L.D.S), Behavioural Science Department (B.S.D). are responsible for developing the program and for its implementation in collaboration with the high command of the Army and the tactical ranks.

1.1.1.4 Measuring Expected Team Resiliency in Battle

A method for measuring resiliency up to the unit level has been developed using data from field research. The measurement is based on a synthesis of reliable equipment that is used to estimate resiliency (Connor & Davidson, 2003, Carron, Colman, Wheeler & Stevens, 2002). The measurement is tailored for military combat units. Using this evaluation, we can predict the resiliency of units during combat, if there is a direct link between high levels of resiliency and optimal function. As such, using this evaluation allows the commander to receive status reports periodically over the course of combat as well as precise information of the plan to develop resiliency. The evaluation presents the resiliency infrastructures: resilience facilitating leadership, task cohesion, collective efficacy, positive social and emotional climate, and shared locus of control.

REFERENCE

- [1] Bartone, P. T., Kelly, D. R., & Matthews, M. D. (2013). Psychological hardiness predicts adaptability in military leaders: A prospective study. *International Journal of Selection and Assessment*, 21(2), 200-210.
- [2] Carron, A. V., Colman, M. M., Wheeler, J., & Stevens, D. (2002). Cohesion and performance in sport: A meta-analysis. *Journal of Sport and Exercise Psychology*, 24(2), 168-188.
- [3] Connor, K. M., & Davidson, J. R. (2003). Development of a new resilience scale: The Connor-Davidson resilience scale (CD-RISC). *Depression and anxiety*, 18(2), 76-82.
- [4] Cornum, R., Matthews, M. D., & Seligman, M. E. (2011). Comprehensive soldier fitness: building resilience in a challenging institutional context. *American Psychologist*, 66(1), 4.
- [5] Luthar, S. S. (2015). Resilience in development: A synthesis of research across five decades. *Developmental Psychopathology: Volume Three: Risk, Disorder, and Adaptation*, 739-795.
- [6] Masten, A. S. (2018). Resilience theory and research on children and families: Past, present, and promise. *Journal of Family Theory & Review*, 10(1), 12-31.
- [7] Masten, A. S., & Reed, M. G. J. (2002). Resilience in development. *Handbook of positive psychology*, 74, 88.
- [8] Matthews, M. D. (2014). *Head strong: How psychology is revolutionizing war*. New York: Oxford University Press.

- [9] Meredith, L. S., Sherbourne, C. D., Gaillot, S., Hansell, L., Ritschard, H. V., Parker, A. M., & Wrenn, G. (2011). Promoting Psychological Resilience in the US Military. RAND CORP SANTA MONICA CA CENTER FOR MILITARY HEALTH POLICY RESEARCH.

- [10] Smith, B. W., Dalen, J., Wiggins, K., Tooley, E., Christopher, P., & Bernard, J. (2008). The brief resilience scale: assessing the ability to bounce back. *International journal of behavioral medicine*, 15(3), 194-200.

- [11] Wolmer, L., Hamiel, D., Pardo-Aviv, L., Laor, N., Cohen, D. J., & Center, I. B. H. R. (2018). Preschool children facing mass trauma: Disasters, war and terrorism.