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Critics Call for Retraction of Flawed Army Resilience-Training Study

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In a report released today by the Coalition for an Ethical Psychology (http://www.ethicalpsychology.org/Eidelson-&-Soldz-CSF_Research_Fails_the_Test.pdf), two psychologists call upon the Army to retract or publicly correct a recent research report that claims the Army's \$140 million Comprehensive Soldier Fitness (CSF) resilience program "works." The psychologists Roy Eidelson and Stephen Soldz argue that the study design is flawed and that the results do not justify the researchers' favorable conclusions.

Report coauthor Roy Eidelson stated: "The over-hyping of CSF's effectiveness should be of concern to everyone, including taxpayers who have paid over \$100 million for the program, and especially the one million soldiers who are forced to participate in this massive experiment, whether they want to do so or not."

Without pilot testing, the CSF program was launched in 2009. It trains soldiers in thinking skills that purportedly diminish the likelihood of suffering post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), depression, suicide, and other combat-related psychological problems. CSF is based upon the "positive psychology" framework of University of Pennsylvania psychologist Martin Seligman.

In their new report Eidelson and Soldz identify five areas of serious concern with the Army's CSF evaluation: (1) the researchers' failure to measure the important outcomes of PTSD, depression, or other psychological disorders despite the availability of validated measures for doing so, (2) a flawed research design that fails to control for important confounding variables, (3) significant problems with the method of data analysis, (4) the researchers' failure to acknowledge plausible risks of harm from the CSF intervention, and (5) miscellaneous related issues of concern. Individually these concerns raise troubling questions regarding the CSF study. Taken together, they severely undercut the CSF researchers' assertion that "There is now sound scientific evidence that Comprehensive Soldier Fitness improves the resilience and psychological health of Soldiers."

Stephen Soldz, Professor at the Boston Graduate School of Psychoanalysis and report coauthor, noted that CSF has been the subject of a wide range of criticism since it was rolled out in 2009: "The problems identified with CSF are legion. It is time for the Army to step back from uncritically promoting this untested program. A careful, independent, evaluation is urgently called for."

Concerns raised by critics in the past span a wide range of significant issues, including indications that CSF is actually a research study involuntarily imposed upon troops without mandated protections such as independent ethical review by an institutional review board (IRB) and informed consent; the possibility that CSF may serve as a distraction from the documented adverse effects of multiple and lengthy deployments and high levels of combat exposure; potential negative effects of CSF, common in prevention programs, that have not been carefully considered or monitored; and the insufficient examination of ethical questions posed by efforts to build “indomitable” soldiers.

This new Coalition report follows a detailed critique last year of CSF by Eidelson, Soldz, and their colleague Marc Pilisuk, [*The Dark Side of Comprehensive Soldier Fitness*](#), which led to Congressional inquiries regarding the program. CSF has also been criticized in a series of comments in the October 2011 issue of the *American Psychologist* and by experts interviewed by the *PBS NewsHour* and other press.

About the research weaknesses they identify, Eidelson and Soldz conclude in their report:

“These scientific shortcomings are all the more troubling given the obvious importance of what is at stake here: soldiers’ welfare. It may be comforting to some to assume that, at worst, CSF is merely ineffective. However, we should not settle for such wishful thinking. It is not outlandish to suggest that CSF may negatively impact some soldiers, and unjustified enthusiasm about the program can prove costly in terms of directing attention and funding away from the consideration and development of alternatives that may be far more beneficial for our troops.

“It is not hard for us to imagine the tremendous pressures faced by those responsible for addressing and protecting the psychological health of the men and women who serve in our military. We recognize and admire the dedicated work of so many toward this goal. But in the search for answers, nobody benefits from research that, inadvertently or not, misrepresents the current state of knowledge and accomplishment in this arena. For this reason, we believe it is essential that the Comprehensive Soldier Fitness leadership correct the record in regard to their Research Report #3.”

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