

Multi-skilling: a factor of anxiety in defence personnel

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ABSTRACT

Indian defence forces comprising of Army, Navy and Air force are the base of our country's internal and global development. Though their main role is to control external invasion, yet they have to perform various activities/tasks requiring multiple skills by each individual to keep up with latest technologies/combat styles. The main aim of this study is to find the association of two important multi-skilling aspects i.e. frequency of multi-skilling and perception of an individual (multi-skilling for success or Work load sharing) with anxiety in context to defence personnel. The survey is conducted virtually utilizing Google forms containing basic questions on multi-skilling and Beck's anxiety inventory. The data is collected through random selection from personnel of all the three branches keeping constraint of served service from 8-14 years. The responses received were converted into meaningful data by scoring as per standards of inventory and the associativity is examined using Chi Square and phi coefficient based on online statistics calculation software and verified by SPSS 21.0 version for windows. The results show significant association of both the aspects of multi-skilling with anxiety.

Keywords: Indian Defence forces, Defence personnel, Multi-skilling, Anxiety, Mindfulness

India's strategic location and global growth requires securing vital national interests. Our defence forces are not only protecting country's boundaries but are also involved in maintaining internal disturbances. They can be called anytime to help in restoring law and order, ensuring the safety of the people and to provide relief during natural calamities. Peacetime cannot be considered as relaxing period for them as they have to upgrade themselves with latest technologies for being war ready. Administration, education, new skill trainings are the secondary parts of their job description. Multi-skilling could be frequent or for prolonged durations for them. Though number of studies have been conducted by researchers on Indian Defence personnel's mental health well-being in reference to stress, depression, border postings, combat training, war situations, peer demise, family distorts, etc. but multi-skilling is a left-out topic considering it as a common act in all working sectors. Multi-skilling frequently may hamper their work performance; it may be a chance for them to achieve success during and after service tenure or a burden of work load sharing keeping them distracted from their core task.

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Objective of the study

The target of this study is to find if there is any association between frequency of multi-skilling and perception of multi-skilling as success or work load sharing with anxiety. As such little anxiety can be experienced by anyone but for those effecting work performance or disturbing normalcy of life in a negative pattern can lead to serious mental health issues ending up in depression and some physical dysfunctions.

The proposed hypotheses are:

H1: There is an association between frequency of multi-skilling and anxiety.

H2: There is an association between perception of multi-skilling and anxiety.

Multi-skilling

Multi-skilling is a process of training an individual in multiple skill-sets, which may or may not be a part of their core job description. It is sometimes misconceived as multitasking which relates to performing many tasks at the same time.

It can be performed in three ways:

1. By leading a self-managed team,
2. By taking tasks of same level as core task and
3. By taking a task requiring complex skills within or outside the core task.

Multi-skilling can be beneficial or harmful for an individual and the organization. It provides job variety, increased job satisfaction, monetary incentives and motivation along with additional skill acquisition to an individual but may also lead to role conflicts or incompetency.

Anxiety

Anxiety is a mental health condition triggered in response to any situation interfering with one's daily life activities. It is easily characterized with worry, fear, numbness, restlessness etc. It can affect the body by triggering fight or flight response and releases huge amount of chemical and hormones promoting imbalance in internal body environment. It peaks up with continuous projection of a stimulus and may end up for more than hours or days. One may face temporary or constant anxiety in terms of mild, moderate, severe affect making one to feel losing control or on verge of death. It can be identified at earlier stages with prior knowledge and controlled quickly or can be treated by professional mental health practitioners with various anxiety management techniques.

METHODOLOGY

Sample and population

The study is scrutinized on the basis of responses from randomly selected 357 defence personnel from all the three branches i.e. Indian navy, army and Air- force who have served in service from 8 to 14 years. The respondents may be having different age factor, skill levels, different core tasks, interests and service commission (Short or permanent).

Procedure

A Google form was created containing basic questions on multi-skilling like have the person performed multi-skilling, Number of times and the person takes multi-skilling a factor for success or work load sharing and Beck's anxiety inventory. Clear instructions were facilitated to fill the form considering their feelings and symptoms in durations of multi-skilling. No personal information was collected from respondents taking care of their

Multi-skilling: a factor of anxiety in defence personnel

confidentiality and all respondents are considered well educated to understand the questionnaire. The form was linked to WhatsApp contacts of known resources in defence force and then got exponential message spread.

Instrument used:

The anxiety measurements are done using Beck's Anxiety inventory (BAI) developed by Beck, Epstein, Brown and Steer in 1998. It is a self-report measure of anxiety, consisting of 21 items. Its internal consistency for the BAI is (Cronbach's $\alpha=.92$) and test-retest reliability for BAI is .75.

It is moderately correlated with the revised Hamilton anxiety rating scale (.51) and mildly correlated with Hamilton Depression rating scale (.25). It contains a list of common symptoms of anxiety; an individual has to indicate how much they have been bothered by the symptoms by selecting the option in the corresponding space in the column next to each symptom.

Interpretation

The responses are converted into excel sheet, response of single skilled 14 personnel are eliminated out of 357 leaving 343 responses for the study, scoring for Beck's anxiety inventory is done using scoring manual i.e. assigning scores 0 for "not at all", 1 for Mildly, but didn't bother me much ,2 for Moderately-it wasn't pleasant at times and 3 for severely-it bothered me a lot.

The total score is obtained for each respondent by finding the sum of the 21 items. The scoring table is given below.

Scores	Level of anxiety
0-21	Low anxiety
22-35	Moderate anxiety
36 and above	Concerning levels of anxiety

The aspects of multi-skilling and their respective anxiety scores are obtained using filter option and categorized and their associativity is identified using Chi-square test and Phi coefficient to prove its significance at .05 using online statistical calculator and validated using SPSS 21.0 version.

RESULTS

For H1:

11% of respondents (39/343) have performed multi-skilling less than 5 times and 89% (304/343) have performed multi-skilling more than 5 times in their service tenure of 8 to 14 years.

Table describes number of respondents in respective fields.

Number of times multi-skilling performed	Low anxiety	Moderate anxiety	Concerning levels of anxiety
More than 5 (304) 89%	195 64.1%	57 18.7%	52 17.2%
Less than 5 (39) 11%	34 87.1%	3 7.7%	2 5.2%

The chi square statistics obtained is **8.3127**.

Multi-skilling: a factor of anxiety in defence personnel

The **p** value is **.015** stating the result is significant at **p<.05**, indicating to accept alternative hypothesis.

For H2:

34.2% (117/343) respondents perceive multi-skilling as part of success and approx 65.8% (226/343) consider it as part of Work load sharing.

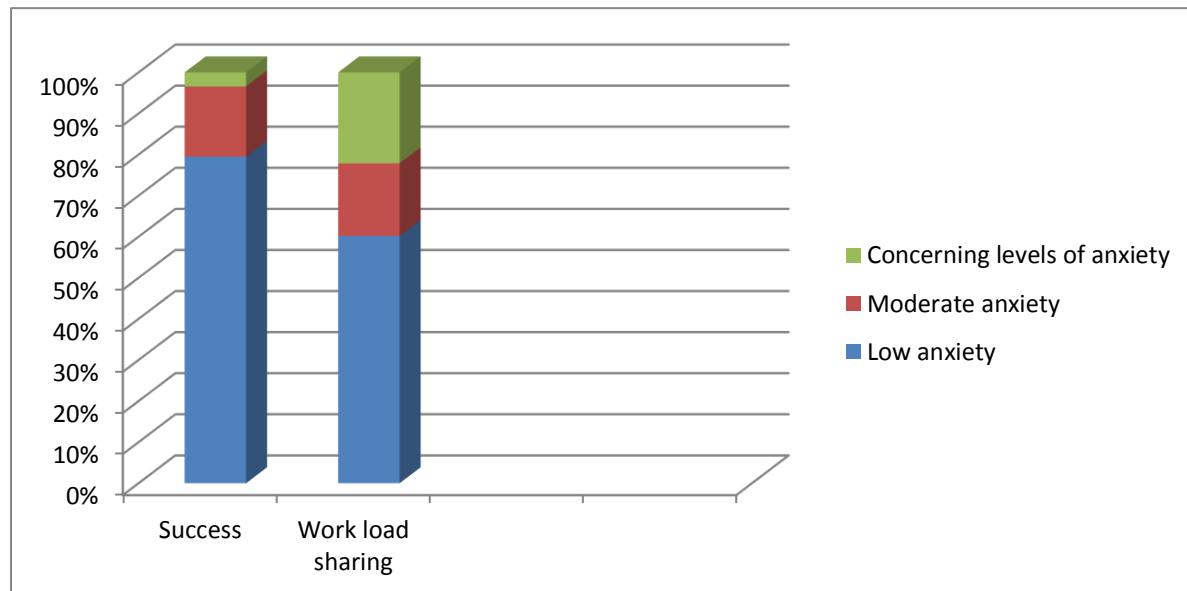
Table below represents number of respondents in respective fields.

Perception of multi-skilling as	Low anxiety	Moderate anxiety	Concerning levels of anxiety
Success (117) 34.2%	93 79.5%	20 17.1%	4 3.4%
Work load sharing (226) 65.8%	136 60.1%	40 17.7%	50 22.2%

The **chi square** obtained is **21.454**. The p value is **.000022** significant at **p<.05**, providing evidence to accept alternative hypothesis

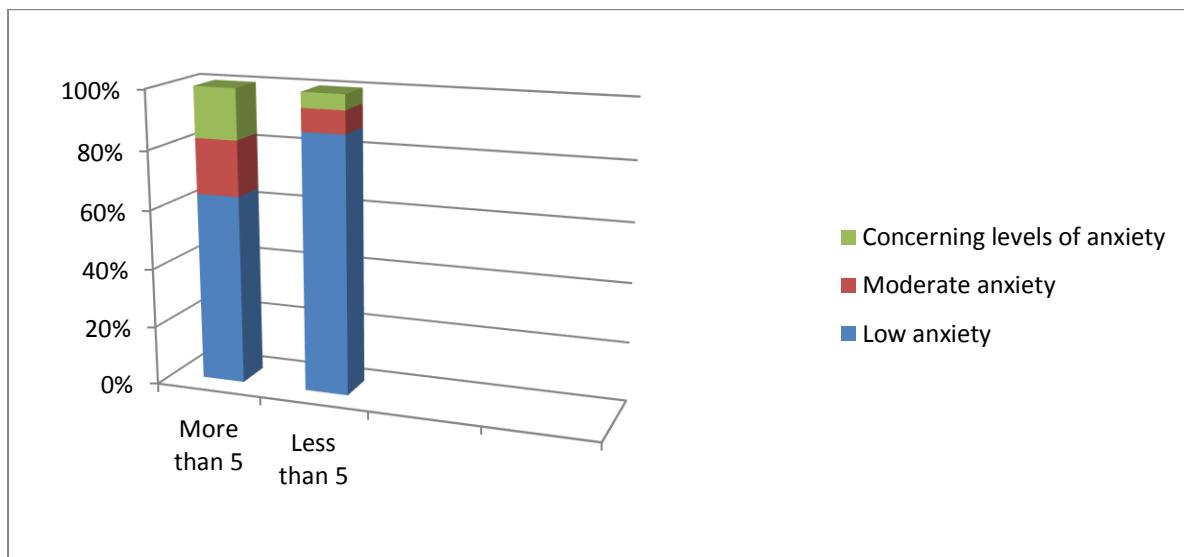
DISCUSSION

The results provide evidences for significant association between both the aspects of multi-skilling and anxiety. Providing a probability of less than 5% chances for the results to be correct by chance.



It can be extracted from chart that the compared percentage of concerning levels of anxiety are less in personnel perceiving learning and performing skills beneficial for their career and personal growth showing professionalism as compared to those taking it as part of work load sharing ending up in low job satisfaction and poor work performance with higher levels of anxiety.

Multi-skilling: a factor of anxiety in defence personnel



It can be inferred from the chart that the personnel performing multi-skilling number of times show more percentage of concerning levels of anxiety than those with less number of multi-skilling. Proving frequency of multi-skilling has significant association with anxiety.

CONCLUSION

Anxiety can be considered pathological when it occurs in absence of challenge and results in significant distress causing psychological, social, occupational, biological and other impairments. To keep up performance and being mentally sound and physically fit as per requirements of defence services , the organization should support their professionals by development of positive attitude towards multi-skilling, educating about anxiety and its controlling techniques like meditation, exercise, mindfulness, chunk activities, emotion or feeling control techniques on regular basis, , for having a ready to combat team. If possible, should be implemented as part of daily routine keeping in mind time and availability of resources (Yoga/Mental health practitioner).

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Conflict of Interest

The author declared no conflict of interest.

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