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## Interrelationship Between Stress Coping Strategies and Psychological Defense Mechanisms in Conflict Situations (On the example of the military and civilian students)

Original article

Tinatin Kropadze <sup>1</sup>, A-C,F

ORCID  [0000-0001-8339-4129](https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8339-4129)

Elina Shavdatuashvili <sup>2</sup>

ORCID  [0009-0000-2449-2319](https://orcid.org/0009-0000-2449-2319)

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<sup>1</sup> Scientific-Research Center, National Defense Academy of Georgia, Georgia

<sup>2</sup> Psychologist of the Junker Training Battalion, National Defence Academy of Georgia, Georgia

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**Objectives:** This article intends to review the strategies for coping with stress and psychological defense mechanisms.

**Method:**

Research Goal: to determine the relationship between stress coping strategies and defense mechanisms, among students (the Junkers). Target Group: the Junkers of the National Defense Academy of Georgia. Hypothesis: It is assumed that Junkers may have different stress coping strategies than civilian students, depending on their activities. Their defense mechanisms may be different too depending on the academic year.

Data Collection Procedure: The research was conducted in April 2023 on 289 members of the Junker Training Battalion of the Academy, which includes 40 female Junkers. These individuals receive professional military education and participate in practical activities, unlike civilian students. The research focused on the age group of 18-22 years and analyzed the results of a survey conducted on 283 respondents. In the research we used the following methods: The Lazarus/Folkman test adapted to the Georgian population for the study of stress-coping strategies was used as a research tool; In the case for both civilian and military students, an adapted Georgian version of the Kellerman-Plutchik test "Lifestyle Index" was used to study psychological defense mechanisms (Plutchik, Kellerman, 1980: 3–33).

**Results:** After analyzing the conducted research, it has become evident that the tests are reliable in terms of total reliability as well as each component. In our study (In military institutions) the Cronbach's alpha coefficient is 0.743, which confirms the reliability of both individual subscales and the total scale. We can say that our hypothesis was confirmed. According to the research, a difference was found between civilian students and Junkers in terms of the relationship between stress-coping strategies and defense mechanisms and their use. In addition, we obtained different results with Junkers according to courses, gender, and specialties, which has been empirically confirmed and is a good prerequisite for planning future research.

**Conclusions:** According to the research, a difference was found between civilian students and Junkers in terms of the relationship between stress-coping strategies and defense mechanisms and their use.

**Corresponding author:** Tinatin Kropadze - Scientific-Research Center, National Defense Academy of Georgia, Tskhinvali Highway 3th km., 0162, Gori, Georgia; email: [kropadze@gmail.com](mailto:kropadze@gmail.com), Phone: +995577520246;

**Second author:** Elina Shavdatuashvili, psychologist of the Junker Training Battalion of the David Aghmashenebeli National Defense Academy of Georgia, Tskhinvali Highway 3th km., 0162, Gori, Georgia; email: [elinashavdatuashvili@gmail.com](mailto:elinashavdatuashvili@gmail.com), Phone: +995598732375.

## Introduction

Our psyche requires constant justification to make our lives easier. When a foreign element, such as an antigen, enters the body, antibodies are produced that attempt to either "fight" it off or "coexist" with it. Similarly, when unfamiliar content enters the psyche, a defense mechanism is activated that involves:

- rejection of information (expulsion mechanism, which is unacceptable, traumatic for me, I do not receive or easily forget...),
- changing the attitude towards the event,
- changing the attitude towards the subject.

If the human psyche cannot focus on any of these three mechanisms and adapt to foreign information and content, then stress and mental disorders develop.

The first researcher, who observed these processes was Z. Freud. He was the first to notice the involvement of impressive processes in the "protective" function. Initially, he was interested in individuals who experienced emotional disturbances along the hysterical line. They attempted to avoid repeating past feelings that could cause unbearable pain. According to Freud, these individuals achieved this at a great sacrifice, which affected their overall functioning.

The human psyche cannot stand to be in a state of dissonance for an extended period. This kind of state is perceived as unbearable by the psyche and seeks a solution immediately. However, if we fail to recognize the impact of the stressor, the defense mechanism may not activate.

Leon Festinger, an American psychologist and the author of the Cognitive Dissonance Theory, has made a significant contribution to the development of social-psychological cognitivism (F. Zimbardo, Gehrig, 2009). His concept of social comparison suggests that people usually evaluate their own behavior and themselves by comparing them with other people and their behavior. Festinger came up with this concept after studying rumors that were spread after one of the earthquakes.

The spread spread of rumors had the power to either worsen or lessen the real situation, depending on whether they predicted further disasters or ignored the future danger. After researching the reasons behind their emergence and widespread use, Festinger concluded that people tend to seek internal balance - between the information they receive and their personal motives for behavior.

L. Festinger was based on the opinion that the system of knowledge in the psyche about things and people has different levels of complexity, interconnectedness, and compatibility. The less compatibility between cognitive elements, the greater the cognitive dissonance and the desire to reduce it. A sense of cognitive dissonance expresses the disharmony between thoughts, feelings, and behaviors and acts as a motivational tendency to rebalance.

Various options for removing or reducing dissonance described in this theory will ultimately be reduced to two basic mechanisms: 1. changing one of the cognitions in an incompatible state - assigning more or less value to it and 2. selective attitude towards new information - increasing receptivity to consonant (non-contradictory, compatible) information

and distraction from dissonant information, ignoring it or soon forgetting it (another important mechanism is rationalization).

The author suggests that people hold certain ideas, beliefs, and opinions about the world and how it should work. When we come across facts or information that goes against our beliefs, we experience anxiety, which prompts us to resolve the contradiction in different ways. The level of anxiety varies based on the importance of the belief to each individual and how contradictory the information is. People may unconsciously choose one of four strategies to eliminate this dissonance. It's important to note that these strategies are not always chosen consciously.

The simplest strategy is for the person to simply ignore or reject information that contradicts their beliefs. For instance, an individual who believes that alcohol consumption is harmful may deny that beer is an alcoholic beverage to avoid unpleasantness.

An second strategy is to seek justifications for the apparent contradiction. This could involve coming up with alternative terms or definitions. For instance, if a young person has decided to study for a few hours but doesn't want to, they might justify their lack of action by saying that they can "waste" time doing it the next day.

The third strategy is based on superficially altering the opinion or belief that contradicts our own without actually giving it up completely. For instance, if someone is trying to stick to a diet but has just indulged in a slice of cake, they might rationalise it by thinking that it is alright to cheat occasionally.

Finally, the most challenging strategy at the cognitive level is to change one's behavior to align with the core idea or to alter the belief altogether. For instance, an individual who believes that learning English is an impossible task may change their opinion when they come across someone in a similar situation who has accomplished it.

As McWilliams N. (2004) *Psychoanalytic Psychotherapy: A Practitioner's Guide* makes clear, psychoanalytically minded clinicians believe that each individual prefers a form of defence that is an integral part of their struggle against difficulties. The automatic use of a certain defense mechanism or a group of defense mechanisms is the result of a complex interaction of at least four factors (N. McWilliams, 2004):

- congenital temperament,
- the nature of stress experienced in early childhood,
- a defense often used by parents and other significant people,
- using a particular form of defense acquired as a result of experience.

Here, the author classifies psychological defense mechanisms according to primitive and mature defense forms. Primitive forms (primary, low organization, immature) include denial, regression, projection (one of the most primitive forms), expulsion/suppression, substitution, and reaction formation. Mature forms are compensation, and intellectualization (rationalization).

## **1. Coping Strategies for Stress**

As for stressful situations, coping is defined as cognitive and behavioural efforts to master, reduce, or tolerate the internal and/or external demands that are created by the stressful transaction (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984: 141). Coping strategies are grouped into following groups:

- emotion-focused techniques might be the only realistic option when the source of stress is outside the person’s control,
- a problem-focused approach will not work in any situation where it is beyond the individual’s control to remove the source of stress. They work best when the person can control the source of stress (e.g. exams, work-based stressors etc.).changing the attitude towards the event,
- it is not a productive method for all individuals. For example, not all people are able to take control of a situation or perceive a situation as controllable.
- optimistic people who tend to have positive expectations of the future are more likely to use problem-focused strategies, whereas pessimistic individuals are more inclined to use emotion-focused strategies (Nes & Segerstrom, 2006).
- problem-focused strategies aim to remove or reduce the cause of the stressor, including:
  - problem-solving,
  - time-management,
  - obtaining instrumental social support.

## **2. From Civilian Life to Military Service**

Military education prepares individuals for important responsibilities and decision-making. The consequences of their actions can have an immediate and profound impact, creating a heightened sense of pressure compared to many civilian professions. Military institutions operate within a highly structured and hierarchical system. Cadets often face strict discipline and chain of command. Accuracy and adherence to protocols are critical to their success, high grades, and scholarship. A hierarchical structure can increase the stress associated with meeting standards and fulfilling orders. The intensity of the training programs, which include physical training, munitions study, and leadership development, requires strict adherence to the schedule. The Junkers have limited control over their own plans and living conditions. The structured nature of the military lifestyle can create a sense of loss of personal autonomy, which also contributes to stress.

Here it should be noted that prolonged stress can lead to negative outcomes in academic performance and, more generally, mental well-being. Therefore, stress management is especially important for junkers. With proper support (education, discipline, physical activity) in institutional settings, coupled with increased adaptability and course progress, stress levels decrease.

Applicants under the age of 24 who register for the Unified National Exams will be admitted to undergraduate educational programs at the National Defense Academy of Georgia. After that, they have to pass through certain phases:

- Phase I: internal selection procedures of the Academy - Physical Fitness Test (I); psychological selection (II), where the readiness and motivation of the entrant will be assessed, how well he/she will be able to adapt to the daily life of the National Defense Academy and, after its completion, to serve in the military service for the term stipulated in the contract; Medical examination(III),
- Phase II: Unified National Examinations - entrants who successfully pass the internal selection rounds, take entrance examinations in specified subjects,
- Phase III: Basic Combat Training Course - Upon successful completion of these stages, they are awarded the status of "Junker".

The role of military psychology is important in the recruiting process, because "military psychology is essential to discipline, and during the testing, professional military psychologists ensure the level of resiliency to adapt to challenging and stressful situations to counter enemy forces, opposition, situation, and environment for success". (Khadka, 2023, p. 2).

In the armed forces of different countries, different psychometric tests are used during the selection process. It depends on the person's preferred branch. In our case, the psychological selection of future officers includes a test battery approved by order of the Minister of Defense (to assess personal characteristics and measure IQ) and a clinical interview.

The process helps us determine whether, depending on the past and present political situation of Georgia, motivating young people and instilling a fighting spirit in them is possible and feasible in a particular cadet. „The war depends on various factors whether it is important or pointless to a person. These factors involve values, political situation, the expediency of this or that operation, trust in the leader as well as the experience of war that have different effects on people, leaving deep traces.“ (Kropadze, 2022, p.43)

Military training places great emphasis on discipline as a fundamental aspect. The structure of the training program is designed to teach order, obedience, and the observance of rules. Team activities are used to foster cooperation, trust, and effective communication. Shared experiences help to build friendships among cadets. This bond is crucial in the military, where mutual trust is essential for success.

The Basic Combat Training course includes physical challenges such as night alarms and rapid mobilization skills, obstacle courses, mud runs, and other challenging exercises. Some of the training is designed to simulate stress and teaches the Junkers how to manage pressure, stay focused, and make the right decisions even in difficult situations. This contributes to the physical training of the Junkers, improving endurance and health in accordance with the physical requirements of military service.

Through the physically demanding and mentally challenging situations of the Basic Combat Training, the Junkers develop mental resilience. This is crucial for soldiers to endure the demands of military service and remain focused on their duties.

Overall, the combat training course aims to transform civilians into military personnel who are physically fit, mentally resilient, disciplined, and able to work effectively as part of a team in a challenging combat environment.

Examining the stress coping mechanisms of the Junkers at the National Defense Academy is a valuable research endeavor for several reasons. The first reason is a stressful environment. The Junkers who undergo training while also pursuing a bachelor's degree face a significant strain on their resources, leading to high levels of stress. Examining how these individuals manage this stress can offer useful insights into the efficacy of current training programs and the overall resilience of military leaders. The second reason is leadership development. As future leaders and officers, the stress-coping strategies adopted by cadets can directly affect their decision-making, problem-solving, and leadership skills. The study of coping mechanisms can facilitate the development of targeted interventions and training programs that enhance leadership skills in stressful situations.

Military personnel are more likely to experience psychological challenges than civilians. By gaining insight into how military personnel (those who have transitioned from civilian life to an environment with strict norms of behavior) cope with the stress of military life, we can better understand their mental well-being. This information is crucial in developing support systems and interventions that can promote mental health and resilience in military professionals. “Officers frequently operate in situations where they have to understand what needs to be done and do it at the same time. In doing so, their experience—and how it is used—is of importance”. (Tillberg, L.V.(2020), p.12)

### **3. Research Context, Data Collection, and Analytical Method**

#### **3.1. Method**

**Research Goal:** to determine the relationship between stress coping strategies and defense mechanisms, among students (the Junkers).

Students, including the Junkers, tend to adopt specific strategies that are influenced by the unconscious part of their psyche, specifically, the protective mechanisms of the Ego. According to the Psychoanalytic Theory, defense mechanisms aim to decrease anxiety and resolve the internal conflict that exists between the conscious and the unconscious. As a result, the idea came up to investigate the preferred stress-coping strategies of Junkers under different environmental and professional conditions. The study aims to determine the forms of defense mechanisms that are commonly used during stressful and conflict situations. Furthermore, the research aims to examine the differences in stress-coping strategies and psychological defense mechanisms used by civilian students and the Junkers when adapting to a new environment that may cause stress and conflict. The research report analyzed the data by gender, course, and major in SPSS. The statistical methods selection was determined by research purposes toward statistical variables: frequencies, correlations, cross-tabulation, T-test, and analysis of variance.

**Target Group:** The Junkers of the National Defense Academy of Georgia.

**The Research Tried to Answer the Following Questions:** which strategies do the Junkers prefer? (I) Which defense mechanisms do the Junkers and civilian students commonly apply to cope with stress in challenging and conflict situations? (II) How different are the stress coping strategies and psychological defense mechanisms used by civilian students and the Junkers during adaptation to the environment (that can be caused by conflict and the stress caused by it)? (III)

**Hypothesis:** According to the results of the study, the Junkers may have different stress-coping strategies than civilian students, depending on their activities. However, their defense mechanisms may be different too depending on the academic year.

Comparing stress management strategies and defense mechanisms between these two groups, we can explore whether certain stress reduction strategies are universal or if their effectiveness depends on the unique demands of each context. The data collected may clarify on the categorization of stress management strategies across different contexts.

National Defense Academy of Georgia operates within a highly regulated and structured environment, whereas civilian universities may afford more freedom and flexibility to their students. By comparing stress management strategies between these parameters, we can understand how individuals cope with stress in various organizational structures. This information can facilitate interventions and support systems tailored to the specific needs of students in each context.

This research provides an opportunity to understand how individuals manage stress in different contexts and allows us to recognize the outcomes obtained for the well-being and success of students in various educational environments. These findings can inform educational institutions that prioritize quality and effective learning.

**Data Collection Procedure:** The research was conducted in April 2023 on 289 members of the Junker Training Battalion of the Academy, which includes 40 female Junkers. These individuals receive professional military education and participate in practical activities, unlike civilian students. The research focused on the age group of 18-22 years and analyzed the results of a survey conducted on 283 respondents.

The frequencies were distributed as follows: I year - 30%, II year - 26.1%, III year - 23.7%, IV year - 20.1%. According to the major, the data was distributed as follows: Defense and Security - 48.8%, Informatics - 23.3%, Management - 23.3%, and Mechanical Engineering - 4.6%.

In the civil sphere, research was conducted in various higher education institutions of Georgia: Sukhumi State University, Ivane Javakhishvili Tbilisi State University, Davit Aghmashenebeli University of Georgia, National University of Georgia. 130 students participated in the research, including 65boys and 65girls. The research focused on the age group of 18-25 years.

**Research Limitation:** 283 out of 289 questionnaires were used for statistical analysis (some of them were incompletely performed).

It should be noted that a relatively small number of girls participated in the study, however, the descriptive statistics enabled us to highlight the differences between genders. In

the next stage of the research, an even more in-depth comparative analysis of the research results of the Junkers of the National Defense Academy of Georgia and the students of the civil sector may be planned.

### **3.2. Measures**

For both civilian and military students, in the case for both civilian and military students, The Lazarus/Folkman test adapted to the Georgian population for the study of stress-coping strategies was used as a research tool . According to Lazarus and Folkman, coping refers to “constantly changing cognitive and behavioral efforts to manage specific external and/or internal demands that are appraised as taxing or exceeding the resources of the person” (Lazarus & Folkman,1984:141).

It is commonly believed that people respond to stressful situations in one of two ways: by focusing on the problem at hand or on their emotions.

The first approach involves analyzing the situation rationally, developing a plan to solve the problem, and implementing it to change the situation for the better. The second approach is more concerned with regulating the emotional response to the problematic situation (or its assessment), rather than taking action to solve the problem. As a result, the problem remains unresolved.

The test consists of 66 questions and aims to assess an individual's behavior when faced with a stressful situation. The questionnaire evaluates the frequency with which a person engages in certain behaviors, and provides four options for evaluation: "0 - never," "1 - sometimes," "2 - often," and "3 - always." The results obtained are then grouped according to parameters that determine an individual's stress management strategies.

#### **Kellerman-Plutchik test LiFE Style Index<sup>1</sup>**

In 1979, in collaboration with R. Plutchik, G. Kellerman, and H.R. With Conte, the Life Style Index (LSI) test was published, which is recognized as the most relevant diagnostic tool for psychological defense mechanisms. In the case for both civilian and military students, an adapted Georgian version of the Kellerman-Plutchik test "Lifestyle Index" was used to study psychological defense mechanisms (Plutchik, Kellerman,1980: 3–33). The test enables both the diagnosis of the entire system of psychological defense mechanisms and the identification of leading, main mechanisms, as well as the evaluation of the tension of each defense mechanism. This test is based on the psycho-evolutionary theory of R. Plutchik and the structural theory of personality of H. Kellerman. The test has several advantages, including its theoretical justification and validity, simplicity of constructs, and purposeful multidimensionality (Chomakhidze, Kopaliani, Chkanava, 2020-21).

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<sup>1</sup> The test was adapted into Georgian by Chomakhidze E. and Chkvanava T. in 2019.



## 4. Results

### Results Interpretation and Analysis

After analyzing the conducted research, it has become evident that the tests are reliable in terms of total reliability as well as each component. In our study (In military institutions) the Cronbach's alpha coefficient is 0.743, which confirms the reliability of both individual subscales and the total scale.

**Frequencies.** The research analysis was conducted on 283 respondents, and the results were statistically significant. Based on the test results, it is evident that Junkers tend to use problem-solving planning strategies the most to cope with stress. Following this, they prefer to take responsibility and then apply positive reappraisal and self-control strategies. They use the escape strategy the least (See Appendix – Fig. 1).

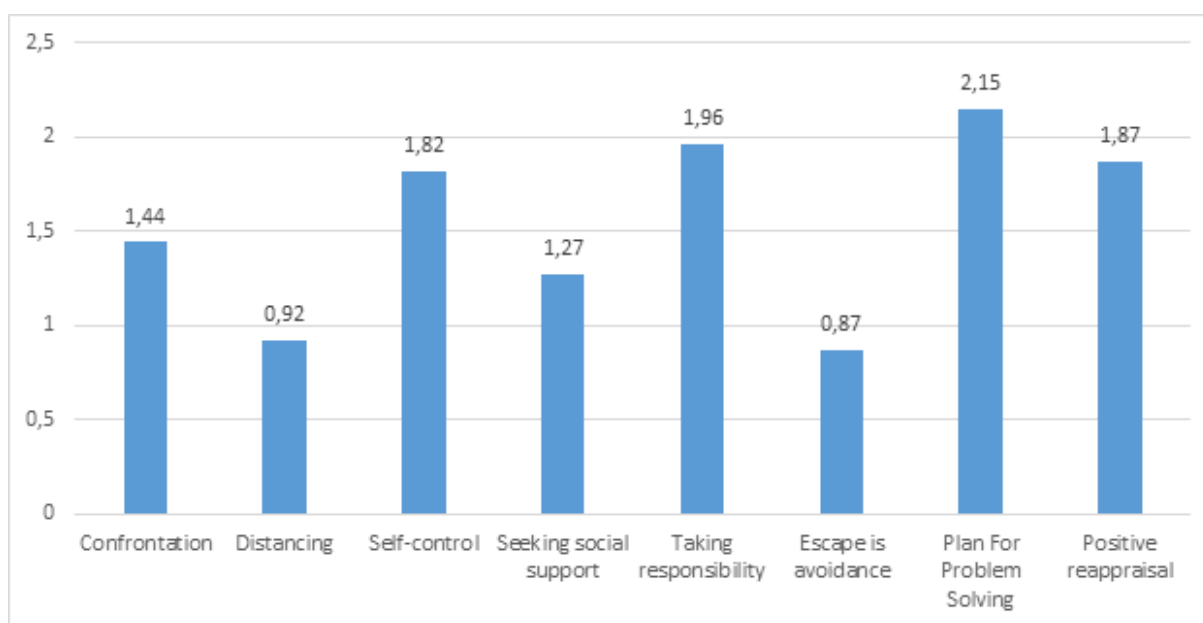


Fig. 1: Junkers' strategies for coping with stress in difficult and conflictual situations.  
Source: own study

Regarding students in the civic field, they are more likely to use the positive reappraisal strategy to cope with challenges. Other relevant strategies include taking responsibility and problem planning. However, seeking social support is the least commonly used strategy among them.

Junkers tend to excel in an environment that emphasizes developing their leadership skills. Therefore, training that focuses on building the skills necessary for a leader helps them become better fighters. Whenever they face a problem, they view it as a challenge and apply solution strategies to overcome it. Junkers believe that problems serve as a stimulus for personal growth. This opinion is supported by the fact that they prefer the positive reappraisal strategy as their next approach. Positive reappraisal is an "emotion-focused behavioral strategy that

involves reappraisal of a problem positively<sup>2</sup>" and considering it as a stimulus for personal growth. Junkers prioritize self-development and try to tackle negative emotions by positive reappraisal of the situation.

The least frequently used coping strategy for stress is the escape/avoidance strategy, which focuses on emotions. It implies an attempt to overcome negative feelings caused by a problematic situation, at the expense of an avoidance type of reaction: denial of the problem, fantasies, unrealistic expectations, etc.

Research conducted on civilian students revealed that seeking social support is the least commonly used stress-coping strategy. This strategy focuses on finding material, informational, and socio-emotional support from others.

After analyzing research on psychological protective mechanisms, it was found that students from the civilian sector, as well as Junkers, tend to use intellectualization as a protective mechanism. Intellectualization involves understanding and reappraisal of a traumatic situation using rational and analytical thinking, rather than relying on emotions. It essentially means shifting from an impulsive and emotional mindset to a more analytical and abstract one. Junkers, on the other hand, tend to use denial, projection, and compensation as protective mechanisms. In the case of civilian students, intellectualization is followed by denial, projection, and regression. (See Appendix – Fig. 2).

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<sup>2</sup> Scientific Papers of Sukhumi State University, XVIII, Humanities and Socio-Political Sciences, Sukhumi State University Publishing House, Tbilisi. 2018-2019; p. 403.

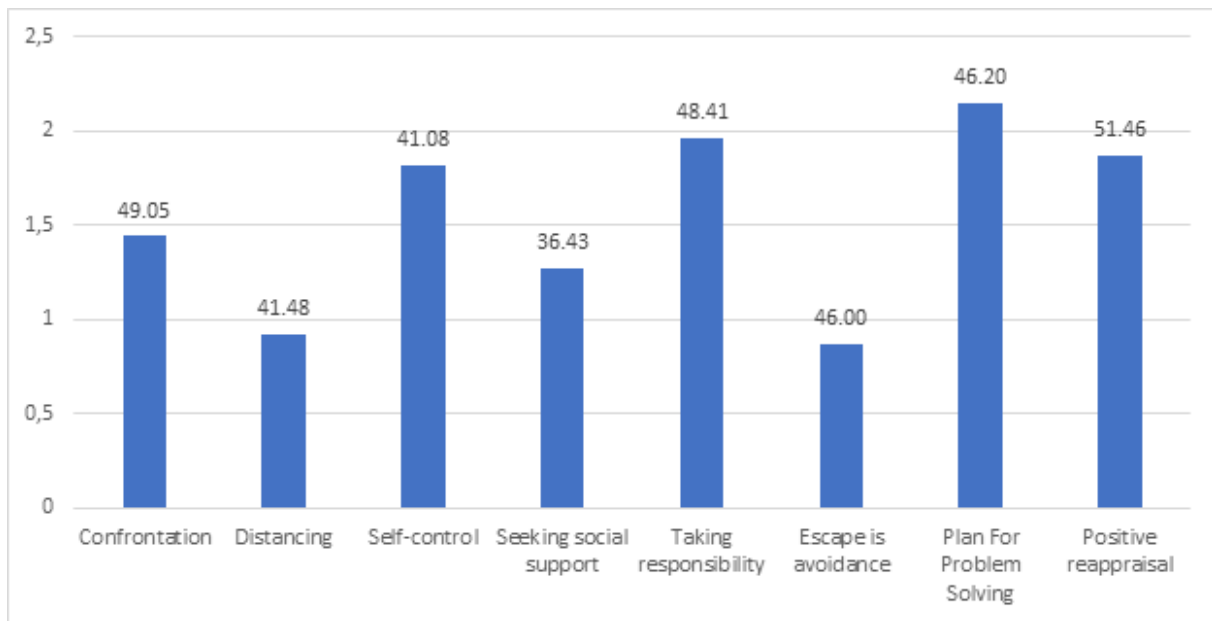


Fig. 2: Strategies for coping with stress in difficult and conflictual situations of civilian students.  
Source: own study

Both Junkers and students rarely use the **regression** defense mechanism. In psychology, regression refers to a defense mechanism used by individuals to avoid anxiety through their behavioral reactions. It involves reducing anxiety by reverting to past activities that have previously reduced anxiety. For instance, a person may experience symptoms of a non-existent illness to avoid life problems and return to a stage of development where their parents take care of them.

**Crosstabulation.** The analysis indicates that the suppression mechanism is more prevalent among males (38.1%) than females (17.9%). The frequency confirms that in 35.3% of cases suppression helps to reduce the psychological tension in the person. Pearson's Chi-square score is 0.05. The same can be said about using regression with 33.3% of females.

Reaction formation helps 71.8% of females to reducing their tension. Pearson's chi-square is 0.01.

According to the academic years, the suppression mechanism is used more often by third-year students (in 47.3% of cases). Pearson's Chi-square is 0.053. The same target group uses substitution, reaction formation, and regression mechanisms (self-general defense) in more cases than others.

When using the substitution mechanism, the „mechanism use tension” is the lowest among fourth-year students (8.8%). The „mechanism use tension” intensively is working with intellectualization among freshmen (92.9%). The Chi-square is 0.01.

The reaction formation intensively is working on „mechanism use tension” among the third-year students (56.7%), with Junkers majoring in mechanical engineering, with more intensively (61.5%), and the less- in the fourth-year students (29.8%).

According to specialties, Junkers majoring in mechanical engineering use suppression and regression mechanisms the most(53.8%). In contrast, the substitution mechanism has the lowest utilization (0%), with correspondingly low stress, on their part.

Intellectualization is frequently used as a defense mechanism by those Junkers in the field of informatics with a medium degree of tension (45.5%).

**Correlation.** The correlation coefficient is used to determine the strength and direction of the relationship between two or more variables. In our study, we used a ratio scale to measure the use of defense mechanisms. We obtained data based on correlation analysis(Pearson's correlation) between stress coping strategies and psychological defense mechanisms.

Correlational data between stress coping strategies and psychological defense mechanisms in the Junker group (Table 1.).

**Table 1. Correlational data between stress coping strategies and psychological defense mechanisms**

correlations		Self- General Defense	A - denial	B - suppression	C - regression	D - compensation	E - projection	F - substitution	G - intellectualization	H - reaction formation
Confrontation	Pearson Correlation	.280**	.091	.170**	.243**	.196**	.183**	.259**	.071	-.021
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.127	.004	.000	.001	.002	.000	.231	.721
	N	283	283	283	283	283	283	283	283	283
Distancing	Pearson Correlation	.334**	.091	.136*	.329**	.197**	.237**	.216**	.150*	.220**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.128	.022	.000	.001	.000	.000	.011	.000
	N	283	283	283	283	283	283	283	283	283
Self-control	Pearson Correlation	.284**	.149*	.133*	.121*	.139*	.201**	.143*	.200**	.226**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.012	.025	.041	.019	.001	.016	.001	.000
	N	283	283	283	283	283	283	283	283	283
Seeking social support	Pearson Correlation	.153**	.079	-.015	.220**	.279**	.039	-.001	.015	.087
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.010	.186	.800	.000	.000	.514	.981	.797	.144
	N	283	283	283	283	283	283	283	283	283
Taking responsibility	Pearson Correlation	.400**	.088	.183**	.270**	.314**	.331**	.317**	.187**	.108
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.140	.002	.000	.000	.000	.000	.002	.069
	N	283	283	283	283	283	283	283	283	283
Escape is avoidance	Pearson Correlation	.391**	-.044	.048	.510**	.336**	.312**	.387**	-.019	.145*
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.464	.420	.000	.000	.000	.000	.756	.014
	N	283	283	283	283	283	283	283	283	283
Plan For Problem Solving	Pearson Correlation	.203**	.253**	.148*	.001	.114	.082	.071	.197**	.059
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.001	.000	.012	.992	.056	.171	.231	.001	.327
	N	283	283	283	283	283	283	283	283	283
Positive reappraisal	Pearson Correlation	.285**	.299**	.108	.151*	.281**	.146*	.085	.221**	.173**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.069	.011	.000	.014	.155	.000	.004
	N	283	283	283	283	283	283	283	283	283
Self General Defense	Pearson Correlation	1	.525**	.509**	.668**	.677**	.726**	.665**	.497**	.511**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000
	N	283	283	283	283	283	283	283	283	283

\*\* Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

\* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

In civilian students, a statistically significant correlation was confirmed between the intellectualization defense mechanism and 5 stress coping strategies, namely: self-control, responsibility-taking, problem-solving planning, positive reappraisal, and escape/avoidance strategies.

Correlational data between stress coping strategies and psychological defense mechanisms in the civilian group (Table 2):

**Table 2. Correlational data between stress coping strategies and psychological defense mechanisms in the civilian group**

	A - denial	B - suppression	C - regression	D - compensation	E - projection	F - substitution	G - intellectualization	H - reaction formation
Confrontation	-.097	.182	.272*	.073	.378**	.306*	-.039	.067
Distancing	.131	.027	.155	-.109	.026	-.072	-.153	.141
Self-control	.069	.213	-.163	.038	.014	-.161	.339**	.198
Seeking social support	.086	-.186	.316*	.053	.016	.054	-.251	.123
Taking responsibility	-.016	-.051	-.190	-.057	.242	-.083	.488**	.147
Escape is avoidance	-.106	.031	.561**	.387**	.387**	.331**	-.328*	-.026
Plan For Problem Solving	.114	-.016	-.314*	.084	-.120	-.182	.506**	.218
Positive reappraisal	.129	-.075	-.105	.16	.213	-.129	.443**	.273*

Source: own study

A weak but significant correlation was found between Junkers' problem-coping strategy and defense mechanisms. In addition, the total indicator of strategies, self-general defense is highly correlated with projection (.726\*\*), regression (.668\*\*), compensation (.667\*\*), and substitution defense mechanisms (.665). The defense mechanism of intellectualization is positively correlated with the self-general defense strategy. (.497\*\*).

And between the least frequently used escape/avoidance coping strategy and the most rarely used defense mechanism, regression, a strong positive correlation was confirmed with a coefficient of (.510\*\*).

## Discussion

This article has focused on how junkers deal with stressful and challenging situations; Which defense mechanisms do they use more often when needed and how different are they from the cases of civilian students.

A person often uses it "automatically" in order to overcome the alarm arising in any unusual situation. In addition, innate temperament, early stress, defense mechanisms of parents and significant others, and experience should be taken into account. When selecting military personnel and planning their professional growth, certain factors should be considered. These

factors will have a significant impact on the Junkers as future officers and play a crucial role in using psychological defense mechanisms effectively. Correct selection and moderate use of appropriate primitive and mature forms must also be taken into account. It refers to the military field, where such a primitive form as, for example, denial, its excess during an emergency, in terms of denying danger on an emotional level, can even be lifesaving. In this way, a person can even commit a heroic act. In other words, a general cannot develop a strategy if he is faced with the terrible picture of war. However, at the same time, people who „choose“ denial as a primary defense mechanism, as psychoanalyst and psychologist Nancy McWilliams calls it, are revealing their "own maniacal nature."

In contrast, it should be noted that the rational mechanism of a mature, strong ego (intellectualization) is in frequent use with the Junkers according to our research. We can assume that the difference between the Junkers and civilian students is due to the influence of personal characteristics and environmental factors of the selected staff.

This study also has implications for future research. As well as for the military's professional discussion about both the factors involved in the selection process of cadets and their correct use in the military career.

## **Conclusion**

In summary, we can say that our hypothesis was confirmed. According to the research, a difference was found between civilian students and Junkers in terms of the relationship between stress-coping strategies and defense mechanisms and their use. In addition, we obtained different results with Junkers according to courses, gender, and specialties, which has been empirically confirmed and is a good prerequisite for planning future research.

In military contexts, effective leadership is essential for personal and organizational goal attainment and fulfillment. This could be in the form of mission completion or team and organizational management. Leaders inspire and motivate others, fulfilling pivotal roles within teams, platoons, or organizations. Through facilitation of communication and collaboration, leaders form cohesive teams capable of effectively working towards shared objectives.

Analysis of outcomes can clarify the role of leadership in decision-making processes and, broadly, in education: stress is a significant aspect of academic life, regardless of predefined expectations. Comparing coping mechanisms between these groups highlights the importance of leadership in managing stress effectively.

Consequently, Georgian National Defense Academy offers a leadership program focusing on inculcating leadership roles among junkers. Various theoretical and practical courses equip civilian individuals to transition into leadership roles within their respective military contexts. In the first and second years, cadets conform to norms, which are entirely new to them, while receiving the necessary training for officer positions. In the third and fourth years, practical training is conducted, utilizing acquired knowledge and honing leadership skills required for lower (first and second years) courses.

The leadership program undergoes continuous review and updates, incorporating monitoring of its constituent components and adjustments based on analysis results. Our research contributes to ongoing improvements within the leadership program, where more

emphasis will be placed on psychological training, as well as other areas such as stress management, critical thinking, self-assessment, team management, and more.

Thus, the increasing correlations confirmed in our case allow us to assume that the Junkers still need experience, which will greatly assist them in the process of transforming weakly expressed defense mechanisms into distinct, robust mechanisms.

We think that the research conducted on the mentioned issues and the obtained results should be taken into account and practically used in the process of admission and recruitment to the military service. It is recommended that more attention be paid to stress coping strategies and defense mechanisms in the psychological selection process. As for military personnel who work directly on the development of future officers, it is advisable to pay more attention to the use of appropriate, correct defense mechanisms in a stressful situation.

Mental health professionals, military psychologists, and researchers interested in leadership development can use the findings to create targeted interventions and treatment plans for military personnel experiencing stress-related issues. Analyzing effective stress coping mechanisms will help develop preventive strategies to reduce the likelihood of mental health problems among military cadets.

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