

## DETERMINANTS OF AGGRESSIVENESS IN MILITARY SERVICE CONTEXT: STRESS, REGULATORY CONSTRAINTS, DEPRIVATION, TRAUMA, ADAPTATION PRESSURE, AND UNIT CLIMATE

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### Abstract

Aggressiveness in military personnel is a complex behavioral and psychological phenomenon shaped by a wide range of determinants. Military service represents a high-demand environment where individuals are exposed to intense stressors, strict organizational regulations, deprivation-related experiences, and adaptation challenges. Additionally, traumatic exposure and collective climate within military units influence emotional regulation and aggression-related outcomes. This article provides a theoretical and analytical review of the key determinants of aggressiveness among service members: operational and chronic stress, disciplinary constraints, deprivation, trauma, adaptation pressure, and unit climate. Emphasis is placed on the interaction between individual vulnerability and environmental factors, including psychological mechanisms such as frustration, emotional dysregulation, hyperarousal, and social learning processes. Understanding these determinants is essential for developing preventive interventions and strengthening psychological resilience in military systems.

### Keywords

aggressiveness, military personnel, stress, deprivation, trauma, adaptation, unit climate, emotional regulation.

### Introduction

Aggressiveness among military personnel has increasingly attracted scholarly attention due to its significant implications for operational effectiveness, psychological well-being, and interpersonal safety within military institutions. While controlled aggression may be considered an adaptive component of combat readiness, uncontrolled or maladaptive aggression represents a risk factor for misconduct, interpersonal violence, self-destructive behavior, and psychological breakdown.

The military context is fundamentally different from civilian environments. It is characterized by strict hierarchy, limited autonomy, permanent evaluation, high responsibility, and the necessity to maintain psychological stability in extreme conditions. Under such circumstances, aggressiveness can emerge as a behavioral response to stress, frustration, or threat perception, and it may be reinforced by group norms or survival-related cognitions.

This article aims to systematize key determinants of aggressiveness in military settings and explain their psychological mechanisms. Specifically, it focuses on stress, regulatory constraints, deprivation, trauma, adaptation pressure, and unit climate as primary determinants contributing to aggression-related behaviors in service members.

**Methodology.** Aggressiveness is frequently defined as a stable tendency to exhibit behaviors intended to harm or intimidate others, either physically or psychologically. In military populations, aggressiveness is often influenced by institutional demands, combat-related roles, and emotional regulation requirements.

It is crucial to distinguish between:

1. Aggression as behavior (observable acts of harm or hostility), and
2. Aggressiveness as a trait (predisposition or readiness to respond aggressively).



In the armed forces, aggressiveness may manifest through verbal hostility, dominance-oriented behavior, impulsive reactions, displacement aggression toward peers, or conflict escalation within units. Importantly, these manifestations may occur even in the absence of direct combat, which highlights the role of organizational and psychological determinants beyond battlefield exposure.

Military service frequently involves high-pressure situations requiring rapid decisions, persistent vigilance, and physical endurance. Acute operational stress is associated with heightened physiological arousal and increased reactivity. Under stress, the threshold for irritation decreases, and aggressive responses become more likely due to reduced inhibitory control. When stress exposure becomes prolonged and recovery resources are insufficient, chronic stress evolves into emotional exhaustion and burnout-like symptoms. This condition undermines patience, empathy, and self-control. Chronic stress also increases sensitivity to minor provocations, which may result in impulsive aggression. Stress contributes to aggressiveness through several mechanisms:

- Hyperarousal (intensified physiological activation and irritability),
- Cognitive narrowing (limited problem-solving, rigid interpretations),
- Reduced self-regulation (difficulty controlling emotional impulses),
- Frustration accumulation (gradual buildup of internal tension).

Thus, stress is not only a direct trigger but also a cumulative risk factor shaping aggressive patterns over time.

Military institutions are organized around strict discipline, formal regulations, and restricted personal freedom. While these principles serve operational stability, they may also generate psychological tension in individuals with low tolerance for control or high autonomy needs. Regulatory constraints may create a persistent frustration state, particularly when personal needs and military demands conflict. This frustration can be redirected into aggression, especially when service members feel powerless to change circumstances. The concept of psychological reactance explains why individuals sometimes respond aggressively to perceived threats to freedom. In military service, constant monitoring, limitation of privacy, and restricted communication may evoke reactance reactions, leading to protest behavior, hostility, or passive-aggressive tendencies.

Military service conditions often include deprivation experiences such as:

- sleep deprivation,
- limited social contact with family,
- restricted leisure,
- emotional deprivation,
- sensory overload or monotony,
- reduced privacy.

Sleep loss is one of the most empirically supported predictors of irritability, impulsivity, and aggression. It disrupts attention control, reduces frustration tolerance, and weakens emotional inhibition. Separation from close social support systems increases loneliness, emotional instability, and maladaptive coping. In such states, individuals may externalize internal distress through aggression.

**Results.** Deprivation therefore acts as both a physiological and psychosocial stressor, increasing the likelihood of aggressive behavior especially in environments with limited psychological support. Traumatic experiences, including combat, witnessing violence, loss of peers, or life-threatening incidents, represent critical determinants of aggression in military service.

Post-traumatic stress symptoms, such as hypervigilance, intrusive recollections, and irritability, can enhance aggressive reactivity. Aggression may function as a defense mechanism when individuals perceive threats even in safe environments. Another relevant trauma-related



factor is moral injury, which involves guilt, shame, or betrayal experiences. Moral injury can lead to internal anger and self-condemnation, which may be displaced onto others through hostile interactions. Trauma contributes to aggressiveness through:

- threat perception bias,
- hyperarousal and anger bursts,
- avoidance and emotional numbing,
- identity destabilization,
- reduced empathy and trust.

Therefore, trauma significantly increases aggression risk, especially when untreated or stigmatized. Military adaptation requires psychological restructuring, behavioral standardization, and rapid assimilation into new norms. This transition often includes:

- loss of civilian identity and habits,
- pressure to conform to military values,
- competitive evaluation,
- fear of failure or punishment.

**Analyze.** Adaptation pressure produces tension due to uncertainty and high expectations. Individuals may respond with aggression as a coping strategy to regain control or assert status. Some service members experience conflict between personal values and military requirements. This internal dissonance can increase irritability and hostile reactions, especially when emotional expression is suppressed. Unit climate refers to interpersonal atmosphere, leadership style, group cohesion, and norms governing behavior. It is one of the most influential social-psychological determinants of aggression. In units with humiliation practices, bullying, hazing, or authoritarian leadership, aggression can become normalized. Social learning theory suggests that aggressive models are imitated when such behavior is rewarded or tolerated.

Conversely, supportive climates reduce aggression through:

- psychological safety,
- fair discipline and justice,
- mutual respect,
- emotional support,
- constructive conflict resolution.

Thus, unit climate can either amplify or buffer aggressive tendencies depending on its normative and leadership structure. Aggressiveness in military contexts rarely results from a single determinant. Instead, it emerges from interactions such as:

- stress × deprivation (fatigue amplifies irritability),
- trauma × unit climate (trauma effects worsen in toxic environments),
- adaptation pressure × regulatory constraints (reactance increases hostility),
- low self-regulation × chronic stress (impulsivity increases aggression).

An integrated understanding highlights the importance of multilevel prevention approaches combining individual psychological training, leadership interventions, and organizational improvements.

**Discussion.** Based on the determinants discussed, prevention strategies should include:

1. stress management programs (breathing techniques, self-regulation training),
2. sleep and recovery interventions,
3. trauma screening and confidential counseling,
4. unit climate monitoring and leadership training,
5. adaptation support systems for newly enlisted service members,
6. aggression de-escalation and conflict resolution training.

A systematic prevention model should not focus solely on punishment but prioritize mental health support, resilience-building, and early psychological diagnostics.



**Conclusion.** Aggressiveness among military personnel is a multidimensional phenomenon influenced by stress, regulatory constraints, deprivation, trauma exposure, adaptation pressure, and unit climate. These determinants shape aggression through mechanisms such as frustration accumulation, emotional dysregulation, hyperarousal, cognitive distortions, and social learning. Understanding aggressiveness in military contexts requires an integrated perspective that includes both individual traits and environmental conditions. Developing evidence-based preventive interventions and strengthening supportive unit climates are essential steps toward improving psychological safety and operational stability within military systems.

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