

# Structure of the Psychological Support System of Georgian Army

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## Abstract

Psychological Service as a structural unit in Georgian Armed Forces was introduced as a small division in 2014 which later on expanded as Social Issues and Psychological Support Department providing psycho-social services. The Psychological Support Division is staffed with 12 mental health specialists and serves over 20,000 active duty military service members including more than 500 wounded warriors. Social Issues and Psychological Support Department incorporates physical rehabilitation for the wounded warriors. This comprehensive approach turned into a successful rehabilitation centre where the soldiers can benefit from the joint efforts of occupational therapist, physical therapist and psychotherapist. Moreover, the Psychological Support Division is responsible for psychological selection of recruits for different units (Special Forces, BCT (Basic Combat Training), Sergeant Academy).

Considering the vast workload of the Division and with Ministry of Defense (MOD) budget is limited more mental healthcare specialists are needed. Therefore, several steps have been undertaken to improve efficiency despite the limited resources: Mental Health specialist of Psychological Support division are currently working on adapting a successful French model of “Human Factor Advisor” - project of involving military personnel in identifying mental issues. Mental health specialists of Psychological Support Division met with founders of “Give an Hour” founders to share experience on how to involve volunteers in the process of delivering psychological support for trauma exposed military service members and their family members.

Psychological Support Division is willing to share International experience in Applied Military Psychology and incorporate the best practices that will most successfully fit Georgian cultural environment.

## Comprehensive Approach

Georgia is a small country with important geopolitical location as a conjunction point of Europe and Asia. History of Georgia is rich with continuous struggle for independence. The Russian-Georgian War of 2008 year can be used as an example of most recent conflict of this kind.

Veterans of the above-mentioned war were left without proper psychological care, requiring the need for structured psychological service for military service members. In 2014, Psychological Support section was introduced as a part of Medical Department. Functions of Psychological Support Section were constantly growing and eventually it transformed into independent structural unit – “Department of Psychological Monitoring and Recruitment.” In 2017, based on the concept of unified Psycho-Social Care Model, the Department merged with Social Support and Wounded Warrior Care divisions.

During the process of functional extension Psychological Recruitment became essential part of Psychological Support Division. Psychological Selection of recruits proved to be a rewarding long-term investment of time and efforts: initial screening of recruits showed fewer mental health problems in service members in the future. Psychological Monitoring Section is a second main structure of Psychological Support Division that supervises mental health in military service members.

Psychological Selection includes all recruitment activities:

- Psychological testing of recruits prior to accession in Army; In order to qualify for military service, individuals willing to join army must pass IQ test, Personality assessment and clinical interview.
- Selection of recruits for Special Forces: In addition to the requirements for BCT candidates, applicants for SF undergo tests for assessing memory, attention and other cognitive functions.
- Selection of military service members for Sergeant Academy: in order to become NCO (Non Commissioned Officer) during psychological assessment soldiers must demonstrate leadership potential and self re-presentational skills.

Psychological Monitoring provides mental health supporting activities for Armed Forces:

- Psychological screening of units before and after deployment in international peacekeeping operations;
- Psychological counseling and psycho-therapy of soldiers with mental health problems;
- Training of NCOs on most urgent Psychological topics;
- Psychological Monitoring of Compulsory military personnel;
- Suicide Prevention program in cooperation with trained NCOs; Suicide rate in Georgian Armed Forces decreased 4 times in 2015-2017yy as compared to 2014 year data.

Psychological Monitoring Section is actively involved in activities of Tserovani Rehabilitation Centre. The Center provides Wounded Soldiers with Physical, Social, and Psychological support. A two week intensive rehabilitation treatment of wounded soldiers includes physical and occupational therapy, evaluations from social workers on various social issues and psychological services as well. Psychological support involves initial interview with psychiatrists to evaluate current mental health status of wounded soldiers. Next step is filling pencil-and-pen based screening questionnaires PCL-5 (PTSD Checklist for DSM-5) and PHQ (Patient Health Questionnaire) to investigate symptoms of PTSD (Posttraumatic stress disorder), Anxiety, Depression and Somatic complaints. Based on the results of tests and information gained from interview, psychologists in cooperation with psychiatrists develop treatment plan for wounded soldiers. Consideration is given to actual situation for individual or group therapy is suggested for patient. By the end of the rehabilitation program progress assessment is made at joint counsel and future plans are discussed.

### **Future Directions**

Psychological Support Division is open to share and implement International Experience of Applied Military Psychology. Several steps have been made in this direction. Working group of psychologists visited French Armed Forces to investigate French model of Psychological trainings for NCOs. Sergeants are trained to identify and refer individuals with psychological

issues. This concept may be well fitted for Georgian Armed Forces considering the lack of psychologists in Active Duty Units.

Another initiative is to incorporate volunteer service model from “Give an Hour” Program. Founders of “Give an Hour” visited Georgian colleagues and plan to cooperate with Georgian Military Psychological Support system. Within the cooperation of “Give an Hour” specialists the introduction of Online Counseling is expected for deployed military service members.

Social Issues and Psychological Support Department is actively involved in Family Readiness Group (FRG) Program; in cooperation with American colleagues FRG Program of Georgian Armed Forces supports family members of deployed peacekeeping soldiers. FRG Program of Georgian Armed Forces plans to expand and reach out more military servicemen and their family members.

Another long-term goal of Psychological Support Division is to conduct research on Posttraumatic growth (PTG), emotional intelligence and coping strategies in Georgian wounded soldiers. Understanding the phenomenon of Posttraumatic growth may be promising in theoretical and practical way; knowing the factors which facilitate psychological rehabilitation of soldiers can be beneficial for therapeutic purposes and also will enrich knowledge in the sphere of PTG in Georgian Military Culture.

### **Conclusion**

Despite the small number of mental health specialists Psychological Support Division of MOD of Georgia provides psychological service to Georgian Armed Forces in main aspects of Military Psychology. Functions of Psychological Support System of Georgian Army gradually expand; in order to become more comprehensive and efficient Psychological Support Division of MOD of Georgia is open for exchange of international experience in the field of Applied Military Psychology.