

Religion, spirituality, faith, and philosophy of life

– a protective or straining factor for soldiers?

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Introduction and aims

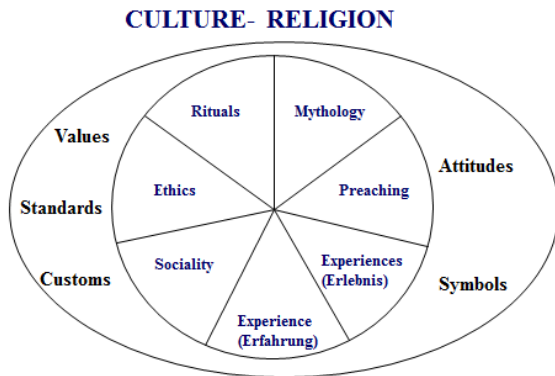
Religious studies is an extremely complex science which through interdisciplinary collaboration provides us with completely new possibilities to examine risk and protective factors for suicidal ideation, attempted and completed suicides

The aim is to examine if soldiers have a faith or philosophy of life that protects or strains them in relation to suicidal ideation or suicidal behaviour.

Method

Interviews with soldiers based on culture and religion (Fig.1). The interviews were conducted at the soldier's own home, at the Centre for Suicide Research, or somewhere where the interviewee felt secure and free to open up. Each interview is recorded and subsequently transcribed and analysed .

Fig. 1



Participants

One hundred Danish soldiers who have been deployed once or more times to Balkan, Iraq or Afghanistan from 1990-2013. Some have experienced suicidal ideation and attempted suicide prior to deployment.

Results

Protective factors

Rituals and social fellowship during deployment is protective for suicidal ideation and suicidal behaviour. While deployed, the soldiers participate in the rituals and the social fellowship that arises when a chaplain also is deployed. The soldiers can confide in chaplains, who are under duty of secrecy and who are not part of the military. Soldiers participate in prayers and unite in the fellowship that arises from camp services or ceremonies in relations to death while deployed.



Straining factors

Ethics may be a risk for suicidal ideation and suicidal behaviour during and after deployment. They may feel guilt and shame of obeying an order not to take action while witnessing atrocities against civilians, adults, and children.

Conclusion

Depending on circumstances, religious themes may have a protective or straining effect. To the soldiers, their philosophy of life, religion, or faith in combination with their cultural background may have a protective effect for suicidal ideation and attempted suicide prior to and during deployment, while ethics may have a straining effect during and after deployment. The soldiers may feel guilt and shame. Furthermore, they may feel that their beliefs are not in keeping with their actions during deployment.

For further information, please contact Centre for Suicide Research, Denmark

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