

Introduction

In a world bombarded with war and violence, the category of people that are most vulnerable and affected are women. Given the rapidly narrowing gap between choice of professions for men and women, most women are choosing to join the armed forces and serve the nation. A lot of studies focus on women as victims of war and their coping mechanisms; however, very few studies throw light on the experiences of women who join the armed forces and survive the challenging period. In this paper, the article titled “‘Living in a movie’ – Israeli women combatants in conflict zones” is examined for the credibility and appropriateness of its research methodology with respect to its objectives (Tekoah and Harel-Shalev, 2014).

Objectives of the study

This study aims to analyze how women in the armed forces manage to cope with the physical and mental stress they endure during periods of unrest. Women tend to develop a myriad of coping strategies and the objective is to understand these strategies based on individual experiences. Hence, the participants of the study included women of the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) who were posted in the Occupied Territories of West Bank and Gaza and the checkpoints at the war-affected borders between Israel and the West Bank of Gaza. These areas are the most conflict-ridden areas in Israel and hence, the sample was appropriate to understand the coping mechanisms of women soldiers posted in these regions (Tekoah and Harel-Shalev, 2014).

Methods used

The sampling method employed was snowball sampling and data collection methods were personal interviews and focus groups. The number of participants selected for this study

were 20 and all of them had joined the defense forces at a young age of 18 with a commitment to complete at least two years of service. Hence, all the participants had completed two or more years of service and ended their period of duty within the last five years. The average age of all participants was calculated to be 25.9 years. The nationalities of all participants was the same i.e. Israeli except one, who was from Ethiopia. The location of the participants was diverse and included central and peripheral areas, cities and small villages of Israel. The ethnic backgrounds of the participants included European, Middle Eastern and African. Their religious beliefs and socio-economic statuses were quite diverse. Their roles in the military varied and included manning checkpoints, arresting Palestinians suspected to be involved in terrorist activity, managing the front-line war room, providing field intelligence and performing various security functions (Tekoah and Harel-Shalev, 2014).

Written informed consent was obtained from all participants and a snowball sampling method was used to divide the participants into two focus groups. Each participant was put through an extensive personal interview that lasted about 1 to 2 hours. All interviews were recorded and transcribed for further analysis (Tekoah and Harel-Shalev, 2014).

Analysis was done on the basis of body language of the participants as well as the content of the interview. Methods used for data analysis included 'listening guide' method and content theme analysis. The 'listening guide' method is a psychological analysis method that is targeted towards understanding women's experiences through voice analysis. There were four steps in this method – listening to the interviewee's answers, 'I poems', analyzing the voices, and performing a final overall analysis (Tekoah and Harel-Shalev, 2014).

Strengths, weaknesses, and appropriateness of the methods used

Snowball sampling technique which was used to recruit participants for this study is a process by which one individual suggests other individuals who would be appropriate for the study. This group of individuals then suggests names of other individuals and the process continues similar to a snowball rolling down a hill until desired number of participants are obtained for the study. This technique is particularly useful for studying populations that are hard to reach and not easily accessible by listings or population records (Heckathorn, 2011).

The snowball sampling technique has a lot of advantages. It is less time consuming and cost-effective. It is especially very useful for collecting participants who belong to a minority group of a large population. It is also useful for introducing variety in the participants so that all religions, cultures and socio-economic statuses are included in the survey. Also, if the request to participate in a study comes from a trusted friend or acquaintance, the person is more likely to share details relevant to the study. However, the downside of using snowball sampling is that it is not random. Thus, the results of the study may be biased due to an over-representation of participants who share similar characteristics or experiences. Another disadvantage is that it is not possible to determine when saturation in the sample is reached, as people with often similar stories or experiences are likely to be involved in the study (Sadler et al., 2010).

In this study, use of snowball sampling was appropriate for three reasons. The population of women combatants in Israel is quite small and it would not have been possible to use probability sampling methods to obtain sufficient number of participants for the study. Secondly, the eligibility criteria were quite strict, these being age requirements, age of joining service, amount of time in service, and tasks performed. These criteria could only be met by using the snowball sampling method. This technique also helped in providing diversity in the sample (Tekoah and Harel-Shalev, 2014).

Information for the study was obtained by personal interviews and focus groups. The interviews were qualitative and semi-structured with open-ended questions. These types of interviews are subjective and help in gathering more extensive information from the participants. It also gives the participants freedom to divulge more information relevant to the study (Bredart et al., 2014). Focus groups are group interviews which are conducted to identify common themes or ideas that exist within a given subset of the population. The discussions that take place in focus groups give an insight into the subconscious thoughts that run in the participants' minds. People are often more ready to talk amidst others who can relate to their experiences (Greenwood et al., 2014). In this study, the use of both personal interviews and focus groups was appropriate for obtaining in-depth information from the participants.

The methods used for data analysis included listening guide method and content theme analysis. The listening guide method has four components which enable analysis of themes, absences, landscapes and contexts. It also helps identify and analyze the usage of 'I' to construct the 'I-poem' which further helps the overall interpretation of the content. Listening rather than mere reading of transcripts helps identify patterns in voice modulation, thus giving a clearer picture of the underlying truth (Balan, 2005). Content analysis is a type of data analysis method which involves the analysis and interpretation of textual data. It allows a researcher to categorize all the information available and generate themes which gives an overview of the study outcomes (Hsieh and Shannon, 2005). The use of both listening and reading probes for the analysis of the data obtained gives a complete solution to the research questions in this study.

In conclusion, this study is well planned in terms of its methodology. The sampling method, though not perfect, is appropriate for the population being studied and its eligibility

criteria. The use of two data analysis methods, listening and content analysis, provides a complete and accurate picture of the personal experiences of women combatants in Israel.

References

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