

Ambiguity Tolerance and Well-being: A Comparative Study of Individuals with Military and non-Military Background

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ABSTRACT

Background: The ability to endure ambiguity has grown more and more important for people navigating uncertain and complex circumstances in today's world of rapid change. **Objectives:** This article aims to identify the differences in ambiguity tolerance and wellbeing among individuals from diverse backgrounds (military and non-military). **Method:** A sample of 130 individuals between the ages of 18-30 were taken (65-M, 65- NM). Statistical techniques such as t-tests were used to compare scores between the two groups, while the Pearson-moment correlation test was used to find a relationship between ambiguity tolerance and overall well-being. **Results:** scores for ambiguity tolerance and well-being were significantly higher for those from military backgrounds than non-military backgrounds. However, no significant relationship was found between wellbeing and tolerance for ambiguity.

Keywords: *Ambiguity Tolerance, Military Background, Well-Being, Civilian Background, Military Families*

The development of psychological resilience and emotional well-being is crucial in the quickly evolving world of today. While the notions of overall well-being, encompasses a person's comprehensive state of psychological health and happiness, ambiguity tolerance, refers to a person's ability to face and adjust to unknown circumstances. Further, while assessing individual's wellbeing and ambiguity tolerance, one must also take a look at how the difference in backgrounds such as those of civilian and military households impacts one's ability to tolerate ambiguity, as well as how they manage uncertainties in life to preserve their well-being.

The ability to endure ambiguity has grown more and more important for people navigating uncertain and complex circumstances in today's world of rapid change. The ability to maintain composure and flexibility in unclear circumstances, or ambiguity tolerance, is a crucial factor in determining how people react to obstacles and uncertainty.

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Ambiguity Tolerance:

Ambiguity tolerance as defined above, refers to the ability to maintain composure and flexibility in the face of uncertainty or ambiguity. It entails being prepared to face unclear situations without being overly anxious or distressed. While those with low ambiguity tolerance may feel overwhelmed or try to avoid confusing circumstances entirely, those with high ambiguity tolerance are more inclined to approach uncertain situations with curiosity, adaptability, and open-mindedness.

The ability to tolerate ambiguity is crucial for handling unclear or uncertain circumstances in a variety of contexts, such as intimate partnerships, educational or professional environments, and decision-making processes. According to researches, people who can tolerate ambiguity better tend to be more creative, resilient, and adept at solving problems when faced with uncertainty.

Well-being:

The multifaceted concept of well-being includes a person's general level of psychological, social, and emotional health as well as their level of life satisfaction. It includes positive characteristics of psychological functioning, subjective experiences of fulfilment and enjoyment, and a sense of purpose and meaning in life, and goes beyond the absence of mental illness.

An individual's cognitive and emotional experiences, such as happiness, life satisfaction, and positive affect, are the main emphasis of psychological well-being. The quality of interpersonal connections, social support systems, and a feeling of connection and belonging within communities are all important components of social well-being. The ability to successfully identify, comprehend, and regulate one's emotions as well as the ability to handle stress and hardship are all components of emotional well-being.

Impact of Military Family Life on Adults:

Studies on how military family life affects individuals point to a number of important variables, such as mobility, stressors associated with deployment, and the population's particular resilience traits. Due to duty commitments, military families must relocate frequently, which can cause disruptions to young adults' social networks, academic continuity, and community ties. Furthermore, young adults from military families may have emotional strain, separation anxiety, and difficulty adjusting if family members are deployed for an extended period of time.

Despite these difficulties, research indicates that people from military families may acquire special resilience traits including flexibility, independence, and a strong sense of support from their community. These resilience traits are frequently linked to the ideals and beliefs instilled by military upbringing, as well as the shared experiences and support networks within military communities.

Overall, understanding the impact of military family life on young adults is essential for addressing their unique needs and promoting their psychological well-being and adaptation in diverse environments. By recognizing the complex interplay between family background, resilience factors, and psychological outcomes, targeted interventions and support services can be developed and implemented to enhance the well-being of young adults from military families.

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Research Gap

There is a discernible lack of studies comparing the psychological resilience and general well-being of young adults from military versus non-military families when it comes to handling uncertainty. While some studies have looked at the effects of military life on psychological health, few compare the well-being and ability to tolerate ambiguity of young adults from these various family situations.

This comparison is essential to comprehending how a person's family background affects their ability to overcome obstacles. Military families deal with particular stressors, such as lengthy deployments and frequent relocation, which might affect how they handle uncertainty. These disparities could be understood by comparing young adults from non-military and military backgrounds first-hand.

Therefore, a significant research need is highlighted by the lack of comparative studies on young adults from military versus non-military backgrounds with regards to ambiguity tolerance and well-being. If this gap is case, it could lead to better assistance being provided for the mental health of young adults from a variety of familial origins.

METHOD

Study Participants

A sample of 130 participants were taken for the study, with 65 participants from a military background and 65 participants from non-military backgrounds. The sample was chosen through snowball sampling method. The ratio of participants from military and non-military family backgrounds was 1:1.

Selection criteria:

- Subjects met the following criteria to be eligible for the study
- The subject provided an informed consent prior to the procedure of study.
- The subjects were within the age range of 18-30 Years.

Tools:

For the study two psychometric tests were used to measure the variables ambiguity tolerance and well-being. The first psychometric test used was the Ambiguity Tolerance scale (AT-20) by A.P. MacDonald which assesses an individual's tolerance of ambiguity using a 20-item self-report measure involving a True/False format of response. The AT-20 scale exhibited a reliability coefficient of 0.73 using the split half method as well as evidence for construct validity was also exhibited.

The second test used was the WHO-5 Well-being Index. This test consists of 5 questions that need to be answered on a scale of 0-5, where 0 signifies no time, while 5 signifies all of the time. The WHO-5 Well-being Index exhibits good validity and reliability with Cronbach alpha values ranging from 0.81 to 0.90.

Procedure:

For the study, a sample of 130 individuals were selected with military and non-military backgrounds with the help of snowball sampling method. A survey consisting of some demographic questions along with the two questionnaires, i.e. the Ambiguity Tolerance Scale (AT-20) and the WHO5 Well-being Index, were circulated for data collection. The subjects were duly informed about the study's purpose and an informed consent was taken

Ambiguity Tolerance and Well-being: A Comparative Study of Individuals with Military and non-Military Background

before proceeding ahead with the circulation of the survey forms. The participants were informed that their responses would be kept confidential, and the information would be used for research purposes only. Instructions were given as well as mentioned on the forms, and the participants were informed that they could ask in case of any difficulties or questions. Once the responses were collected, the participants were duly appreciated for taking out their precious time for the study.

Statistical analysis:

Statistical analysis was also carried out with the aim to assess Ambiguity Tolerance and Well-being in young adults with military and non-military family backgrounds. For this various statistical measures were employed, these include Mean, Standard Deviation, Variance, Karl Pearson's coefficient of correlation and independent sample t-tests.

The independent sample t-tests were used to compare the levels of ambiguity tolerance as well as overall well-being in young adults from both groups, i.e. Military and Non-military Backgrounds, the probability value $p < 0.01$ is regarded as significant. While the Karl Pearson coefficient of correlation was used to determine the association between Ambiguity Tolerance and Well-being.

RESULTS

The following tables highlight the results obtained by the sample,

Table 1: Signifying the descriptive statistics for AT and WBI

	Non-Military Family Background		Military Family Background	
	Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (SD)	Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (SD)
Ambiguity Tolerance	8.20	2.60	10.00	3.50
Overall Well-being	15.09	4.25	16.94	3.94

Table 2: Indicating the T test for scores for Young adults from Military Backgrounds and those from Non-military family backgrounds on Tolerance of Ambiguity

	df	Mean Difference	t-value (df)	p-value
Ambiguity Tolerance (AT)	128	-1.80	-3.33**	.001

Table 3: Indicating the T test for scores for Young adults from Military Backgrounds and those from Non-military family backgrounds on Overall Well-being

	df	Mean Difference	t-value	p-value
Overall Well-being (WBI)	128	-1.85	-2.57**	.011

Table 4: Indicating the Correlation between Ambiguity Tolerance and Well-being Scores

	Well-being Score	Ambiguity Score
Well-being Score	1	0.150 (p = 0.089)
Ambiguity Score	0.150 (p = 0.089)	1

DISCUSSION

Ambiguity Tolerance in the most basic terms, refers to an individual's ability to deal with uncertain and ambiguous situations and events. It involves one to be prepared to face such uncertain situations without being overly anxious or distressed. This study aims to

Ambiguity Tolerance and Well-being: A Comparative Study of Individuals with Military and non-Military Background

understand this ability of individuals, along with well-being and how each of these are affected by the kind of background that an individual receives.

In a study conducted to understand the attachment styles, deployment and perceived stress in spouses of African American military personnel. A statistically significant relationship was indicated between perceived stress and the predictor variables. (Willis, 2022)

As a way of measuring and assessing ambiguity tolerance in individuals, we used the Ambiguity Tolerance scale (AT-20) by A.P. MacDonald which helps us in measuring how effectively one is able to deal with ambiguous and certain situations. The Scale consists of 20 items, each of which are to be answered true or false. The score of the test range from 0-20, 0 indicating no ambiguity tolerance, which would suggest a significant amount of difficulty or discomfort with situations that lack clarity or where outcomes are uncertain. On this test the Mean scores for individuals with military backgrounds were 10 while the scores for those without a military background were, 8.2, indicating a mean difference of -1.80.

In order to figure out how Ambiguity tolerance scores differed in the two groups, of individual with and without a military background, T-test was conducted. The hypothesis taken for the study was that, there will be significant difference in Ambiguity tolerance between Young adults from military and non-military backgrounds. The results for T-test can be seen through table 2 where the values for df, mean difference, t- value and p-value are given. The table signifies that these exists significant difference between the two groups of individuals, i.e. those with a military and those with a non-military background. This proves that our hypothesis (H1) was accepted, and hence there is significant difference amongst the scores of ambiguity tolerance, with a higher level of ambiguity tolerance in individuals with a military background, than those with a non-military background.

Studies have found that high levels of psychological well-being have been linked with creativity and ambiguity tolerance. And these associations with creativity and ambiguity tolerance are not found in people who exhibit low levels of psychological well-being. (Vasylykevych, et. al. 2021)

Along with this, the paper also focuses on the well-being of individuals, which refers to a person's general level of psychological, social, and emotional health as well as their level of life satisfaction.

To assess individuals' well-being levels, the WHO-5 Well-being Index was used. The Well-being Index comprised of 5 questions, to be answered on a 5 point scale, where 0 signifies no time, while 5 signifies all of the time. Based on the results achieved (Table 1), the wellbeing scores for individuals with military backgrounds were 16.94, while the scores for those with a non-military background were, 15.09, indicating a mean difference of -1.85.

Further the study examines and tests the hypothesis, H2, (There will be significant difference in the well-being of Young adults from military and non-military backgrounds), by conducting a t-test to compare the scores obtained on the WHO5 Well-being Index for individual with a military and non-military backgrounds. The results for T-test can be seen through table 3, with a t value of -2.57 and a p-value of 0.011, the table signifies that these exists significant difference between the well-being scores of the two group of individuals, i.e. those with a military and those with a non-military background, with a higher level of

Ambiguity Tolerance and Well-being: A Comparative Study of Individuals with Military and non-Military Background

well-being in the individuals with military background. Similarly, studies have indicated that older children from military families were at a higher risk of adjustment issues such as substance use, externalising behaviour etc. However on the whole, it was not found that they have a poorer well-being in comparison to civilian children. (Williamson et. al., 2018)

The study also focuses on assessing the relationship between Ambiguity Tolerance and Well-being, for which Pearson-moment correlation test was used. The hypothesis stated that there will be significant relationship between Tolerance of Ambiguity and Well-being of young adults (H3). Table 4 indicates the results for the person-moment correlation test. The value for Pearson-moment correlation coefficient (r) was found to be 0.150, while the p value was 0.089, this indicated that there is no significant association between Ambiguity Tolerance and Overall Well-Being on individuals.

CONCLUSION

This thesis was aimed at comparing Tolerance of Ambiguity and Well-Being among individuals with a military background and those with a non-military background (civilians). As it can be seen through the results and discussion above, we can conclude that there is significant difference amongst the scores of ambiguity tolerance, with a higher level of ambiguity tolerance in individuals with a military background, than those with a non-military background, which proves the 1st hypothesis – there will be significant difference in the ambiguity tolerance of Young adults from military and non-military backgrounds. Similarly, it can also be said for the 2nd hypothesis – there will be significant difference in the well-being of Young adults from military and non-military backgrounds, since significant difference was established between the well-being scores of the two group of individuals, i.e. those with a military and those with a non-military background. The 3rd hypothesis of the study, there will be significant relationship between Tolerance of Ambiguity and Well-being of young adults, however, was rejected since findings indicated that there was no significant association between Ambiguity Tolerance and Overall Well-Being on individuals. Therefore, it can be concluded that out of the three hypothesis stated in the study, two were accepted (H1 & H2), while one was rejected (H3).

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Ambiguity Tolerance and Well-being: A Comparative Study of Individuals with Military and non-Military Background

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Conflict of Interest

The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.

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