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A three year profile comparison of a group of Special Operations candidates

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**ABSTRACT:**

The present mixed methods study is based on responses to open-ended questions posed as well as quantitative positive psychology construct questionnaire data of three different year groups of military Special Operations Forces candidates. The study examined, from a Positive Psychology perspective, candidates' enlistment motivation in addition to their coping strategies. The qualitative results revealed that, despite candidates' various reasons for enlisting, all three year groups were motivated by some form of meaningful goal. In terms of coping strategies, this study revealed that candidates, who undergo Special Operations training, have a high Sense of Coherence, particularly with regard to meaningfulness that serve as an intrinsic motivator. The qualitative results revealed that South African Special Operations Forces operators have character strengths related to positive psychology constructs like Sense of Coherence, Locus of control, Self-efficacy and hardiness as important coping mechanisms in overcoming the challenges and obstacles within the Special Operations training context. The quantitative results showed similar profiles between the three year groups and in the comparison of selected and not-selected candidates across the three groups, only the meaningfulness sub-dimension of the sense of coherence construct showed a statistically significant difference between the two groups.