Perceptions of Bullying among Deployed Military Personnel and the Impact on Exhaustion/Burnout and Organizational Commitment

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Introduction

- "Bullying is an act of aggression by a military member or members, or Department of Defense civilian employee or employees […] with the intent of harming a military member, Department of Defense civilian, or any other persons, either physically or psychologically, without a proper military or other governmental purpose" (DoD Memo, 2015).
- Greater perceptions of bullying have been previously reported among the junior enlisted ranks (E-6 and below) and among those military personnel who identify as minority race or declined to provide race (Farmer, 2016).
- The effects of bullying can potentially be exacerbated in a deployed environment and impact physical health (De Vogli et al., 2007), work productivity (Namie, Namie, & Lutgen-Sandvik, 2010), anxiety, and depression among targets and bystanders (Namie, 2003).
- Thus, achieving mission readiness may be reduced if such demeaning behaviors are occurring in any environment.

Purpose

- To understand what factors impact Service Members' exhaustion/burnout levels and organizational commitment when deployed.
- To develop solutions to resolve bullying in the workplace, deployed or not.

Figure 1. Hypothesized Model
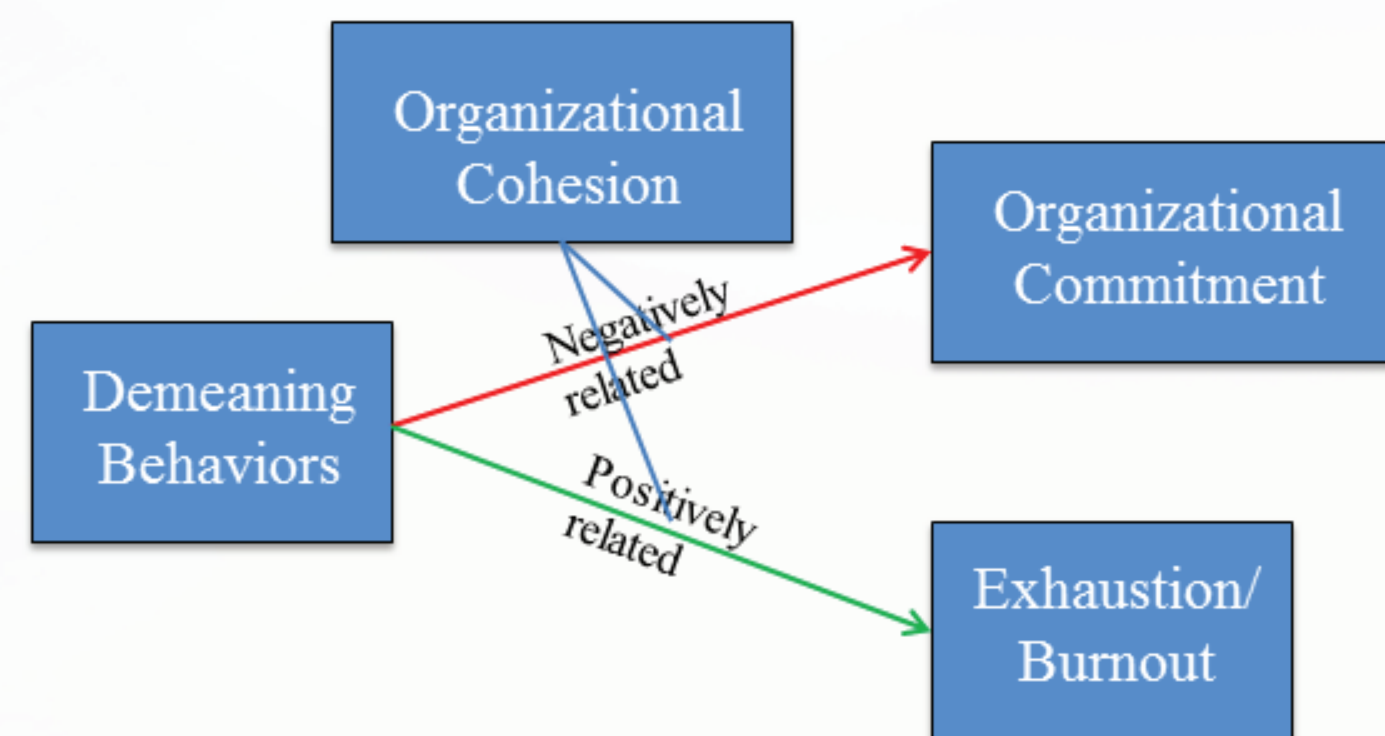
Hypotheses

- **H1:** Demeaning behaviors will be positively related to emotional exhaustion.
- **H2:** Demeaning behaviors will be negatively related to organizational commitment.
- **H3A:** Organizational cohesion will moderate the relationship between demeaning behaviors and exhaustion/organizational commitment.
- **H3B:** The moderation from organizational cohesion will be greatest between demeaning behaviors and emotional exhaustion.

Methods

- **Design:** Cross-sectional
- **Survey:** Archival data from the DEOMI Organizational Climate Survey (DEOCS) for FY 2016. A 4-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree to 4 = strongly agree) was used to indicate level of agreement with statements.
- **Sample Size:** 16,164 military personnel deployed OCONUS
- **Quantitative Items:** The following factors were used: demeaning behaviors, favoritism, emotional exhaustion, job commitment, and organizational cohesion (see Table 1).

Table 1. DEOCS Items for Key Variables

Demeaning Behaviors	Exhaustion/Burnout	Organizational Commitment	Organizational Cohesion
Certain members are excessively teased to the point where they are unable to defend themselves.	I feel mentally worn out.	I feel motivated to give my best efforts to the mission of my organization.	Members look out for each other's welfare.
Certain members are purposely excluded from social work group activities.	I feel physically worn out.	I am proud to tell others that I belong to this organization.	Members support each other to get the job done.
Certain members are frequently reminded of small errors or mistakes they have made, in an effort to belittle them.	I feel emotionally worn out.	I feel a strong sense of belonging to this organization.	Members work well together as a team.
			Members trust each other.

Results

The sample consists of military personnel deployed OCONUS, with 87.3% men and 12.7% women.
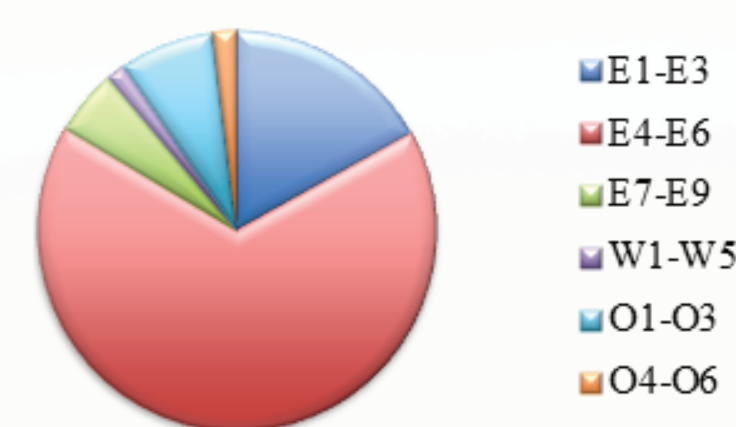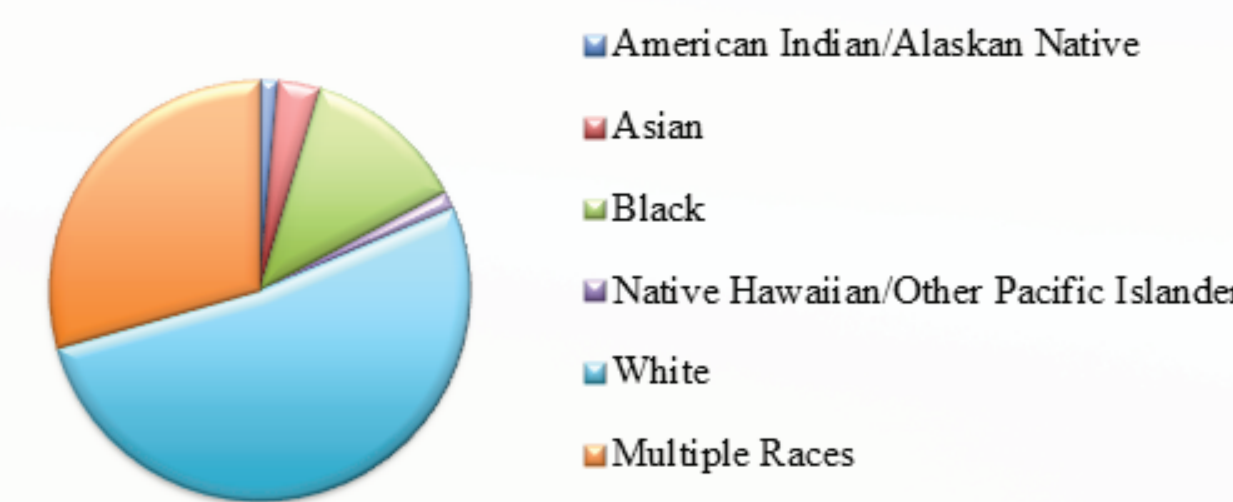
Figure 2. Rank Breakout

- E1-E3
- E4-E6
- E7-E9
- W1-W5
- O1-O3
- O4-O6

Figure 3. Race Breakout

- American Indian/Alaskan Native
- Asian
- Black
- Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander
- White
- Multiple Races

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics and Correlations

	Mean	Std. Dev	Demeaning Behaviors	Organizational Commitment	Exhaustion/Burnout
Demeaning Behaviors	2.607**	.667	--		
Organizational Commitment	2.330**	.771**	-.275**	--	
Exhaustion/Burnout	2.242**	.795	.269**	-.406**	--
Organizational Cohesion	2.444**	.664	-.287**	.656**	-.281**

$**p < .01$

Report of Main Findings

- Significantly more exhaustion/burnout existed among Service Members who perceived more demeaning behaviors in their workplace ($r = .269, p < .01$).
- There was significantly less organizational commitment when high levels of demeaning behaviors were perceived ($r = -.275, p < .01$).
- There was significantly less organizational cohesion when greater levels of demeaning behaviors were perceived ($r = -.287, p < .01$).
- Organizational cohesion did not significantly moderate the relationship between demeaning behaviors and organizational commitment or exhaustion/burnout.

Summary of Results

- **H1: Supported** – Perceptions of demeaning behaviors and emotional exhaustion were positively related.
- **H2: Supported** – Perceptions of demeaning behaviors and organizational commitment were negatively related.
- **H3A, 3B: Not supported** – Organizational cohesion did not moderate the relationship of demeaning behaviors among organizational commitment of exhaustion/burnout.

Best Practice Recommendations

- **Recommendation 1:** Perceptions of bullying in the workplace, deployed or not, can increase signs of **emotional/physical exhaustion or burnout**.
  - This includes chronic stress, depression, loss of self confidence, fatigue, or headaches (Wilcox, 2017).
- **Recommendation 2: Team cohesion**, especially when deployed, is critical in recognizing and taking signs of bullying seriously.
  - Strong team cohesion can increase identification of a target being bullied and reduce burnout.
- **Recommendation 3:** Leaders should encourage a deployed work environment that has trust and communication to achieve the mission (Wilcox, 2017). Those who do have greater **organizational commitment** among their personnel.
  - As a result, there is no place for demeaning behaviors to occur in the workplace.

Limitations

- Self-reported data were used.
- Respondents may have reported on prevalence instead of perceptions of demeaning behaviors.

Future Research

- How promoting help-seeking behavior would impact the percentage of targets reporting demeaning behavior.
- How different genders and races perceive bullying.
- How prevention programs influence prevalence and severity of bullying.

References

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