

Title: Building a Hardiness Mindset for Enhanced Health and Resilience Under Stress

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Summary

Stress is a part of life, something we must learn to live with. This is especially true in high risk, high demand occupations such as the military and emergency responders. But stress can lead to mental and physical health problems, and performance deficits. Research on differences in how individuals respond to stress led to the discovery of mental hardiness in 1979. Hardiness describes the mental framework or mindset that characterizes people who remain resilient and cope effectively with stress. Hardiness has three components: Commitment (sense of meaning and engagement in life), Control (belief that one's decisions and actions influence results), and Challenge (willingness to try new things and learn from experience). Many factors, such as family history, social support, and work environment can contribute to resilience under stress. But hardiness is the primary "inside the skin" factor affecting resilient responding. I briefly review some research evidence showing that hardiness is a significant moderator or buffer of the effects of stress on important outcomes including physical health (cardiovascular fitness), mental health (burnout, anxiety, depression), alcohol abuse, and performance. While hardiness is relatively stable or trait-like, it is also amenable to change. Hardiness attitudes and coping skills can be developed through experiences and training programs. I close my presentation with some examples of training programs that have worked to increase hardiness, notably among nurses and medical students.