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Learning potential, career interest and coping profile of a group of SOF candidates

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ABSTRACT:

The aim of this mixed method study was to obtain a general profile of candidates (N=251) applying to join the Operational Forces of the South African National Defence Force in terms of their coping (hardiness, sense of coherence, locus of control and self-efficacy), learning potential and career related interests and to explore their reasons for wanting to become and their perceptions of what it takes to achieve success as an Operational Forces soldier. Furthermore, those that were successful in the selection (N=26) were compared on the various measures to those that were not successful (N=225). The results indicate that the applicant group show high levels of coping – in particular with regard to their sense of coherence and self-efficacy. In terms of their learning potential, their level of performance is commensurate with the tertiary diploma level of training for Operational Forces members. With regard to their career preferences, the sub-dimensions rated highest were Practical, Security, Precision, Formal, People, Outdoors, Challenges, Task Variety, Service and Sport – in line with the job demands of the Operational Forces context. In the comparison of the selected and not selected groups, the selected group showed statistically significantly higher mean scores on the meaningfulness sub-dimension of the sense of coherence construct and post-test of the learning potential measure. With regard to the career interest measure, the selected group showed lower levels of career related interest in Law and Medical when compared to the group that was not selected. The qualitative results showed strong evidence for the importance of meaningfulness for achieving success in the selection context. The findings of this study suggest that measures of coping, learning potential and career interest can contribute to the profiling of and prediction of success in the selection of operational force members.

