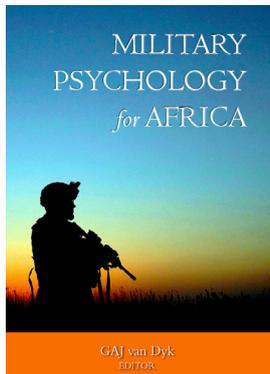


Military psychologists as scientists and practitioners

BOOK TITLE:

Military psychology for Africa



EDITOR:

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ISBN:

9781920689957 (softcover)

PUBLISHER:

Sun Press, Stellenbosch;
ZAR450

PUBLISHED:

2016

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HOW TO CITE:

Van Niekerk R. Military psychologists as scientists and practitioners. *S Afr J Sci.* 2016;112(11/12), Art. #a0182, 1 page. <http://dx.doi.org/10.17159/sajs.2016/a0182>

Military psychology is a sub-discipline of psychology that encompasses a wide range of academic and professional activities such as assessment and measurement (monitoring and selection), diagnosis, intervention (prevention, support, treatment and rehabilitation), training and development, human engineering, organisational development, and research. Because of its comprehensive scope, psychologists from different registration categories (such as clinical, counselling, industrial and research) contribute to different areas of military psychology. Military psychology has been practised in South Africa for almost five decades. In the rest of Africa, military psychology is not as formalised and some may view it as still in its infancy.

The book under review, *Military Psychology for Africa*, focuses on the application of psychological principles and methods in military environments. This beautiful book will be welcomed by psychologists and mental health-care practitioners whose clients include members of the security forces and their dependants. The publication of the book is a landmark in the history of psychology in Africa. Now, for the first time, African researchers and practitioners have access to a comprehensive book that acknowledges the unique social, cultural, economic and political dynamics that influence military activities on the continent.

The editor of the book, Gielie van Dyk, is a clinical psychologist and professor of psychology at the South African Military Academy (Stellenbosch University) in Saldanha, South Africa. The Military Academy offers professional military higher education and attracts students from several countries on the African continent.

Van Dyk invited a substantial team of experts – comprising 16 authors and 11 reviewers – to contribute to the book. The authors include academics and practitioners (both military psychologists and private practitioners) and most (10) are members of the South African National Defence Force. They are qualified in industrial (11), clinical (4) or research (1) psychology. A chapter that is likely to attract considerable attention to the role of traditional healing practices in military psychology was written by a traditional healer who also holds a doctorate in psychology. With the exception of one Ugandan contributor, all the authors are from South Africa. The review panel comprised eight South African academics as well as one reviewer each from Australia, Nigeria and Uganda.

The aim of the contributors was to produce a text that psychologists, researchers, students, military trainers and mental health-care practitioners would find useful. In my view, they achieved this aim in a commendable way. The 20 chapters combine theory, research findings, case studies, as well as guidelines from military reports, field and training manuals. The book is likely to stimulate further theorising, application and research.

The book comprises 479 pages and is divided into seven sections comprising between two and six chapters. The chapters focus on the role and contributions of military psychology to:

(1) conventional military operations, (2) peacekeeping, (3) the development and maintenance of morale, (4) the selection of military personnel and civil military coordination officers, (5) the management of trauma, (6) the prevalence and management of HIV/AIDS, (7) the well-being of soldiers (e.g. trauma, HIV/AIDS and traditional healing), (8) the improvement of combat readiness and the identification of critical factors, (9) the challenges facing military families, (10) the psychological well-being and resiliency of military families, (11) the role of personality in military psychology, (12) military leadership (including leadership in Africa), (13) military work readiness, and (14) factors involved in subjective career success of soldiers in Africa.

Two chapters also review the need for military psychology in Africa, with specific reference to the Central African Republic and Uganda.

I am particularly impressed with four aspects of the book: the comprehensive coverage of a range of topical issues, the generic and reader-friendly structure of the chapters, the informative and interesting content, and the inclusion of many recent references. In my view, all the chapters make a constructive contribution to the general theme of the book. However, I believe that five chapters stand out amongst the others. These are Chapter 1 (the role of military psychology in conventional operations), Chapter 4 (the selection of soldiers and military personnel), Chapters 6 and 8 (the management of trauma) as well as Chapter 12 (the factors relating to combat readiness). In my opinion each of these chapters makes a noteworthy contribution to knowledge production in military psychology.

Some features of the publication detract somewhat from its superb standard. Firstly, I acknowledge the challenges faced by second-language authors. Still, I believe that this beautiful and informative book deserves a higher standard with regard to linguistic presentation. For example, the Preface is an important section and one of the first to be read. Regrettably, the editorial standard of the Preface does not match the standard of the publication as a whole. Secondly, the excessive use of bullets in some chapters undermines the cohesiveness and weakens the underlying arguments (e.g. pages 16–24, 103–108, 140–143, 301–308, 315–318, 337–341, 361–367). Thirdly, the contents of the chapters overlap in places, which is not surprising considering that 16 authors contributed to the publication, but in most cases I found the overlap unnecessary and difficult to justify.

In conclusion, this publication represents a ground-breaking and courageous accomplishment. The book is a valuable, practical and comprehensive guide that offers insights and ideas to psychologists, mental health-care practitioners and military leaders alike. Although the book is primarily aimed at an African audience, it addresses universal military issues that psychologists all over the world would be interested in. The authors drew from more than 1100 bibliographic sources (of which approximately 25% were produced by African authors). The publication is a first for the continent and I expect that it will achieve classic status in years to come. Another reviewer considered the book 'long overdue' and I concur. I recommend the book to researchers, practitioners and students who share an interest in military psychology. I hope that the book will receive the attention it deserves, and that readers will use it as a springboard to take military psychology in Africa to the next level. Lastly, I hope that the second edition will be based on a higher percentage of African bibliographic sources, research and content.