

Strategy of Coping Stress by Novice Mobile Brigade Officers in Conflict Areas

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ABSTRACT

Having duty under the control operation (BKO) in conflict areas are operations carried out by Brimob personnel to secure conflict situations, protect citizens from terrorist threats and carry out humanitarian operations. This duty can be a stress trigger for the personnel, however this can be overcome by coping strategies. Coping is an attempt made to change the situation by individual who has feeling in pressured and burden condition. This research aims to find out what kind of coping strategies are used by Brimob personnel who having duty in conflict areas. It is intended that the institution can anticipate and deal with stress that occurs to the officers. This research used a qualitative method with interviews with 3 subjects: 1 namely commissioned officer, 1 non-commissioned officer and 1 enlisted officer. The result is a coping stress strategy used by the three subjects are different. First subject used emotion focused coping in the form of seeking social support, distancing, self control, escape avoidance and positive reappraisal. In addition he also used problem focused coping in the form of confrontative coping. The second and third subjects used emotion focused coping in the form of seeking social support, distancing, self control and escape avoidance.

Keywords: *Coping Stress, Novice Mobile Brigade Officers, Conflict Areas*

1. INTRODUCTION

Brimob (Mobile Brigade) is one part of the Indonesian National Police whose one of its duties is to carry out tasks under the control operations (BKO) to secure conflict situations, protect citizens from terrorist threats, recover damaged infrastructure and facilities as well as carry out humanitarian, social, and health problem. The BKO's tenure relatively in long duration starting from three months and can be extended to nine months.

While on duty, the officers are always on watchful position to anticipate from enemy's attacking. Difficult terrain in conflict areas are in the form of forest and mountains is also a challenge for personnel. On the other hand, the terrain is very beneficial for terrorists, who have more control over the terrain because they have lived and hid in the mountains for years. BKO is a tough task and have several dangerous risks, especially for officers who are still young or who have just finished their police training and immediately deployed to participate in BKO duties in conflict areas. More over, these officers have not known the situation and conditions in the conflict area yet.

When performing patrol activities to comb out the enemy from mountain to mountain, they often come across and have armed clashes with the enemy that can make the officer get injured or lose their lives. Inspector General of

Police Anton Charliyan [1] said that those kind of risks, situation and conditions as well as workloads causing stress for officer if they have to have the duty for a long time. The symptoms of stress are usually anxiety, fatigue, difficulty focusing, mood swings, boredom, palpitations, tense and pain muscles. Researcher have conducted research through a questionnaire and found the fact that as many as 23,5% of 81 personnel who served in the conflict areas of Papua have experienced of stress.

Zakir and Murat [2] said that the profession as a police officer is considered to be one of the jobs with high stress levels, this can occur because of long and irregular working hours, leadership hierarchy, and concerns about their safety because working as a police officer is full of dangerous risks. Anderson et. al. [3] said that work as a police officer is prone to high stress especially when doing work or shift work. Often officers are asked to respond to situations where threatened both to themselves and to the general public.

Zhao et. al. [4] said that the police were the profession that most often experienced interactions with the community that could be dangerous or threatening. Not infrequently some officers choose to end their lives as said by the Chairman of the Presidium of the Indonesian Police Watch (IPW) Neta S. Pane. He said that in 2017 as many as seven police officers committed to end their lives and two out of seven cases were mobile brigade officers due to stress being

witnessed as well as too long being served in conflict areas. He is concerned that if this is not anticipated, suicide cases committed by the police officers due to stress will increase [5].

Stress according to Bartsch and Evelyn [6] is a feeling of tension and burden that is challenging and felt by individuals to satisfy their needs or desires. If various problems and stress cannot be handled properly it will cause a negative impact for the individual and will hinder he/she in managing his/her life. Waitz [7] said that the symptoms of stress can be in the form of physical and psychological symptoms. Physical symptoms can be palpitations, tense muscles, headaches, stomach aches, nausea, insomnia, indigestion and breathing problem. While psychological symptoms can be feelings of nervousness and anxiety, feelings of fear and tend to be stand apart. Some factors that causing stress include (a) physical factors; (b) environmental factors; (c) cognitive factors; (d) personality factors and (e) socio-cultural factors [8].

Frank et. al. [9] said that the profession as a police officer is known as a stressful job, acting out emotions and full of dangerous risks. The task of BKO in the conflict area make the officers have to go far away from the family for quite long time and have to be watchfull anytime. In contrary, the challenges such as small salaries are not worth with the tasks and risks they faced. Complicated and difficult terrain, stressful tasks where the problem come one after another, pushing the officer have to have readiness for all challenges and excellent endurance. If officers do not have the readiness both physically and psychologically it will cause stress. Stress that occurs can cause many problems, therefore stress must be overcome by coping strategies so that personnel can be active and back to work normally.

According to Endler [10] coping strategy is one of the main competencies for police officers in doing the task. The researchers conducted several studies to identify what coping strategies were the most effective for coping stress for police officer. Evans et. al. [11] said that police tend to use strategies that focused on problem solving that aim to change events or situations causing stress. Violanti and Paton [11] said only a few police officers used emotional strategies to manage the feelings of stress experienced. Learning effective and appropriate strategy will benefit for the officers themselves and related agencies to reduce high level of stress both physically and psychologically.

Lazarus and Folkman [12] said that when an individual experiences stress, the individual will carry out a reaction so that the negative impact does not occur continuously. This reaction is called coping. The coping stress according to Lazarus and Folkman is divided into two forms, namely problem focused coping and emotion focused coping.

Problem focused coping is centered on the problem where the individual feels the problem can be overcome and tries to find a solution, while emotion focused coping is a strategy carried out by individuals focusing on emotional problems rather than on problems that are actually happens, this is done when individuals unable to change the pressing situation.

Problem focused coping consists of (a) confrontative coping, which is a strategy undertaken to change the

situation with an active or aggressive and risky action; (b) planful problem solving is to set planned strategies with full estimations to overcome and solve the problems.

Emotion focused coping consists of (a) seeking social support, that is, seeking support, advice or information from others; (b) distancing, that is, to distance or keep a distance between oneself and the problem at hand; (c) self control is an effort to regulate by adjusting and regulating the feelings that arise; (d) accepting responsibility, which is a reaction in which the individual grows self-awareness and places himself in the problem at hand; (e) escape avoidance is the behaviour of avoiding or running away from problems and carrying out activities such as smoking and alcohol; and (f) positive reappraisal, which is an attempt to find a positive meaning or new belief from the problem at hand.

The stress coping strategies used by subjects or Brimob officers is an important thing to be researched, so that both the subject and the institution can anticipate and deal with stress that occurs in mobile brigade officers when performing the duties. It is expected that the institution can provide services or training to overcome the problems so that the officers can work and do the task optimally.

2. RESEARCH METHOD

This study involved three mobile brigade police officers as subjects with various criteria, one namely commissioned officer, one non commissioned officer and one enlisted officer. The subjects are males, aged between 20-25 years old, have served at least one year in mobile brigade corps and participated in the activities of the conflict area (BKO) with a period of completion of assignment or returning a maximum of one month when the interview was being conducted.

This research is using qualitative method with a phenomenological approach. The research data was collected through interviews, but before the interviews were being conducted, the researcher distributed the Kessler Psychological Distress Scale questionnaire first. Kessler Psychological Distress Scale is a questionnaire to measure stress levels consisting of 10 questions. This K-10 scale has a Cronbach's Alpha value of 0.920 and it mean in the good category.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The stress factors that are experienced by the three subjects come from environmental factors.

Subject I said that while serving in a conflict area the conditions were very limited such as the postal residence is only makeshift building, there was no electricity and no signal, and had to collect rainwater for daily needs. He also get a shot from a terrorist because he was in the area of terrorist or Free Papua Movement (OPM).

Subject II said he had been shot by a terrorist at the post. Then, the absence of a signal makes it difficult for subjects to communicate with others. He also got lost out of Arfak

mountain when conducting a sweep the mountain because GPS did not get any signal.

Subject III said the situation there was dangerous and he also had a shot. More over, the subjects were in the mountains with a height of 4900 feet which made breathing hard due to lack of oxygen and only relied on raincoats to be used as tents.

In serving in conflict areas all subjects experienced symptoms of stress both physically and psychologically.

Subject I said that during his duty he felt heart palpitations and several times felt stiff or tense muscles especially during shootout with terrorist or OPM. The psychological symptoms experienced were anxiety and fear because terrorist often disguised themselves and mingled with the local residents.

Subject II felt palpitations and sometimes had difficulty falling asleep or not sleeping well for fear of sudden terror attacks. Psychological symptoms experienced are feeling scared because of getting a shot attack while at the post and feeling anxious if he was not in a safe area.

Subject III felt palpitations especially when he involved in first shooting out and felt his muscles stiff or tense. Psychological symptoms experienced in the form of feelings of fear because they had a terror attack and cannot control the terrorist area.

Coping stress that used by the three subjects are different. Coping is divided into two forms, namely problem focused coping which consists of confrontative coping and planful problem solving. While emotion focused coping consist of seeking social support, distancing, self control, accepting responsibility, escape avoidance and positive reappraisal [12].

Confrontative Coping is an active and aggressive effort to change a stressful situations even if it is full of risks.

Subject I did it in a way to fight or get closer to situations that made him afraid, by checking posts that were suspected of terrorist there, even though he knew it was full of dangerous risks.

Seeking Social Support is an effort to find information and support including emotional support from others.

Subject I did it by chatting with other personnel especially after the shooting out, then sharing or exchanging suggestions on what programs to be done in the effort to reduce the fear.

Subject II did it by gathering and making humorous things with other personnel to reduce feelings of fear and ask for advice or guidance from the leader.

Subject III did it by gathering with teammates to share and correct or remind one another. According to him this is enough to overcome the fear experienced.

Distancing is an attempt to keep a distance between yourself and the problem and behave as if nothing happened.

Subject I tried to ignore his fear by creating sports facilities such as volleyball or kick volleyball with other personnel and watching TV.

Subject II tended to ignore his fear by not thinking about it, this is done in order to feel not too tense.

Subject III tried to ignore the fear and not think too much about it because it was worried this would disrupt future activities.

Self Control is an effort to regulate feelings or actions by adjusting and regulating feelings that arise.

Subject I tried to control and hide the fear that he experienced, especially when there was a shootout so that his subordinates did not have the feel for fear as him.

Subject II controlled and hid the feelings of fear so that other personnel also do not share the fear, even though he knows all personnel are equally afraid.

Subject III controlled feelings of fear by controlling emotions, thoughts and focus on what is happening.

Escape Avoidance is an attempt to escape or avoid a problem and usually involves smoking, drinking, eating and drugs.

Subject I did it by smoking with the members and making a meal.

Subject II did it by smoking while gathering with other personnel.

Just like the two subjects above, subject III also did smoking.

Positive Reappraisal is an effort to create or find positive meaning or new beliefs that aim to develop themselves better.

Subject I said he would make this a valuable lesson and experienced so that he could be more prepared if he will be assigned to a similar place.

Table 1: Coping stress strategy used by three subjects.

Coping Stress	Type of Coping	S.I	S.II	S.III
PFC	Confrontative	√	-	-
EFC	Seeking Social Support	√	√	√
	Distancing	√	√	√
	Self Control	√	√	√
	Escape Avoidance	√	√	√
	Positive Reappraisal	√	-	-

Research conducted by Alexander and Walker [13] said that female police in Scotland tend to use emotional focused coping and male police in Scotland tend to use problem

focused coping. This contradicts the results of research of research in which the three male subjects tend to use emotion focused coping. The mobile brigade duties are different from the police forces in general. Brimob is a special force or elite police unit that has a relatively heavier and more complex burden or task.

When serving in conflict area, the three subjects cannot change dangerous situations such as very vulnerable to be shot out from terrorists who can occur at any time. Because they cannot change the situation, what all three subjects can do is change their fear. In addition, this was done because the three subjects tended to surrender, accepting the burden and responsibility given to them carry out their duties as members of the Indonesian National Police in whatever conditions and situations.

Emotion focused coping used because while serving in the conflict area all officers are divided into several teams, and stay for months as a group, facing similar situation makes they feel that they are at the same fate. With these circumstances and situations there is nothing can be done by the officers except gathering and sharing with fellow members to seek emotional support. This is in line with research by Bigam et. al. [13] who said that young police officer tended to use emotion focused coping, one of which was seeking social support compared to older personnel. This finding is consistent with the behaviour of young individuals who rely on emotional support from peers to deal with stress.

4. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

It can be concluded from the results of the study that being served in heavy field such as in the conflict areas of Papua can trigger stress for the officers on duty. Symptoms of stress experienced by the three subjects were physical symptoms such as heart palpitations, tense muscles and insomnia. Aside physical symptoms, psychological symptoms also experienced by them such as fear and anxiety because of the shootout and they are in the OPM's area. The stress experienced by the three subjects comes from environmental factors that they should face dangerous situation and lack of logistic support.

Coping stress that used by the three subjects while being served in conflict areas is different. The three subjects used coping strategies in the form of emotion focused coping which is more focus on the emotions or feelings experienced. All three subjects used emotion focused coping such seeking social support, distancing, self control, escape avoidance and positive reappraisal. In addition, subject I also used problem focused coping in the form of confrontative coping.

Theoretical advice for further researcher is recommendation to conduct more in depth research and focus on emotion focused coping and use more theoretical studies. Then look for a number of subjects that are more and more varied such as different ages, different ranks and different statuses.

Practical advice for subjects is that subjects are expected to be able to recognize and control the initial symptoms of stress in order to prevent the severe stress and be diverted to positive activities. Train regulating breathing and being calm during assignments have to be done, so that personnel can focus on situations and conditions and know what to do even in dangerous situations.

Practical advice for Indonesian National Police (INP) especially the Mobile Brigade Corps is recommended to prepare the officers who will be deployed not only physically but also psychologically. It has to monitor and pay attention to be physical, mental and welfare conditions of officers while in conflict areas, therefore in determining the leadership of the troops must be done more selectively and need to be given special or additional debriefing.

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