Summary

Introduction

In this study, we have looked at whether veterans of peace missions experience guilt and/or shame related to their mission experiences and, if so, what specific situations in the mission area and what personal characteristics of the veterans relate to that guilt and shame. We have looked in particular at the factors which directly and indirectly influence that extent of mission-related guilt and shame experienced by veterans and the role of guilt and shame in psychological well-being and the development of psychological problems after the mission. We have formulated and tested several hypotheses in this respect.

Earlier research among veterans has shown that many of them experience profound feelings of guilt as a result of having survived a war in which comrades were killed and that feelings of guilt can be related to painful war memories.[1] It has become clear that, years after the end of the war, many Vietnam veterans suffer from a feeling that what they did is unforgiveable[2] and experience feelings of shame.[3] The earlier studies on guilt and shame among veterans mainly looked at the relationship between guilt, shame and psychological problems, including post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Usually, the focus was on two types of guilt, namely survivor guilt (guilt as a result of the fact that the veteran survived the war whilst comrades in the same situation were killed) and combat guilt (guilt as a result of participation in combat action and acts of violence, including the killing and wounding of civilians or soldiers). These studies were always carried out in the United States and focused on war veterans. The extent and the nature of guilt and shame experienced by veterans of peace missions had never been studied before.

Our study focuses on veterans who have participated in a peace mission. Dutch military personnel have been participating in peace missions under the flag of the United Nations (UN) since 1947. In such a mission, they form part of a peace force and, as such, part of an impartial party tasked with preventing the escalation of conflicts between (former) warring parties in a former conflict area. The purpose of peace missions is to contribute to the correct implementation of a peace treaty and to a sustainable solution to the conflict, for instance by developing and assisting with reconstruction activities. The peace force is to ensure that the conflicting parties refrain from the use of violence now and in the future.

Dutch military personnel have taken part in various types of peace missions and still do to this day. These missions differ from one another as regards the content of the mandate. The mandate indicates the political objective of the operation, as well as the powers and assets available to the (civilian) leaders of the operation.[4] The mandate is determined beforehand on the basis of the situation in the (former) conflict area and on the basis of the behaviour of the conflicting parties. On this basis, we can make a rough distinction between two types of missions, namely peacekeeping and peace-enforcement missions. In the first place, during peacekeeping missions the military

deployment takes place with the consent of all parties involved in the conflict. These missions focus on preventing acts of violence, as well as establishing and consolidating peace. The latter can be achieved by taking up buffer positions, carrying out patrols, reconstruction activities and/or providing support in the preparations for and assistance during elections. Secondly, the use of force is only permitted in an act of legal self-defence.[5]

During peace-enforcement missions, conversely, the military force may intervene without the consent of the parties involved in the conflict. The peace-enforcement force operates in the conflict area without the consent of the 'host nation'. The focus is on restoring order and peace. The peace-enforcement force acts if the peace treaties are violated, if human rights continue to be violated and if, as a result, the peacekeeping force is unable to carry out its mandate safely and successfully. This can involve embargoes and sanctions, but, if necessary, peace can be restored by military force. In that case, the peace-enforcement force temporarily sets aside its impartial position.

It is this distinction between peacekeeping and peace-enforcement missions in particular, but also the initially impartial position of both types of peace forces – which distinguishes peace operations from war operations – which plays an important role in our study. The impartiality of the peace force always complicates the provision of aid and limits or sometimes even prohibits intervention in order to stop violence. As a result, soldiers in the midst of an armed conflict may be both physically and psychologically vulnerable. In the mission area, soldiers witness the consequences of war and of the violence inflicted on the civilian population, which is sometimes still ongoing. They witness the appalling conditions in which refugees have to live in the post-war situation and they see children dying and other forms of human suffering. In this respect, tension may arise between the moral points of view of the individual soldier, including the personal sense of duty to intervene to stop violence or to provide medical assistance to civilians to prevent further suffering, and the impartial position of the peace force of which the soldier is a part. As a result, participation in a peace mission can be a psychological burden. After the mission, doubts can arise as to the justification of choices made, of actions carried out and of not having intervened or not having acted to change the negative situation. Even if the use of force is permitted in order to stop violence and further suffering, doubts can arise after the mission as to the justification of certain decisions made in the mission area and in particular regarding their consequences, which cannot always be monitored afterwards. Feelings of guilt and/or shame may play a role in this respect. This dissertation focuses on such mission-related guilt and shame among veterans of peace missions.

Aim

Our study mainly involves exploratory research, with which we will contribute to the development of *theory* on how differences in guilt and shame between veterans can be explained. The study provides insight into the stressors to which veterans of peace missions have been exposed and the psychological consequences this exposure has for them. This concerns, *inter alia*, moral dilemmas during the mission, as well as the moral and existential issues which may occupy the minds of veterans after a mission. Knowledge of those dilemmas sheds light on the *moral development* of military personnel and their preparation for future missions. After all, this study shows that that

preparation must partly be based on the moral self-evaluation which soldiers apparently carry out after missions. We will also gain insight into the specific help issues which may concern veterans as well as soldiers in current missions as a result of their participation in a peace mission and we will contribute to the improvement of *aftercare* for veterans and insight into the necessity of *recognition* of veterans. In order to achieve the abovementioned aims, this study will answer four research questions.

The meaning of guilt and shame in behavioural science

First of all, we look at the definitions of guilt and shame in the field of behavioural science, as well as the difference between the two and their function. We also identify how they manifest themselves in people's lives, for instance in demanding situations. The first research question was:

1. What meaning and relevance of guilt and shame do we find in behavioural science theories?

This first research question was answered in chapter 2. Guilt and shame are two different moral, self-conscious and social emotions[6] and cognitions.[7] When we feel guilt, we judge our behaviour and when we feel shame, we judge our character or personality.[8] The meaning of veterans' guilt and shame can best be clarified using the attribution theory. This involves a socio-psychological approach to guilt and shame on the assumption that there is a need for causality, which every person experiences in daily life. We all feel the need to be able to explain what is happening in our lives. It gives us a feeling of control over the course of our lives and insight into what we can still expect. Experiencing an extreme event, for instance in a mission area, means loss of control and therefore fear, uncertainty and powerlessness. The need to explain what has happened will therefore be even greater. In that case, we often prefer to hold ourselves responsible for what has happened, and prefer to feel unhappy about the self-accusation and shame, than to have to accept that life can apparently be full of fear and uncertainty and that we may be subject to arbitrariness.[9] By means of the moral questions regarding decisions and actions, which are embedded in self-accusation, the veteran attempts to find an explanation for the evil and the suffering and to attribute a meaning to it. He or she thus regains control over the course of his or her own life. If feelings of guilt and shame remain suppressed and are not acknowledged, however, such an attitude can be detrimental to the individual's mental health.

The extent and nature of mission-related guilt and shame

In this study, we look empirically at how much mission-related guilt and shame is experienced by veterans, what mission-related situations generate guilt and shame and, in particular, what specific dimensions of guilt are typical of veterans of peace missions. The second research question is:

2. What is the extent and nature of guilt and shame among veterans of peace missions?

This question and the third and fourth research questions, which will be discussed below, were answered on the basis of a large-scale survey. In mid-2006, more than 3,000 veterans of fourteen

peace missions (including UNTSO, UNTAC, UNPROFOR, KFOR, UNMEE and SFIR) were sent a questionnaire. The veterans who were contacted are all registered with the Veterans' Institute. More than 1,100 veterans completed the questionnaire. In chapter 3, we look at the structure of and the data collection for the empirical study, as well as at the operationalisation of the theoretical concepts, and we present the first part of the empirical findings: the description of the distribution of the variables in the survey population.

We found that, to some extent, 25% of the veterans studied experience guilt and shame related to the mission, and that 4% even experience this regularly. As regards guilt, we have looked in more detail at the various categories. There is a good instrument with which to determine the nature of mission-related guilt.[10] This allows us to make an empirical distinction among various categories of guilt. It involves categories of mission-related events and situations which can later generate different categories of guilt. In the earlier studies into shame among war veterans,[11] general instruments were used to measure shame. This refers to instruments with items which are not linked to situations and events that may occur during a military mission.[12] In that case, it is unclear what underlies the shame and what it is related to. Mission-related shame has therefore never before been studied, whilst guilt related to peace missions or war missions has often been the subject of research. In our study, we have tried nonetheless to distinguish among various categories of shame, but we were unable to study shame to the same degree as guilt.

In our study, veterans' guilt can be divided into six categories, based on events and situations which have occurred in the mission area, as well as on thoughts and opinions during the mission: (1) 'bystander guilt'; (2) 'negative attitude towards the population in the mission area'; (3) 'indirect effect of decisions and actions'; 4) 'attitude and behaviour in the context of war and violence'; (5) 'actions and decisions which led to survival or increased the chance of survival' and (6) 'lack of ethics'.

Around 18% of the veterans indicated that they had feelings of guilt as a result of the 'bystander role', such as 'not having objected to brutality or not having tried to prevent brutality'. Feelings of guilt regarding 'their negative attitude towards the population' (around 13%, including 'having no sympathy for the culture or values which are important to the population of the conflict area') also play an important role, as do feelings of guilt as a result of the 'indirect effect of decisions and actions' (around 7%, including 'making friends with a civilian who was later killed, possibly as a result of the friendship with the veteran').

The veterans themselves gave the following as the main causes of mission-related guilt: 'The feeling that you did not do your utmost to help civilians'; 'Hiding behind your work so as not to have to be near the victims'; 'The question of guilt may be that you are so powerless. You really want to help everyone, but with a million people it is just not possible. And yet that really was our task, at least that's how I saw it (…)'. It also became apparent that 'guilt related to violence and combat', including survivor guilt and guilt due to lack of ethics, occurs less frequently than the abovementioned guilt categories.

The respondents relatively frequently mentioned 'failing', 'being powerless' and 'being inadequate' as the main cause of mission-related shame. Veterans were also ashamed, however, of

'colleagues' misconduct', 'the lack of respect shown towards the civilian population in the mission area', and '(…) their own luxury at the military base, while not far away people were starving and having to live in appalling conditions'.

Determinants of mission-related guilt and shame

In chapter 4, we discussed the second part of the empirical findings: the analysis results as found on the basis of, *inter alia*, multiple regression analyses. The variation in the extent and nature of mission-related guilt and shame is expected to depend on a number of personal, professional and mission-related factors. The third research question is therefore:

3. To what extent, and in what way, are differences in mission-related guilt and shame connected to characteristics of the mission and of the veterans?

In our study, we see a direct positive relationship between perceived powerlessness during the mission, a sense of responsibility for the successful outcome of the mission and the extent of mission-related guilt and shame. The feelings of powerlessness appeared to be stronger if veterans were less able to accept the rules of engagement. Veterans of peacekeeping missions experienced a greater degree of powerlessness and a greater inadequacy of the rules of engagement than veterans of peace-enforcement missions. Besides 'powerlessness' and 'responsibility', the differences in the survey group in the extent of mission-related guilt and shame are related to various other factors, including 'mission-related situations and events', the 'intensity of the mission and the mission experiences' and 'personal characteristics' of the respondents. For instance, we see that the youngest veterans experience mission-related guilt and shame more often than veterans aged 60 and above. We also found that, related to mission experiences, female veterans experience shame less often than their male former comrades. The extent of the guilt and shame also depends on the veterans' self-esteem. The lower the self-esteem, the more often veterans experience mission-related guilt and shame.

The role of guilt and shame in the extent of mission-related psychological problems and the psychological well-being of veterans

Lastly, we look at whether there is a link between guilt and shame and the occurrence of mission-related psychological problems and the psychological well-being of veterans. We first study the role of guilt and shame in coping with mission experiences and in the psychological well-being of veterans and then assess whether guilt and shame are distinct from one another in that context.

4. To what extent, and in what way, are differences in mission-related guilt and shame connected to the psychological consequences of mission experiences and the psychological well-being of veterans?

The results of the research (section 4.2.5) show that the extent of mission-related psychological problems (symptom clusters of PTSD) is not dependent on mission-related shame, whereas the psychological well-being of veterans (depression and anger) is. The effects, however, are negative.

We also see that if veterans feel guilty more often, they are less often trying to avoid the memories of extreme mission experiences (symptom cluster of PTSD). If veterans experience guilt more often, they score higher for depression problems, hostility and anger, however. Survivor guilt in veterans of peace missions, however, leads to less intense depression problems.

These findings largely deviate from the literature and from findings from earlier empirical studies into the distinction between guilt and shame in relation to psychological problems in, inter alia, war veterans.[13] The studies show that a shame tendency correlates positively with the symptoms of PTSD and with, *inter alia*, fear, depression and anger, and thus forms a risk factor for the continued occurrence or development of psychological problems. For a guilt tendency, the researchers found either no relationship or a negative one with PTSD and other psychological problems. In any case, the findings showed that guilt tendency does not form a risk factor for the continued occurrence or development of PTSD and other psychological problems.

In our opinion, the negative effect of survivor guilt on depression and the lack of effect of survivor guilt and survivor shame on mission-related psychological problems (symptom clusters of PTSD) and psychological well-being which we found in our research prove the non-pathological nature of survivor guilt as has been emphasised by Lifton since 1973.[14]

Conclusions

The final answers to the research questions and the main results of the research and conclusions were discussed in chapter 5. Chapter 5 also includes a discussion on the scientific, social and political relevance and on strengths and limitations of the research, as well as some first steps towards follow-up research.

We can conclude from the nature of the guilt among veterans of peace mission and the factors which indirectly (type of mission and adequacy of the rules of engagement) and directly (powerlessness, responsibility and specific mission experiences) influence the extent of mission-related guilt and shame that guilt among veterans mainly has to do with a strong sense of responsibility for other people's well-being on the one hand, and on the other hand a feeling of inadequacy: to have been bound hand and foot. The more often that veterans have witnessed suffering and violence in a mission area, the more often they report after the mission that they suffer from guilt and shame, whilst having been involved more often in war situations and combat action leads to veterans less frequently feeling ashamed of their mission experiences. It is clear that mission-related guilt and shame is related to loss of control, (involuntary) passivity and powerlessness. This touches on the experiences of veterans of UNPROFOR, and in particular of Dutchbat III during and surrounding the fall of the enclave of Srebrenica in July 1995, experiences which were characterised by the juxtaposition of a personal sense of responsibility and duty, and with it a need to stop the violence and protect the civilian victims, and a professional mandate which prohibited the provision of help.

Our research shows, in any case, that Dutch veterans of peace missions are conscientious individuals and that they display a morally committed professional attitude and a great capacity for

moral evaluation of their decisions and actions in the mission area, as well as for moral self-reflection.

If 25% of veterans – of both peacekeeping and peace-enforcement missions – experience mission-related guilt and shame to some extent, and guilt is largely related to 'inadequacy' and 'unintentionally having caused harm', it makes sense to conduct a public and political debate on the relationship between the impartial position of the peace force (including mandates and rules of engagement) and the responsibility of the soldiers who have to carry out the mission. After all, on the basis of the findings of our research, we can perhaps much better imagine what, *inter alia*, Dutchbat III veterans have been through – and what some of them are still going through – precisely because they feel so responsible. Recognition plays an important role in this respect and can help them cope with their mission experiences: recognition, after all, restores pride in one's job.

Notes

[1] Lifton, 1973; Glover, 1984; Kubany, 1994; Kubany et al., 1997.

[2] Singer, 2004.

[3] Wong et al., 1992; Leskela, Dieperink & Thuras, 2002; Harrigan, 2007.

[4] Army Doctrine Publication III - Peace Operations: 20.

[5] Broesder, 2008.

[6] Tangney & Dearing, 2002.

[7] Kubany & Ralston, 2006.

[8] Lewis, 1971.

[9] Herman, 2002.

[10] Kubany et al., 1997: The Sources of Trauma-Related Guilt Survey-War-Zone Version (STRGS-WZ).

[11] Wong & Cook, 1992; Leskela, Dieperink & Thuras, 2002; Harrigan, 2007.

[12] *'Internalized Shame Scale'*, Cook, 1989; *'Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale'*, Rosenberg, 1965 and *'Test of Self-Conscious Affect'*, Tangney et al., 1989.

[13] Including Tangney & Dearing, 2002; Leskela, Dieperink & Thuras, 2002; Harrigan, 2007.

[14] Lifton, 1973; Lifton,1987.