



Moderating Role of Core Self-Evaluation in the Associations of Combat Exposure, Experiences and Military Personnel Professional Commitment

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Abstract

The study investigated the moderating role of core self-evaluation in the relationships of combat exposure, experiences and professional commitment among military personnel. Two hundred and fifty-two (252) Nigerian soldiers drawn from the Nigerian Army School of Military Engineering (NASME) and 72 Special Forces Battalion in Makurdi, Benue State, Nigeria, participated in the study. Four instruments: Combat Exposure Scale, Combat Experiences Scale, Core Self-Evaluation Scale and Professional Commitment Scale were used for data collection. We tested five hypotheses. The hierarchical multiple regression analysis results indicated that combat exposure, combat experiences and core self-evaluation were positively and significantly associated with the combatant's professional commitment. Core self-evaluation did not moderate the associations of combat exposure, combat experiences and the professional commitment of soldiers. Our study implications show that core self-evaluation, combat exposure, experience, and professional commitment of soldiers are needed to build capable combatants through cognitive restructuring for effective warfare against terrorism, banditry, crisis management, Fulani Herdsmen, and maintenance of global peace. We discussed other implications, and limitations and made suggestions for further research.

Keywords: *Combat experiences, combat exposure, core self-evaluation, ethno-religious deployment, Nigerian military personnel, and soldiers' professional commitment.*

Introduction

There are fears that Nigerian troops' professional and organizational commitment, both on and off duty, has been compromised (Abel et al., 2019; Bappah, 2016). Similarly, the country's fight against terrorism and other security issues are politically motivated (Bappah, 2016), and the resultant lack of professional commitment has harmed the effort (Abel, 2020). Professional commitment (PC) refers to attachments individuals form with their vocation for improved job satisfaction, adaptation, and reduced turnover intention (Bagrami, 2003). Commitment to the military, whether on-and-off duty, means adhering to the military's ethics (Allen, 2003) and values faithfully and consistently (Baba et al., 2019). When deployed for war, committed military members show competence in carrying out their responsibilities as well as character in their decisions and actions (Anderson & Rees, 2015) through sharing tacit knowledge with mutually trusted teams (Baba et al., 2019).

Professional commitment in the military is an attitude of purposefulness and loyalty to a mindful calling to serve a greater purpose than the individual (Griffith, 2021). Although, Allen (2003) observed that loyalty to a particular ethnic group, religion, geographical location, belief system, and value system predicts or influences soldiers' commitment, soldiers' commitment entails volunteers forming bonds and sharing identities as a motivator for their nation, which is more complex, internal, and multifaceted (King et al., 2006). The professional commitments of soldiers are based on the perceived legitimacy of a defence organisation decision (Gade, 2009), vocational identity, spirit and faith at work (Ujoatuonu et al., 2017), person-job-fit, job characteristics, day-to-day experiences (Odo et al., 2021), core self-evaluation, combat exposure, and experiences.

Combat exposure is a pathogenic stressor, leading to the beginning or worsening of organisational and professional adaptation, commitment, and increased burnout (Vinokur et al., 2011). Ogbole (2021) stated that recurrent experiences of negative mood-related thoughts, undesirable organisational outcomes, and hyperarousal symptoms might influence personnel commitment. A few examples of combat exposures are: being under enemy fire with colleagues missing or killed in action; seeing fellow soldiers, friends, and loved ones hit by incoming or incoming rounds; being surrounded by the enemy; being overrun, pinned down, ambushed, or having a close call; and going on patrols with little to no sleep. An individual's perceived threshold of invincibility can be altered by exposure to war and combat, having direct accountability for taking another person's life (Vermetten & Ambaum, 2019). Combat exposure lightly increases the propensity to engage in risky behaviour after serving in a war zone (Sudom et al., 2019).

Combat exposure alters a person's sensitivity, cognition, actions, emotional reactivity, brain function, sense of self, worldview, and spiritual beliefs (Kelber et al., 2019), as well as their commitment to their career and country (Adam & Ben, 2022).

Combat exposure takes a toll on self-efficacy and psychological distress (Abel et al., 2019), perceived work ability, person-job-fit, learning with vitality (Abel, 2020), spirit and faith at work, vocational identity (Ujoatuonu et al., 2017), psychological detachment, and soldiers' mental health (Vermetten & Ambaum, 2019). Among the most stressful experiences, soldiers encounter during combat is the exposure to dead and wounded soldiers and civilians (LeardMann et al., 2021). Regardless of how much colleague support from combatant units is necessary to buffer workers from the harmful effects of war stresses (Hosek & Martorell, 2009), battle exposure affects unproductive work behaviour, morale, breath, and stress (Ikin et al., 2004). Although exposure to and experience in combat seem to be inexorably linked, there is a significant difference between the two.

Combat experiences are defined as individuals' duty to engage in a fight or shootout involving exposure to life threats, work situations, participating in warfare, and battle-related circumstances (LeardMann et al., 2021). Enlistment procedures, job and deployment characteristics such as length, combat exposure, and morale are pertinent variables that may determine combat experience and the organisational commitment of soldiers (Carter, 2021). Individual differences in combat absorption have made male experiences differ from their female counterparts (Khan et al., 2014). The most significant experiences for the males include exposure to combat violence, feeling or loss of control, the lowest amount of sleep due to sleeplessness, inadequate living conditions,

and other combat-related supplies. In contrast, female combatants' most significant experiences include contact with offensive firearms, exposure to dead civilians, colleagues with significant others, being involved directly with combats, affection deprivation, with a loss of sense of control. These show that after fighting, soldiers experience numerous types of affliction (MaDonald, 2017).

Authors (e.g., Chhabra, 2020; Di Fabio et al., 2012; Shi et al., 2015) have suggested that core self-evaluation can moderate combat exposure, experience, and professional commitment. Core self-evaluation is a stable higher-order personality characteristic that comprises low neuroticism, fundamental evaluations, locus of control, abilities, strong emotional stability, and self-control (Judge et al., 2003). According to Shi et al. (2015), core self-evaluation can influence emotional intelligence, job satisfaction, instil confidence, competence, ability to cope with situations and problems, hope, control and determination needed for deserved success in an employee's career life. According to Di Fabio et al. (2012), attributes such as core self-evaluations may assist troops in thinking favourably of their abilities and remaining engaged in challenging decision-making scenarios.

Personnel with low core self-evaluations will have low emotional intelligence, be unsuccessful, and be dissatisfied with their lives, careers, and themselves (Di Fabio et al., 2012). They also experience increased stress, setbacks, conflicts, lack of confidence, and fail to capitalise on advantages and opportunities. Core self-evaluations are important because they represent a personality trait that will remain consistent over time and impact an employee's job satisfaction (Zhang et al., 2014). Furthermore, how people appraise themselves can predict positive work outcomes, like career adaptation (Xu & Yu, 2019), job satisfaction, workability, organisational commitment, and job performance (Zhang et al., 2014). Zhang et al. (2014) suggest that core self-evaluation relationships have inspired increasing research and suggest implications about the importance of people's commitment to their profession.

The Career Construction Theory (CCT) by Savickas (2005) explains how professionals grow their careers despite difficulties, disagreements, and difficult times in their career life cycle. Researchers (Chhabra, 2020; Di Fabio et al., 2012; Ismail et al., 2017; Merino-Tejedor et al., 2016) made it known that CCT may apply to the professional commitment of soldiers because, in the face of combat, insecurities, terrorism, and resurgences, soldiers need to restructure their career cognition for the best working ability (McCuaig Edge & Ivey, 2012). Also, to help them make decisions by investigating options before making a choice and learning new skills to help them prepare for and adapt to new careers (Merino-Tejedor et al., 2016). CCT not only presents a model that explains employees' vocational behaviour, engagement, and subjective success in a dynamic environment, but it also provides methods and tools that can assist military personnel in maintaining successful workability and core self-evaluation (Xie et al., 2016). Making the best vocational commitment in the face of insecurity challenges and combat (McCuaig Edge & Ivey, 2012).

We used CCT as our anchor theory to investigate how military personnel in the Nigerian defence organization mould themselves into whom they are when faced with resurgences, unidentified gunmen, banditry, and other security concerns. We, therefore, hypothesised that:

1. Combat exposure will have a significant positive relationship with professional commitment among Nigerian military personnel.
2. Combat experience will have a significant positive relationship with professional commitment among Nigerian military personnel.
3. Core self-evaluation will have a significant positive relationship with professional commitment among Nigerian military personnel.
4. Core self-evaluation will moderate the relationship between combat exposure and professional commitment among Nigerian military personnel.
5. Core self-evaluation will moderate the relationship between combat experience and professional commitment among Nigerian military personnel.

Method

Participants

The participants in this study comprised 252 Nigerian army personnel drawn from the Nigerian Army School of Military Engineering (NASME) and 72 Special Forces Battalion all in Makurdi, Benue State, Nigeria. The participants were purposively drawn from these training institutes to sample combatants duly and conveniently sampled soldiers that were available and less engaged that wants to participate in the study. Institutional ethical approval was obtained for the present study and the ages of the participants ranged from 18 to 50 years. Participants were requested to provide demographic information on years of service, number, age, marital status and educational qualification.

Instruments

Professional Commitment Questionnaire

The Professional Commitment Questionnaire was developed by Bagraim (2003) to measure an employee's effort, loyalty, value, pride, inspiration, gain, faith and care at work. The scale has three factors affection, continuance and normative and each factor has six items. It is an eighteen-item questionnaire measured on a seven-point Likert scale format ranging from 1= strongly disagree to 7= strongly agree. Sample items include; "Changing professions now would be difficult for me to do", and "I believe people who have been trained in a profession have a responsibility to stay in that profession for a reasonable period." However, the scale indicated that items out of the eighteen, five are reversed scored. Bagraim (2003) reported a Cronbach alpha of .75 (professional commitment affective), .87 (professional commitment continuance), and .73 (commitment affective normative). While a composite Cronbach alpha score of .95 (Bagraim, 2003). The present researchers conducted a pilot study to validate the Professional Commitment Scale for the present study on a sample of 80 and the items yielded high internal consistency reliability, Cronbach's alpha of .90.

Combat Exposure Scale

The Combat Exposure Scale (CES) is a seven-item self-report measure developed by Keane et al. (1989) to assess wartime stressors experienced by combatants in the form of combat patrols, being under enemy fire, surrounded by the enemy, experiencing teammates killed, wounded or missing in action, firing rounds at the enemy, seeing someone being hit by incoming or outgoing rounds and being injured or killed in combat. Combat Exposure Scale is rated on a 5-point Likert scale format ranging from (1=No to 51 + times) for item one (1= never to 5= 7 months or more) for item two; (1= No to 5= 26+ times) for item number three; (1= None to 5= 76% or more) for item number four; (1= Never to 5= 51 or more) for items number five, six and seven. Sample items include; "Did you ever go on combat patrols or have other dangerous duty?" "What percentage of the soldiers in your unit were killed (KIA), wounded or missing in action (MIA)?" "Were you ever under enemy fire?" Respondents are asked to respond based on their exposure to various combat situations, such as firing rounds at the enemy and being on dangerous duty. The total CES score (range from 0 to 41) and is calculated by using a sum of weighted scores, which can be classified into 1 of 5 categories of combat exposure ranging from "light" to "heavy." The CES was developed to be easily administered and scored and is useful in both research and clinical settings. Keane et al. (1989) reported a Cronbach alpha of .87. We conducted a pilot study to validate the Combat Exposure Scale for the present study on a sample of 80 military personnel and the items yielded high internal consistency reliability, Cronbach's alpha of .88.

Combat Experiences Scale

Combat Experience Scale is a thirty-three (33) item measure developed by Guyker et al., (2013) to assess deployment-related experiences of military personnel exposure to a combat environment, close physical engagement, in warzones with hostile, life-threatening work situations and proximity to serious injury or death. Also, this questionnaire assesses Veterans' subjective emotional distress that is due to objective and typical military combat scenarios during wars which participants directly experienced, bore witness to, and obtained information concerning, which results in different degrees of stress. The measure is scored on a five-point

Likert scale format ranging from 0 = never to 5 = 10 or more times. Sample items include: "Was attacked or ambushed." "In a threatening situation, but unable to respond because of rules of engagement." "Engaged in hand-to-hand combat." Guyker et al., (2013) reported a Cronbach alpha of .81. We conducted a pilot study to validate the Combat Experiences Scale for the present study on a sample of 80 military personnel and the items yielded good internal consistency reliability, Cronbach's alpha of .97.

Core Self-Evaluation Questionnaire

The Core Self-Evaluation Questionnaire was developed by Judge et al. (2003), to assess how individuals measure the success they deserve in life, when they feel depressed, worthless, not in control of their work, feel doubts about their competence and capable of coping with most of these problems. It is a twelve-item instrument measured on a five-point Likert scale response format ranging from 1= strongly disagree to 5= strongly agree. Sample items include; "I am confident I get the success I deserve in life", and "Sometimes, I do not feel in control of my work". Judge et al. (2003) reported a Cronbach's alpha of .80. We conducted a pilot study to validate the Core Self-Evaluation Scale for the present study on a sample of 80 military personnel and items yielded good internal consistency reliability, Cronbach's alpha of .85.

Procedures

An introductory letter to conduct this study in the selected training institutes was gotten from the Department of Psychology, Faculty of the Social Sciences, University of Nigeria, Nsukka and ethical approval was obtained from the training institutes. The researchers (n=5) visited the training institute in Makurdi, Benue State where Special Forces and engineering combatants are trained. The management and other relevant authorities were communicated to seek permission to allow their employees to participate in the study. With the approval of the relevant authorities, the researchers solicited participation from soldiers participating in the study. Informed consent was obtained from each respondent. Participants who were willing to take part in the study were given the questionnaire form comprising demographic and variables of interest in the present study. The participants were given ten minutes to complete the questionnaires during break periods or other appropriate times. A cover letter was included in the questionnaire to brief respondents about the nature and purpose of the study with assurance and confidentiality of their responses. Completed copies of the instruments were retrieved from the respondents with gratitude and appreciation expressed to the participants for completing the questionnaires.

Design/Data Analysis

The study adopted a cross-sectional design since the samples were drawn from the population at the same time. The reason for the cross-sectional design is because Nigerian soldiers do not have reserve personnel. Also, the process of conducting research with the military does not guarantee causal or longitudinal studies since researchers will be asked to structure their study so it cannot exceed one month for the distribution of questionnaires in the Nigerian defence organisation. Pearson's correlation (r) analysis was conducted among the study's demographic, predictor and dependent variables while model 1 of the Hayes (2018) regression-based PROCESS were applied for hypotheses testing. PROCESS conducts regression-based path analysis and creates product terms to analyze interaction effect, automatically (entering the predictor variables before analysis in psychology and management sciences research (Hayes, 2018).

Results

The results of the findings of this study are presented in this chapter. The descriptive statistics and correlations of the variables are shown in Table 1. The Hayes PROCESS Macro results for predicting the professional commitment of military personnel by combat exposure and core self-evaluation are shown in Table 2. The Hayes PROCESS Macro results for predicting the professional commitment of military personnel by combat experiences and core self-evaluation are shown in Table 3.

Table 1: Mean, Standard deviation and correlations of demographic factors, combat experiences, combat exposure, core self-evaluation and professional commitment of military personnel

Variables	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Age	-	-	-						
Years of Service	-	-	.70***	-					
Number of Children	1.19	1.94	.33***	.38***	-				
Education	-	-	.43***	.36***	.14*	-			
Combat Exposure	17.30	6.77	.32***	.43***	.32***	-.03	-		
Combat Experience	74.33	41.53	.37***	.37***	.26***	.06	.63***	-	
Core self-evaluation	44.51	12.63	.26***	.24***	.16*	-.02	.36***	.56***	-
Professional Commitment	32.08	11.55	.25***	.29***	.13*	-.04	.49***	.61***	.58***

Note. *** $p < .001$; * $p < .05$;

Table 1 showed that older age was positively associated with years of service ($r = .70, p < .001$), number of children ($r = .33, p < .001$), education ($r = .43, p < .001$), combat exposure ($r = .32, p < .001$), combat experience ($r = .37, p < .001$), core self-evaluation ($r = .26, p < .001$), and professional commitment of military personnel ($r = .25, p < .001$). Years of service-related positively with number of children ($r = .38, p < .001$), education ($r = .36, p < .001$), combat exposure ($r = .43, p < .001$), combat experience ($r = .37, p < .001$), core self-evaluation ($r = .24, p < .001$) and professional commitment of military personnel ($r = .29, p < .001$). Number of children correlated positively with education ($r = .14, p < .05$), combat exposure ($r = .32, p < .001$), combat experience ($r = .26, p < .001$), core self-evaluation ($r = .16, p < .05$) and professional commitment of military personnel ($r = .13, p < .05$). Combat exposure associated positively with combat experience ($r = .63, p < .001$), core self-evaluation ($r = .36, p < .001$) and professional commitment of military personnel ($r = .49, p < .001$). Combat experience was positively related to core self-evaluation ($r = .56, p < .001$) and a high level of professional commitment of military personnel, ($r = .61, p < .001$). Core self-evaluation was positively related to a high level of professional commitment of military personnel, ($r = .58, p < .001$).

Table 2: The Hayes PROCESS Macro results for predicting professional commitment of military personnel by combat exposure and core self-evaluation with age, years of service, and number of children as control variables

Variables	B	t	p	95%CI	R ²	F
Age	-.14	-.13	.900	[-2.38, 2.09]	.43	31.37 (6, 245)***
Years of Service	1.05	1.10	.272	[-.83, 2.93]		
Number of Children	-.41	-1.32	.190	[-1.04, .21]		
Combat Exposure (CE)	.54	5.16	.000	[.33, .74]		
Core Self-Evaluation (CS)	.42	8.53	.000	[.32, .52]		
CEXCS	.00	.09	.932	[-.01, .01]		

Note: CI = Confidence Interval

Results in Table 2 showed that combat exposure was positively associated with the professional commitment of military personnel ($B = .54, p < .001$). The B showed that each unit's rise in combat exposure was associated with a .54 increase in the professional commitment of military personnel. Core self-evaluation was positively associated with the professional commitment of military personnel ($B = .42, p < .05$). The B showed that each unit's rise in core self-evaluation was associated with a .42 increase in professional commitment of military personnel. The interaction of combat exposure and core self-evaluation was not significant ($B = .00$), indicating that core self-evaluation did not moderate the relationship between combat exposure and the professional commitment of military personnel. The R^2 of .43 for the model indicated that 43% of the variance

in the professional commitment of military personnel was explained on account of the entire variables, $F(6, 245) = 31.37$.

Table 3: The Hayes PROCESS Macro results for predicting professional commitment of military personnel by combat experiences and core self-evaluation with age, years of service, and number of children as control variables

Variables	<i>B</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	95% <i>CI</i>	<i>R</i> ²	<i>F</i>
Age	-.57	-.51	.610	[-2.76, 1.63]	.47	36.85 (6, 245)
Years of Service	1.62	1.82	.070	[-.14, 3.38]		
Number of Children	-.44	-1.44	.151	[-1.04, .16]		
Combat Experiences (CE)	.12	7.16	.000	[.09, .15]		
Core Self-Evaluation (PF)	.33	6.38	.000	[.23, .43]		
CEXPF	-.00	-1.96	.051	[-.00, .00]		

Note: *CI* = Confidence Interval

Results in Table 3 showed that combat experiences were positively associated with the professional commitment of military personnel ($B = .12, p < .001$). The B showed that each unit's rise in combat experiences was associated with a .12 increase in the professional commitment of military personnel. Core self-evaluation was positively associated with the professional commitment of military personnel ($B = .33, p < .001$). The B showed that each unit's rise in core self-evaluation was associated with a .33 increase in the professional commitment of military personnel. The interaction of combat experiences and core self-evaluation was not significant ($B = -.00$), indicating that core self-evaluation did not moderate the relationship between combat experiences and the professional commitment of military personnel. The R^2 of .47 for the model indicated that 47% of the variance in the professional commitment of military personnel was explained on account of the entire variables, $F(6, 2445) = 36.85$.

Summary of Major Findings

1. Combat exposure was positively associated with the professional commitment of military personnel, indicating that an increase in combat exposure was associated with the high professional commitment of military personnel.
2. Combat experiences were positively associated with the professional commitment of military personnel, indicating that an increase in combat experiences was associated with the high professional commitment of military personnel.
3. Core self-evaluation was positively associated with the professional commitment of military personnel, indicating that an increase in core self-evaluation was associated with the high professional commitment of military personnel.
4. The interaction of combat exposure and core self-evaluation was not significant, indicating that core self-evaluation did not moderate the relationship between combat exposure and the professional commitment of military personnel.
5. The interaction of combat experiences and core self-evaluation was not significant, indicating that core self-evaluation did not moderate the relationship between combat experiences and the professional commitment of military personnel.

Discussion

Combat exposure was positively associated with the professional commitment of military personnel. Thus hypothesis one was accepted. This result contradicts Adam and Ben (2022); Kelber et al. (2019) who found that combat exposure alters a person's sensitivity, cognition, actions, emotional reactivity, brain function, sense of self, worldview, and spiritual beliefs, as well as their commitment to their career and country. However, the

positive association found between combat exposure and professional commitment among Nigerian soldiers could be a result of resilience built through experience. It could also explain the relative lack of career choice provided by coercion and the high rate of unemployment in the country. Thus, soldiers stay committed irrespective of hard times and self-endangerment.

Combat experiences were positively associated with the professional commitment of military personnel. Thus hypothesis two was accepted. This result is supported by Odo et al. (2021) who found that the professional commitments of soldiers are based on the perceived person-job fit, job characteristics and day-to-day experiences (Odo et al., 2021). The result of the current study could explain professional commitment as one of the gains of experience in the military considering that the more difficulties one overcomes, the more his or her ability to overcome other difficulties and the more he or she becomes conversant and committed to the rules of the game. However, Ogbole (2021) found that recurrent experiences of negative mood-related thoughts, undesirable organizational outcomes, and hyperarousal symptoms might influence personnel commitment.

Core self-evaluation was positively associated with the professional commitment of military personnel. Thus hypothesis three was accepted. This result is in line with Shi et al. (2015) who found that core self-evaluation can influence emotional intelligence, job satisfaction, instil confidence, competence, ability to cope with situations and problems, hope, control and determination needed for deserved success in an employee's career life. The result of the current study could explain why self-examination is necessary for career choice and career success. It seems that the core self-evaluation increased commitment because most personnel understood their ability as fit for the job and therefore committed to their job appropriately.

The interaction of combat exposure and core self-evaluation was not significant, indicating that core self-evaluation did not moderate the relationship between combat exposure and the professional commitment of military personnel. Thus hypothesis four was not accepted. This result runs contrary to Zhang et al. (2014); Xu and Yu (2019) who conclude that how people appraise themselves can predict positive work outcomes, like career adaptation, job satisfaction, workability, organisational commitment, and job performance. The result of the present study might have been influenced by the limited job opportunities ravaging the Nigerian workspace. Likely, core self-evaluation matters less in the face of economic hardship.

The interaction of combat experiences and core self-evaluation was not significant indicating that core self-evaluation did not moderate the relationship between combat experiences and the professional commitment of military personnel. Thus hypothesis five was not accepted. This result contradicts Chabra (2020); Di Fabio et al. (2012); Shi et al. (2015) who observed that core self-evaluation can moderate combat exposure, experience, and professional commitment. The result of the current study might have been influenced by the realities of the Nigerian economic situation. Thus, whether or not they have core self-evaluation, those who experienced the devastations of war were still committed considering that there could be no other easy means of livelihood.

Implications of the study

The result of this study implies that core self-evaluation is an important psychological variable in military job commitment. Thus, it is not only necessary to select those who have what it takes to do the job, but also those who perceive themselves to have what it takes in addition. However, while core self-evaluation may matter as an independent variable, it matters less as a moderating variable in a less flourishing economy.

Limitations of the study

The use of a convenience sampling constraints generalization. The sampling procedure, however, entails the risk of self-selection bias. Possibly, the Nigerian armed forces personnel who were experiencing the most commitment at the time were also likely not selected. This could be the reason core self-evaluation did not moderate the relationships between combat exposure and combat experience and military professional

commitment. Secondly, the use of a cross-sectional design disallows causal statements. This made the researchers believe the study design was suited for the intention of the study, to address a specific theoretical issue rather than generate estimates for broad generalization. The researchers noted that survey studies for Nigerian armed forces and other para-military organizations often use similar sampling methods, which involve approaching samples purposefully. This was the case for each of the previous studies that were cited, which were concerned with the mediating or moderating role of person-job-fit on military commitment.

Suggestions for further study

Combat exposure, combat experience, core self-evaluation and commitment within the circumstances of the Nigerian Armed Services are highly relevant concepts. However, in the Nigerian insecurity context, there is a need for personnel to commit more to the military organization despite the condition of the environment in which they complete their responsibilities. Our limitations for advanced studies were interpreted in light of the study's findings and implications. It would be interesting for future research to investigate other possible mediators and moderators (e.g., job crafting, flow at work, appetitive aggression, dark personalities, and thriving at work) in the relationship between core self-evaluation, combat exposure and combat experience as they affect other work and organizational commitment.

Secondly, because cross-sectional design precludes implication of causality, longitudinal studies with more than a few measurement occurrences are desired to shed light on the causal associations linking work method control, psychological detachment, and conscientiousness with Nigerian armed forces personnel.

Summary and conclusion

This study investigated the moderating role of core self-evaluation in the relationships of combat exposure, experiences and professional commitment among military personnel. The result of the study indicates that: combat exposure was positively associated with the professional commitment of military personnel; combat experiences were positively associated with the professional commitment of military personnel, and core self-evaluation was positively associated with the professional commitment of military personnel. Furthermore, the interaction of combat exposure and core self-evaluation was not significant, indicating that core self-evaluation did not moderate the relationship between combat exposure and the professional commitment of military personnel. The interaction of combat experiences and core self-evaluation was not significant, indicating that core self-evaluation did not moderate the relationship between combat experiences and the professional commitment of military personnel. Our study concludes that while combat exposure, combat experience and core self-evaluation as independent variables may matter significantly in military professional commitment, core self-evaluation matters less as a moderator in a situation of economic instability, as there is less hope of finding other jobs when one loses his or her tie with the military.

Ethics approval and consent to participate: Ethical permission was obtained from the University of Nigeria, Nsukka's research ethics review committee (UNN/EC/010-SC/4002-JA.05). All of the participants in the study gave their informed consent. All methods were conducted in conformity with the Helsinki Declaration on Human Research.

Competing interests: The authors declare that they have no competing interests

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