

A Case Study on Physical Harassment Encountered by ROTC Advanced Officer

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ABSTRACT

Physical harassment within the Reserve Officers' Training Corps (ROTC) remains a sensitive yet significant issue that can affect leadership development, organizational culture, and the well-being of its members. This study was based on Power Control Theory and Organizational Climate Theory. A qualitative case study design was employed through in-depth interviews with ROTC Advanced Officers in Misamis University. The data were analyzed using Yin's five phase method, which includes organization of qualitative data, within case analysis, pattern matching, explanation building and cross case analysis. Physical harassment in the Reserve Officers' Training Corps (ROTC) is a touchy but important concern that can impact leadership formation, organizational culture, and members' well-being. Whereas earlier research has tended to survey the experiences of lower-level cadets, little research examines what advanced officers have to say on the matter, as they are tasked to maintain discipline and act as role models within the program. This research sought to explore and explain the lived experiences of ROTC senior officers who had experienced physical harassment. With a qualitative case study design, data were collected from 10 purposively chosen participants using in-depth interviewing and thematic analysis. Results indicated common themes that included power imbalance, normalization of physical punishment, emotional and psychological effects, and the tension between leadership and personal vulnerability. In spite of all these difficulties, the participants also identified resilience and coping mechanisms by which they were able to continue performing their functions. The findings of this study were useful in expanding knowledge regarding the dynamics of harassment in the context of ROTC units and provided a foundation for creating better policies, protective measures, and leadership training programs aimed at fostering a safer and more supportive environment.

Keywords: Coping Mechanisms; Leadership; Leadership Development; Harassment Prevention; Psychological Impact; Physical Harassment; Policy Recommendations; Reserve Officers' Training Corps (ROTC); Resilience Strategies; Vulnerability.

1. Introduction

The Reserve Officers' Training Corps (ROTC) is a vital part of the National Service Training Program (NSTP), designed to foster discipline, patriotism, and leadership among students through military education (Salvador, 2021). Advanced ROTC officers play a key role in maintaining order and modeling ethical leadership, yet the hierarchical structure of ROTC can also create environments where physical harassment and abuse of power persist (Gagnon, 2024). Such behaviors are sometimes rationalized as necessary for discipline, but they undermine the program's integrity and the well-being of cadets (Khraban, 2022). Physical harassment—defined as unwelcome physical contact or use of force to intimidate or dominate—can result in physical injury, emotional distress, and impaired leadership performance (Smyth, 2021). Despite efforts to promote respect and integrity, harassment remains a systemic issue, often concealed by a culture of silence and fear of retaliation (Täuber et al., 2022). This study investigates the lived experiences of ROTC advanced officers who have encountered physical harassment, focusing on the nature, causes, and consequences of such mistreatment within a university-based ROTC program. While much research centers on lower-ranking cadets, the vulnerability of advanced officers as potential victims is underexplored (Jefferson, 2024). This gap in the literature limits understanding of how power dynamics and organizational culture within ROTC can expose even leaders to mistreatment, thereby impacting their well-being and leadership effectiveness. By examining how these experiences affect leadership and personal growth, the study aims to inform policy reforms, strengthen accountability, and promote a safer, more ethical training environment for all ROTC members.

1.1. Study Objectives

1. Explore the different forms of physical harassment experienced by ROTC Advanced Officers during training and service.
2. Identify the factors that contribute to the occurrence of physical harassment within ROTC training environments.
3. Examine the impacts of physical harassment on the personal well-being, academic life, and leadership performance of the affected ROTC Advanced Officers.
4. Assess the effectiveness of existing mechanisms and policies in preventing and addressing incidents of physical harassment in ROTC programs
5. Provide recommendations for developing intervention strategies and policy improvements to promote a safer and more ethical ROTC training environment.

2. Methods

This study employed a qualitative case study design to explore the lived experiences of physical harassment among ROTC Advanced Officers, as this approach allows for an in-depth examination of complex, context-bound phenomena within their institutional setting (Hogan, 2023). Data were collected through in-depth, semi-structured interviews with ten purposively selected ROTC Advanced Officers at a university in Ozamiz City, chosen for their direct experiences with physical harassment within the program (Massey-Torres, 2023). Interviews were conducted in private locations to ensure confidentiality and openness, and supplemented by non-participant observations and review of relevant ROTC documents for triangulation. A semi-structured interview guide was used to elicit detailed narratives on the nature, context, and impact of harassment, as well as coping mechanisms and institutional responses. Ethical protocols were strictly observed, including formal review by the College Research Committee, informed consent, and adherence to the Data Privacy Act of 2012 to protect participant confidentiality and well-being. Data analysis followed Yin's (2014) five-phase case study methodology: organization of qualitative data, within-case analysis, pattern matching, explanation building, and cross-case analysis. Thematic coding was used to identify recurring patterns and contextual factors, with triangulation, constant comparison, and member checking enhancing rigor and trustworthiness. This systematic approach facilitated a comprehensive understanding of how physical harassment is experienced, rationalized, and addressed within the ROTC environment, supporting evidence-based recommendations for institutional reform.

3. Results and Discussions

3.1. Persistence of Traditional Military Culture and Passed-Down Disciplinary Practices

“Persistence of Traditional Military Culture and Passed-Down Disciplinary Practices” reflects how physical harassment within ROTC programs is sustained by long-standing norms and traditions that have become embedded in training culture. Participants emphasized that harsh disciplinary actions, including physical punishments and intense hardships, are often justified as part of “traditional military practice” and passed down

from one generation of officers to the next. This generational cycle reinforces the belief that enduring physical strain builds toughness, loyalty, and resilience, making such practices appear normal rather than abusive. The hierarchical structure of ROTC further contributes to the persistence of these behaviors, as cadets feel unable to question authority or challenge the actions of senior officers, thereby allowing harmful practices to continue unaddressed. As a result, the ROTC environment becomes one where historical customs override ethical considerations, and disciplinary methods rooted in tradition perpetuate a culture that normalizes physical harassment.

Generational Cycle of Harsh Training Practices

The participants' responses show that physical harassment in ROTC persists due to a generational cycle of traditional military practices that are repeatedly passed down. Statements describing the "same treatment they once received," "practices passed down by senior officers," and "military culture passed through generations" indicate that harsh disciplinary methods survive not because they are formally required, but because they have long been normalized. Senior officers often replicate the treatment they experienced, believing it to be essential for discipline and toughness. Over time, these inherited practices become embedded in the training culture, making physical harshness appear acceptable rather than abusive. This generational transmission reinforces a system where outdated methods persist and ethical concerns are overlooked.

The participants' responses show that harsh disciplinary practices persist because they are passed down through tradition and normalized within ROTC culture. This reflects Power-Control Theory, as senior officers repeat the treatment they once received, reinforcing existing power dynamics. It also aligns with Organizational Climate Theory, which explains how the ROTC environment sustains norms that view physical hardships as acceptable. Together, these factors embed outdated practices into the system, making physical harassment appear routine.

"Culture of passing down the same treatment they once received."

"Traditional military practices passed down by senior officers."

"Reflects traditional military culture passed through generations."

How that harsh military practices persist because they are rooted in long-standing traditions that normalize physical hardship (Brown, 2025). Explains that service members often view such treatment as inherited "military heritage," making it difficult to distinguish discipline from abuse (Dawson, 2025). Finds that organizational cultures with aggressive norms tend to normalize bullying and mistreatment (Quinn et al., 2025). Further argues that harassment continues when institutions tolerate or inadequately address abusive practices, allowing them to become routine (Täuber et al., 2022).

Generational Cycle of Harsh Training Practices highlights the need for ROTC programs to critically reassess inherited methods of discipline that rely on fear and physical punishment. Breaking this cycle requires instructors to adopt modern, learner-centered pedagogical approaches that build discipline through guidance rather than coercion. Training officers must be equipped with updated teaching strategies that promote motivation, resilience, and ethical leadership. Integrating reflective practice, positive reinforcement, and trauma-informed instruction

can help replace harmful traditions with healthier developmental techniques. By transforming outdated practices, ROTC programs can foster a safer and more effective learning environment that supports genuine character and leadership growth.

Hierarchical Structure that discourages Questioning

The participants show that misuse of authority often stems from deeply rooted organizational norms that influence both leaders and subordinates. One participant highlights a culture of hierarchy that makes it difficult to question actions, suggesting that strict obedience and fear of being labeled insubordinate prevent individuals from speaking out against unfair treatment. Another participant points to strict discipline enforcement and leadership testing, indicating that harsh or excessive actions are sometimes justified as a way to build resilience or maintain order. Together, these insights reveal how rigid structures and traditional leadership practices can create an environment where power is exercised unchecked, ultimately normalizing behaviors that may undermine morale, trust, and accountability within the organization.

The participants show that the misuse of authority is influenced by both structural power dynamics and the overall climate of the organization. The statement about a “culture of hierarchy that makes it difficult to question such actions” reflects Power-Control Theory, which explains how individuals in positions of authority tend to exercise greater control over subordinates, often leading to power imbalances that discourage resistance. In this context, leaders hold disproportionate influence, while subordinates adopt a passive role due to fear of repercussions, reinforcing a cycle where misuse of power becomes tolerated. At the same time, this hierarchical culture aligns with Organizational Climate Theory, as it shapes shared perceptions that questioning authority is unacceptable, creating an environment that normalizes silence and obedience. Meanwhile, the response describing “strict discipline enforcement and leadership testing” also mirrors Power-Control Theory, because leaders may use disciplinary practices to assert dominance and maintain control, framing harsh actions as necessary for order. This behavior is further reinforced by the organization’s climate, where rigid discipline and toughness may be valued, thus shaping expectations that harsh leadership is part of the institution’s identity. Together, these explanations demonstrate how both the distribution of power and the prevailing organizational climate contribute to practices that allow authority to be used—and sometimes misused—without challenge.

"Culture of hierarchy that makes it difficult... to question such actions."

"Strict discipline enforcement and leadership testing."

The persistence of traditional military culture and passed-down disciplinary practices helps explain why physical harassment and extreme discipline remain embedded in some cadet training programs (Stuart & Szeszeran, 2021). Historical norms valorizing toughness, hierarchy, and absolute obedience — even when not codified — tend to perpetuate across generations, making harsh punitive practices appear as necessary rites rather than abusive excesses (Serrano-Flores et al., 2024). Research shows that such entrenched organizational culture can contribute to toxic leadership and undermine mental health, morale, and trust among members of the institution. Consequently, traditional justifications of toughness and resilience risk normalizing harmful behaviors, allowing abusive practices to persist unchallenged under the guise of discipline and heritage (Tenorio, 2025).

A hierarchical structure that discourages questioning carries important pedagogical implications, particularly for training environments in security, military, police, or organizational leadership programs. When learners are conditioned to accept information or directives without inquiry, critical thinking, reflective judgment, and ethical decision-making become underdeveloped. This environment limits opportunities for open dialogue, reduces psychological safety, and prevents learners from challenging problematic practices or proposing innovative solutions. As a result, educators must intentionally design learning spaces that encourage respectful questioning, promote participatory discussion, and model shared authority to counterbalance rigid hierarchical norms. Doing so fosters empowered learners capable of analyzing power dynamics, voicing concerns, and developing leadership skills grounded in accountability and critical reflection—qualities essential for ethical and effective professional practice.

Belief in Hardship as a Foundation for Discipline and Toughness

The participants show that physical hardships are often perceived as essential components of organizational training and culture, reflecting beliefs that such experiences build toughness, resilience, and readiness for demanding duties. One participant emphasizes that physical hardships foster resilience, highlighting a mindset that enduring discomfort strengthens an individual's psychological and physical capacity. Another explains that hardships are viewed as tests of loyalty and obedience, suggesting that organizations may use difficult experiences to evaluate commitment and conformity to authority. A third participant notes that these hardships are also used as forms of discipline and accountability, indicating that challenging situations are intentionally imposed to correct behavior or reinforce standards. Altogether, these perspectives reveal how physical hardships become institutionalized tools for shaping behavior, assessing dedication, and cultivating a resilient and disciplined workforce.

The participants show that physical hardships are used in organizations to build toughness and resilience, reflecting a climate that normalizes endurance as a valued trait, consistent with Organizational Climate Theory. The view that hardships test loyalty, obedience, and resilience illustrates Power-Control Theory, as authority figures use challenging tasks to assert dominance and measure compliance. Similarly, framing hardships as discipline or accountability highlights how leaders exercise power to enforce conformity while the organizational climate legitimizes these practices. Together, these perspectives reveal that physical hardships function both as tools of control and as culturally reinforced expectations shaping behavior and resilience within the organization.

Physical hardships can build toughness and resilience."

"Hardships are viewed as a test of loyalty, obedience, and resilience."

"Used as a form of discipline, accountability, or to build toughness."

The persistence of traditional military culture and passed-down disciplinary practices helps explain why physical harassment and extreme discipline remain embedded in some cadet training programs, as recent reviews find that hazing and abusive initiation rituals continue across militaries worldwide despite official prohibitions (Parker, 2022). Historical norms that valorize toughness, endurance, and hierarchical obedience tend to be transmitted

across generations, making harsh punitive practices appear as necessary rites of passage rather than abuses (Trent III, 2025). Research shows such entrenched cultures increase the risk of mental health problems among personnel, as rigid hierarchies and normalized harsh discipline often coincide with bullying, hazing, and breakdowns in psychological well-being (Waldron, 2024). Consequently, this generational cycle of tradition-driven discipline can normalize abusive behavior, allowing harmful practices to continue unchallenged under the guise of standard training and organizational cohesion (Carey, 2025).

The belief in hardship as a foundation for discipline and toughness has important pedagogical implications for training programs that aim to develop resilience and professional competence. Exposing learners to challenging experiences can enhance perseverance and self-discipline, but these practices must be carefully structured and supervised to avoid physical or psychological harm. Educators should integrate reflection, feedback, and ethical reasoning alongside rigorous tasks to ensure learners develop both toughness and sound judgment. By balancing challenge with support, instructors can cultivate disciplined, resilient, and capable individuals prepared for demanding professional roles.

3.2. Reflective Leadership and the Responsible Exercise of Authority

Reflective Leadership and the Responsible Exercise of Authority highlights how experiences with harsh or misused authority shape leaders' approaches to discipline and guidance. Participants recognized that some actions were driven by a desire to assert power rather than develop skills, prompting them to reflect on how authority should be exercised fairly. As a result, they adopted balanced leadership practices that combine firmness with encouragement, empathy, and ethical consideration. Ultimately, this reflective process fosters leaders who are confident, responsible, and capable of maintaining discipline while respecting the dignity and growth of their subordinates.

Recognition of Authority Misuse

The participants show that experiences of harsh or excessive discipline often raise questions about the true intent behind leadership actions. The statement "It made me question if the intention was really to develop us or simply to assert authority" reflects a critical awareness that some practices may prioritize control over genuine skill development or growth. Similarly, the observation that "Some officers may also use it as a way to establish authority" indicates that certain leaders may consciously or unconsciously employ power to reinforce their dominance rather than to mentor or guide subordinates. The comment "Sometimes it is also caused by a misuse of authority..." highlights that improper application of disciplinary measures can occur, whether through misunderstanding, overreach, or lack of accountability, emphasizing the need for responsible and reflective leadership.

The participants show that harsh or excessive discipline is influenced by both power dynamics and organizational culture. The statement, "It made me question if the intention was really to develop us or simply to assert authority," reflects Power-Control Theory, highlighting how leaders may prioritize control over development, creating power imbalances. The observation that "Some officers may also use it as a way to establish authority"

demonstrates how hierarchical structures enable dominance, while shared organizational norms can tolerate such behavior, linking to Organizational Climate Theory. Finally, “Sometimes it is also caused by a misuse of authority...” underscores that when organizational climate condones unchecked authority, misuse becomes more likely, reinforcing a culture where control is exercised without accountability.

“It made me question if the intention was really to develop us or simply to assert authority.”

“Some officers may also use it as a way to establish authority.”

“Sometimes it is also caused by a misuse of authority...”

Reflective Leadership and the Responsible Exercise of Authority highlights how leaders’ awareness of misused power can foster more balanced and ethical approaches to discipline and guidance. Research shows that ethical and reflective leadership, which combines fairness, empathy, and accountability, enhances subordinate trust, psychological safety, and commitment (Beri, 2024). Leaders who model transparency and concern for subordinates promote a positive organizational climate, reducing reliance on coercion while encouraging constructive behavior (Hubbart, 024). Ultimately, reflective leadership transforms hierarchical authority into responsible guidance, supporting both organizational effectiveness and the personal growth of subordinates.

The theme Recognition of Authority Misuse carries significant pedagogical implications for leadership and training programs. Educators and trainers must emphasize critical reflection, helping learners identify when authority is being exercised to control rather than to develop skills or promote growth. This awareness encourages ethical decision-making, fosters accountability, and equips future leaders to question and correct improper practices without fear of reprisal. By integrating discussions, case studies, and experiential learning on power dynamics and misuse, training programs can cultivate leaders who exercise authority responsibly, balance discipline with fairness, and create organizational environments that prioritize respect, development, and trust.

Adopting Balanced Leadership Practices

The participants show that their experiences with harsh discipline led them to adopt more balanced and thoughtful leadership approaches. The statement, “As a leader, it made me avoid using extreme discipline, focused on encouragement and balanced correction,” reflects a shift from punitive methods to supportive guidance that promotes growth rather than fear. Similarly, “As a leader, I became more conscious of balancing strictness with fairness...” highlights the importance of maintaining authority while ensuring equitable and respectful discipline. The comment, “I also make sure to separate training discipline from unnecessary harassment...” underscores a commitment to ethical leadership and the well-being of subordinates.

The participants show that their leadership practices are shaped by both power dynamics and organizational climate. The statement, “As a leader, it made me avoid using extreme discipline, focused on encouragement and balanced correction,” reflects Power-Control Theory, as leaders consciously moderate authority to maintain structure without overexerting control. Similarly, “As a leader, I became more conscious of balancing strictness with fairness...” aligns with Organizational Climate Theory, highlighting how shared norms influence responsible exercise of authority. The comment, “I also make sure to separate training discipline from

unnecessary harassment..." demonstrates that leaders adapt their behavior to ethical and cultural expectations, ensuring power is applied fairly and respectfully.

"As a leader, it made me avoid using extreme discipline, focused on encouragement and balanced correction."

"As a leader, I became more conscious of balancing strictness with fairness..."

"I also make sure to separate training discipline from unnecessary harassment..."

Reflective Leadership and the Responsible Exercise of Authority emphasizes how experiences with misused power encourage leaders to adopt fair, empathetic, and ethically grounded approaches. Recent research shows that ethical and transformational leadership promotes trust, psychological safety, and employee well-being, fostering positive organizational climates (Huang et al., 2021). Leaders who exercise transparency, integrity, and individualized consideration help subordinates feel respected and motivated while maintaining discipline (Brigue & Orlu, 2023). Consequently, reflective leadership transforms hierarchical authority into responsible guidance that supports both organizational effectiveness and the personal growth of subordinates.

Adopting Balanced Leadership Practices has important pedagogical implications for leadership and training programs. Educators should emphasize the development of leaders who can balance authority with fairness, combining discipline with encouragement to foster growth and resilience in subordinates. Training should include opportunities for reflection, ethical decision-making, and feedback, helping learners distinguish between constructive correction and harmful practices. By modeling and reinforcing balanced leadership, instructors can cultivate leaders who maintain organizational standards while promoting trust, respect, and the well-being of their team members.

Learning Discipline with Respect and Care

The participants show that their experiences with leadership and discipline led to a deeper understanding of how to guide subordinates effectively and ethically. The statement, "Over time, I realized that discipline can be taught without crossing the line..." reflects a recognition that authority can be exercised firmly while respecting boundaries. Similarly, "It ultimately improved my confidence in handling cadets..." indicates that reflective practice enhances a leader's competence and decision-making in managing subordinates. The comment, "As a leader, it taught me to be empathetic yet firm..." emphasizes the importance of combining empathy with authority, fostering trust, respect, and effective leadership within the team.

The participants show that their experiences with leadership and discipline are influenced by both power dynamics and organizational culture. The statement, "Over time, I realized that discipline can be taught without crossing the line..." reflects Power-Control Theory, as it demonstrates a conscious effort to exercise authority responsibly without overusing power. Similarly, "It ultimately improved my confidence in handling cadets..." aligns with Organizational Climate Theory, showing that a positive climate supports learning, confidence, and effective management. The comment, "As a leader, it taught me to be empathetic yet firm..." illustrates how leaders apply both responsible authority and organizational norms to maintain discipline while fostering respect and trust.

“Over time, I realized that discipline can be taught without crossing the line...”

“It ultimately improved my confidence in handling cadets...”

“As a leader, it taught me to be empathetic yet firm...”

Reflective Leadership and the Responsible Exercise of Authority emphasizes how experiences with misused power encourage leaders to adopt fair, empathetic, and ethically grounded approaches. Recent studies show that ethical leadership enhances organizational justice, job satisfaction, and employee commitment, fostering a climate where subordinates feel respected and motivated (Ramlawati et al., 2023). Leaders who practice fairness, transparency, and integrity contribute to a positive organizational climate, discouraging coercive control while promoting responsibility and ethical behavior (Olusegun, 2024). Thus, reflective leadership transforms hierarchical authority into responsible guidance that maintains discipline while supporting trust, psychological safety, and the growth of subordinates.

The theme Learning Discipline with Respect and Care has significant pedagogical implications for leadership and training programs. Educators and trainers should emphasize that effective discipline does not rely on fear or harshness, but on teaching standards while respecting the dignity of subordinates. Training programs can incorporate reflective exercises, ethical decision-making, and feedback mechanisms to help learners balance firmness with empathy, ensuring that correction promotes growth rather than resentment. By modeling and reinforcing this approach, instructors cultivate leaders who maintain discipline, foster trust, and create a positive organizational environment that supports both performance and well-being.

3.3. Physical Hardships and Discipline as Tools for Testing Endurance and Obedience

Physical Hardships and Discipline as Tools for Testing Endurance and Obedience highlights how rigorous physical challenges are used in training programs to assess cadets' resilience, perseverance, and ability to follow commands under pressure. Participants reported that these hardships often occurred in response to mistakes, lapses in performance, or during critical phases of training such as inspections, drills, and early stages of the program. While some exercises were intended to build toughness and enforce discipline, several participants noted that the intensity or duration of punishments sometimes exceeded what was necessary, reflecting a fine line between constructive training and excessive or punitive measures. Overall, these experiences reveal that structured physical hardships serve both as tools for leadership evaluation and as mechanisms to instill endurance, obedience, and mental fortitude in a disciplined environment.

Triggered by Mistakes or Performance Errors

The participants show that physical hardships were often imposed as a response to mistakes or errors during training. The statement, “It usually happened during corrections or punishments for minor mistakes,” indicates that even small lapses could trigger disciplinary measures. Similarly, “Sometimes it was triggered by small mistakes or late responses” reflects how timing and attention to detail influenced when hardships were applied. The comment, “It happened to me due to drill errors or group mistakes,” further emphasizes that both individual

and collective errors were subject to correction through physical challenges, highlighting a structured approach to enforcing discipline.

The participants show that the use of physical hardships in response to mistakes is shaped by both hierarchical power structures and the norms of the organization. The statement, “It usually happened during corrections or punishments for minor mistakes,” reflects Power-Control Theory, as it demonstrates how authority figures exert control over subordinates to enforce compliance and maintain order. Similarly, “Sometimes it was triggered by small mistakes or late responses” aligns with Organizational Climate Theory, highlighting that shared perceptions and expectations within the organization normalize the use of strict corrective measures. The comment, “It happened to me due to drill errors or group mistakes,” illustrates the interplay of both theories, showing that disciplinary actions are influenced by formal authority as well as the prevailing cultural norms that dictate acceptable forms of enforcing discipline.

“It usually happened during corrections or punishments for minor mistakes.”

“Sometimes it was triggered by small mistakes or late responses.”

“It happened to me due to drill errors or group mistakes.”

Physical Hardships and Discipline as Tools for Testing Endurance and Obedience emphasizes how rigorous training challenges are used to assess cadets’ resilience, perseverance, and adherence to commands under pressure. Recent studies show that structured physical training can enhance strength, cardiorespiratory fitness, and mental toughness, supporting the development of discipline and endurance in military contexts (Tornero-Aguilera et al., 2024). However, excessive or prolonged exercises can lead to psychological stress, fatigue, and reduced performance, highlighting the fine line between constructive training and punitive measures (Zhou & Chen, 2024). These findings align with participants’ experiences, showing that while physical hardships can build mental and physical fortitude, careful balance is necessary to avoid adverse effects.

Triggered by Mistakes or Performance Errors has important pedagogical implications for leadership and training programs. Educators and trainers should emphasize that while mistakes can be used as learning opportunities, corrective measures should be applied constructively rather than punitively, ensuring that discipline promotes growth and skill development. Training programs can incorporate reflective practices, feedback, and guided corrective exercises to help learners understand the consequences of errors without fear of excessive punishment. By fostering a learning environment where mistakes are treated as teachable moments, instructors can cultivate resilience, accountability, and a culture of continuous improvement among trainees.

Testing Endurance, Resilience, and Discipline

The participants show that physical hardships are often deliberately used to test endurance, perseverance, and adherence to discipline. The statement, “Sometimes it was also because officers wanted to test our endurance and discipline under pressure,” reflects how challenging experiences are structured to push cadets beyond their comfort zones and build resilience. Similarly, “It is also sometimes used to correct mistakes and test perseverance” highlights the dual purpose of discipline as both corrective and developmental. The comment,

“Participants undergo this because it is viewed as a method of enforcing toughness and strict discipline,” emphasizes that such practices are rooted in organizational norms that value mental and physical fortitude as essential components of effective leadership.

The participants show that the use of physical hardships to test endurance and discipline reflects both hierarchical authority and organizational norms. The statement, “Sometimes it was also because officers wanted to test our endurance and discipline under pressure,” aligns with Power-Control Theory, as leaders deliberately exert control to shape behavior and ensure compliance under stressful conditions. Similarly, “It is also sometimes used to correct mistakes and test perseverance” connects to Organizational Climate Theory, highlighting that the shared norms and expectations within the organization normalize rigorous testing as a standard practice. The comment, “Participants undergo this because it is viewed as a method of enforcing toughness and strict discipline,” demonstrates the interplay of both theories, showing that power is exercised within a structured climate that values resilience, strict discipline, and conformity to organizational standards.

“Sometimes it was also because officers wanted to test our endurance and discipline under pressure.”

“It is also sometimes used to correct mistakes and test perseverance.”

“Participants undergo this because it is viewed as a method of enforcing toughness and strict discipline.”

Physical Hardships and Discipline as Tools for Testing Endurance and Obedience emphasizes how rigorous physical challenges in cadet training assess resilience, perseverance, and adherence to commands under pressure. Research shows that structured military-style training can enhance physical fitness, strength, and psychological readiness, supporting endurance and discipline (Abdullaeva & Olimboeva, 2025). However, excessive or prolonged physical stress can increase mental fatigue and impair performance, highlighting the fine line between constructive training and punitive measures (Pelz, 2024). These findings align with participants’ experiences, showing that while physical hardships build toughness and obedience, careful balance is required to protect both physical and mental well-being.

Testing Endurance, Resilience, and Discipline has important pedagogical implications for leadership and training programs. Educators should design training experiences that challenge learners physically and mentally while ensuring that these challenges are safe, constructive, and clearly linked to skill development. Reflection and feedback mechanisms can be incorporated to help learners understand the purpose of hardships, develop coping strategies, and build resilience without fostering fear or resentment. By emphasizing structured, purposeful challenges, instructors can cultivate disciplined, perseverant, and mentally resilient leaders who maintain motivation and ethical standards within the organization.

Excessive or Disproportionate Punishments

The participants show that some physical training practices went beyond what was necessary and became excessive or punitive. The statement, “The forms of physical harassment I experienced include excessive physical punishments such as prolonged push-ups, extended drills, and strenuous exercises beyond what was necessary for training,” highlights how routine exercises could become overly demanding. Similarly, “There were also times we

were forced to do physical exercises beyond safe limits like over 300 push-ups without rest as a form of punishment” emphasizes the extreme physical strain imposed on cadets. The comment, “I experienced rigorous physical punishments such as long runs under harsh conditions, carrying heavy loads, and repeated strenuous drills that sometimes felt excessive,” underscores the cumulative impact of such practices on both physical and mental well-being.

The participants’ experiences of excessive physical punishments reflect how hierarchical power and organizational norms influence discipline. The statement, “The forms of physical harassment I experienced include excessive physical punishments such as prolonged push-ups, extended drills, and strenuous exercises beyond what was necessary for training,” illustrates Power-Control Theory, showing how leaders use authority to enforce compliance. Similarly, “There were also times we were forced to do physical exercises beyond safe limits like over 300 push-ups without rest as a form of punishment” aligns with Organizational Climate Theory, highlighting how shared norms normalize extreme measures. The comment, “I experienced rigorous physical punishments such as long runs under harsh conditions, carrying heavy loads, and repeated strenuous drills that sometimes felt excessive,” demonstrates the interaction of both theories, revealing how structural authority and cultural expectations reinforce excessive discipline.

“The forms of physical harassment I experienced include excessive physical punishments such as prolonged push-ups, extended drills, and strenuous exercises beyond what was necessary for training.”

“There were also times we were forced to do physical exercises beyond safe limits like over 300 push-ups without rest as a form of punishment.”

“I experienced rigorous physical punishments such as long runs under harsh conditions, carrying heavy loads, and repeated strenuous drills that sometimes felt excessive.”

Physical Hardships and Discipline as Tools for Testing Endurance and Obedience emphasizes how rigorous physical challenges in cadet training assess resilience, perseverance, and obedience under pressure. Research shows that structured physical training improves both physical readiness and psychological resilience, helping cadets cope with stress-inducing tasks (Szamocki, 2024). At the same time, excessive or prolonged physical strain can elevate stress responses and negatively affect well-being, highlighting the importance of balancing intensity with safety (Sorensen et al., 2021). These findings support participants’ reports that physical hardships serve as tools for leadership evaluation and instilling endurance and mental fortitude while emphasizing the need for careful implementation.

Excessive or Disproportionate Punishments has important pedagogical implications for leadership and training programs. Educators and trainers should ensure that corrective measures are proportional, purposeful, and focused on skill development rather than instilling fear or exerting control. Training programs can incorporate structured feedback, reflection, and progressive challenges that promote learning while safeguarding physical and mental well-being. By emphasizing fair and balanced discipline, instructors can cultivate a positive organizational climate where resilience, accountability, and ethical behavior are developed without compromising morale or trust.

3.4. Developing Emotional Resilience and Mental Toughness through Challenging Experiences

The participants' experiences illustrate that challenging training situations, while physically and emotionally demanding, serve as catalysts for developing emotional resilience and mental toughness. Initially, many reported feelings of exhaustion, anxiety, demotivation, and self-doubt, highlighting the significant strain such experiences impose on both body and mind. Over time, however, these hardships prompted self-reflection, helping participants recognize the importance of emotional control, perseverance, and the ability to manage stress effectively. Ultimately, navigating these challenges enhanced their confidence, strengthened their capacity to remain composed under pressure, and fostered leadership competence, demonstrating that adversity can be a powerful tool for personal and professional growth.

Physical and Emotional Strain

The participants' responses indicate that physically and mentally demanding training experiences had a significant impact on their well-being. The statement, "Afterward, I felt both physically and mentally drained," highlights the immediate exhaustion caused by strenuous activities. Similarly, "It made me anxious during the following trainings" shows how these experiences also affected their emotional state, creating anticipatory stress for future sessions. The comment, "It caused fatigue, both physically and mentally," reinforces the combined physical and psychological toll, illustrating that the challenges extended beyond mere physical exertion to impact overall mental resilience.

The participants' experiences of physical and mental exhaustion reflect how hierarchical authority and organizational norms shape training practices. The statement, "Afterward, I felt both physically and mentally drained," illustrates Power-Control Theory, showing how leaders use authority to enforce compliance and discipline. Similarly, "It made me anxious during the following trainings" aligns with Organizational Climate Theory, as shared norms and expectations create stress and influence emotional experiences. The comment, "It caused fatigue, both physically and mentally," highlights how authority and organizational climate together produce taxing physical and emotional challenges for participants.

"Afterward, I felt both physically and mentally drained"

"It made me anxious during the following trainings"

"It caused fatigue, both physically and mentally."

Challenging training situations, while physically and emotionally demanding, can foster emotional resilience and mental toughness in cadets, as structured exposure to stress improves coping skills and stress management (Zueger et al., 2023). Cadets undergoing resilience-focused interventions before intense exercises reported greater motivation, positive affect, and lower stress reactivity compared to those without preparation, highlighting the role of reflection and coping in building psychological hardiness (GATEJ, 2024). Engagement in rigorous training also enhances adaptive capacity, with resilient soldiers maintaining mental health despite high-stress exposure and demonstrating better endurance (Norton-Gardner & Tramel, 2025). These findings support participants'

experiences that adversity, when combined with reflective practice, can strengthen confidence, composure under pressure, and leadership competence.

Physical and Emotional Strain has important pedagogical implications for training and leadership programs. Educators and trainers should design activities that challenge participants while ensuring safety and psychological well-being, avoiding unnecessary fatigue or stress that could hinder learning. Incorporating reflection, stress management strategies, and supportive feedback can help learners process physical and emotional strain constructively, transforming challenges into opportunities for growth. By balancing intensity with care, instructors can foster resilience, emotional regulation, and sustained motivation, creating a positive organizational climate conducive to both skill development and mental well-being.

Self-Reflection and Awareness

The participants' responses reveal the dual impact of challenging experiences on self-perception and leadership development. The statement, "It made me reflect on my capacity to lead with empathy and understanding," highlights how difficult situations can prompt self-reflection, encouraging participants to consider the importance of emotional intelligence and compassionate leadership. Conversely, "I felt humiliated and questioned my capability" illustrates the negative emotional impact, showing that such experiences can temporarily undermine confidence and self-worth. Together, these responses suggest that challenging training experiences can both challenge and cultivate leadership skills, depending on how individuals process and learn from the events.

The participants' responses show how hierarchical authority and organizational norms influence emotional experiences and leadership development. The statement, "It made me reflect on my capacity to lead with empathy and understanding," aligns with Organizational Climate Theory, as a supportive climate encourages self-reflection and the development of emotional intelligence. Conversely, "I felt humiliated and questioned my capability" reflects Power-Control Theory, where strict authority can undermine confidence and induce fear. Together, these responses highlight how structural authority and organizational climate shape both the emotional impact of training and the growth of responsible, empathetic leaders.

"It made me reflect on my capacity to lead with empathy and understanding"

"I felt humiliated and questioned my capability."

Challenging training environments that combine physical strain and psychological stress can act as catalysts for developing emotional resilience and mental toughness when individuals adapt effectively to them (Tornero-Aguilera et al., 2024). For example, resilience training in military cadets has been shown to improve physiological recovery, enhance motivation, and promote positive reappraisal of stressful situations (Zueger et al., 2023). Similarly, regular physical activity in adolescents strengthens mental toughness and the ability to cope with anxiety and emotional challenges, highlighting the role of perseverance in fostering psychological resilience (Husain, H., Samsudin et al., 2024). Overall, exposure to such challenges can bolster confidence, improve stress-management skills, and support leadership development, demonstrating that adversity can be a powerful tool for personal and professional growth (Thomas & Karalam, (2024).

The theme Self-Reflection and Awareness highlights the importance of integrating reflective practices into training and educational programs. Encouraging learners to critically examine their experiences allows them to identify personal strengths and areas for growth, fostering emotional intelligence, ethical decision-making, and adaptive leadership skills. Instructors can incorporate structured reflection exercises, journaling, or debriefing sessions to help participants process challenges and transform difficult experiences into learning opportunities. By cultivating a culture of self-awareness, organizations can promote resilience, accountability, and more thoughtful, empathetic approaches to leadership and teamwork.

Development of Emotional Resilience and Mental Toughness

The participants' responses demonstrate how challenging experiences contribute to the development of emotional resilience and mental strength. The statement, "Over time, it helped me develop emotional control and mental toughness," highlights the gradual growth in managing emotions under stress. Similarly, "It strengthened my endurance and taught me to remain composed even under pressure" reflects the enhancement of both psychological stability and the ability to perform effectively in demanding situations. The comment, "It helped me develop mental toughness and emotional balance," emphasizes the combined development of resilience and equilibrium, showing that repeated exposure to challenges can foster sustained personal and professional growth.

The participants' responses illustrate how structured challenges in training influence both individual resilience and perceptions of authority. The statement, "Over time, it helped me develop emotional control and mental toughness," aligns with Organizational Climate Theory, suggesting that a supportive and structured environment can foster growth in emotional regulation and coping skills. Similarly, "It strengthened my endurance and taught me to remain composed even under pressure" reflects how exposure to controlled stress under hierarchical supervision allows individuals to adapt, consistent with Power-Control Theory, where authority shapes behavior and responses. The comment, "It helped me develop mental toughness and emotional balance," highlights that the interplay between organizational norms and leadership practices can cultivate resilience while promoting awareness of appropriate and responsible use of authority.

"Over time, it helped me develop emotional control and mental toughness"

"It strengthened my endurance and taught me to remain composed even under pressure"

"It helped me develop mental toughness and emotional balance."

Challenging training environments that combine physical strain and psychological stress can act as catalysts for developing emotional resilience and mental toughness when individuals adapt effectively to them (Tornero-Aguilera et al., 2024). For example, resilience training in military cadets was shown to help participants appraise highly stressful exercises more positively, recover more quickly (lower cortisol response), and maintain higher motivation and positive affect. Similarly, structured programs aimed at building "mental toughness" underscore how repeated exposure to stressors—when managed properly—can enhance psychological adjustment, stress-management skills, and self-efficacy (Sharbaugh, 2025). Over time, these practices can strengthen confidence, improve stress-coping capacity, and support leadership readiness, suggesting that

adversity, when balanced with support and reflection, can foster significant personal and professional growth (Tornero-Aguilera et al., 2024).

Development of Emotional Resilience and Mental Toughness underscores the importance of incorporating structured challenges and reflective practices into educational and training programs. By exposing learners to manageable stressors and opportunities for problem-solving, instructors can help participants build coping strategies, perseverance, and emotional regulation skills. Integrating debriefing sessions, self-assessment, and guided reflection allows learners to process experiences, recognize growth, and develop adaptive responses to adversity. Ultimately, fostering resilience and mental toughness prepares individuals to face future challenges confidently, enhances leadership capabilities, and promotes a proactive and self-aware learning environment.

3.5. Impact of Training-Related Fatigue on Academic Concentration and Performance

Impact of Training-Related Fatigue on Academic Concentration and Performance highlights how the physical and mental exhaustion from demanding training sessions directly affects cadets' ability to focus and perform well in their academic tasks. Participants frequently described feeling tired, anxious, or mentally preoccupied, which made it harder for them to concentrate during classes or study sessions, as seen in statements such as struggling to stay awake or experiencing lapses in focus. Several noted temporary declines in academic performance, particularly during periods of consecutive training days or when fatigue carried over into exams. Overall, the theme reflects how rigorous training schedules create cognitive strain that interferes with academic engagement, demonstrating the need for balanced workloads and support systems to help learners manage both physical readiness and academic responsibilities effectively.

Carry-Over Fatigue Affecting Academic Focus

The first participant's statement, "Sometimes, the exhaustion from training spilled over into my academic life, making it harder to concentrate," shows how physical fatigue reduces mental focus and disrupts academic tasks. This indicates that intense training demands can impair cognitive processing even outside training hours. The second participant's response, "It made me anxious during the following trainings, which slightly affected my focus even in academics," highlights how emotional stress and anticipation of future training can also interfere with concentration. Together, these accounts reveal that both physical exhaustion and training-related anxiety negatively influence students' academic performance and overall ability to stay attentive in class.

The participant who said, "Sometimes, the exhaustion from training spilled over into my academic life, making it harder to concentrate," reflects how a demanding organizational climate creates physical fatigue that directly reduces cognitive focus beyond the training environment. This shows that when an organization normalizes high-pressure routines, its climate can negatively influence performance in other areas such as academics. Meanwhile, the participant who shared, "It made me anxious during the following trainings, which slightly affected my focus even in academics," illustrates Power Control Theory, where the exertion of strict or intimidating authority produces anxiety that affects behavior and concentration. Overall, both responses demonstrate how organizational structures and power dynamics collectively shape cadets' emotional well-being and academic functioning.

“Sometimes, the exhaustion from training spilled over into my academic life, making it harder to concentrate,”

“It made me anxious during the following trainings, which slightly affected my focus even in academics.”

Training-related fatigue and stress — whether physical, mental, or emotional — can significantly impair students’ concentration, cognitive functioning, and academic performance. Research shows that fatigue, sleep disruption, and stress among students are associated with reduced attention, mental exhaustion, and poorer capacity for learning and focus. For instance, studies find that when physical strain or stress load is high, students experience mental fatigue that interferes with studying, comprehension, and test performance (McCabe et al., 2023). Moreover, repeated or prolonged stressors without adequate recovery can lead to declines in well-being, lowered physiological recovery, and impaired cognitive control — all of which may translate into difficulties in academic engagement and performance.

Carry-Over Fatigue Affecting Academic Focus underscores the need for educators and trainers to recognize the interplay between physical training and academic responsibilities. Students experiencing fatigue from rigorous training may struggle with concentration, retention, and timely completion of academic tasks, highlighting the importance of designing balanced schedules that allow for adequate rest and recovery. Incorporating strategies such as staggered training sessions, structured breaks, and mindfulness or stress-management exercises can help mitigate the negative impact of fatigue on learning. Ultimately, acknowledging and addressing carry-over fatigue promotes both academic success and overall well-being, fostering a holistic approach to student development.

Temporary Decline in Academic Performance Due to Exhaustion

The participants’ responses highlight how consecutive training days and accumulated fatigue can negatively impact academic performance. One participant noted, “There were days when my academic performance dropped due to tiredness from consecutive training days,” indicating that physical exhaustion directly affected their ability to perform academically. Another stated, “The physical and mental fatigue sometimes interfered with my academic concentration, especially during exams,” showing that cognitive focus and exam readiness were compromised by the demands of training. Together, these experiences reveal that sustained physical and mental strain from rigorous training can carry over into academic tasks, emphasizing the need for balancing training intensity with cognitive recovery.

The participants’ responses illustrate how hierarchical and high-pressure training environments, as explained by power control theory, can affect academic performance through fatigue and stress. One participant noted, “There were days when my academic performance dropped due to tiredness from consecutive training days,” showing how strict discipline limits personal autonomy and carries over into academics. Another stated, “The physical and mental fatigue sometimes interfered with my academic concentration, especially during exams,” reflecting how an organizational climate emphasizing toughness may compromise individual well-being. These insights indicate that authority and rigid organizational practices can influence cognitive functioning and overall morale in training contexts.

“There were days when my academic performance dropped due to tiredness from consecutive training days,”

“The physical and mental fatigue sometimes interfered with my academic concentration, especially during exams.”

Training-related fatigue and stress in cadets — arising from intensive physical or military-style training — can impair cognitive performance and concentration, which in turn undermines academic functioning. Studies show that after demanding training sessions, individuals exhibit significant declines in strength, neuro-cognitive performance, and increased subjective fatigue — all of which can disrupt study focus, memory, and decision-making (Skala, & Zemkova, 2022). Research on student-athletes and physically active students also reveals that when physical workload is excessive and recovery insufficient, academic tasks such as concentration, attention, and exam performance often suffer (Miranda-Comas et al., 2022). These findings support participants’ reports that rigorous training schedules — without proper rest or balance — can create cognitive strain, reducing academic engagement, performance, and mental well-being.

Temporary Decline in Academic Performance Due to Exhaustion highlights the need for educators and trainers to recognize the cognitive impact of physically and mentally demanding training on students. When cadets experience fatigue from consecutive training sessions, their ability to focus, retain information, and perform well academically can temporarily decline, as noted by participants. Pedagogically, this underscores the importance of integrating rest periods, time management strategies, and cognitive support within training programs to ensure that learning is not compromised. Additionally, instructors should monitor students’ well-being and adjust workloads to balance rigorous training with academic responsibilities, promoting both physical readiness and academic success.

Struggles in Balancing Training Demands and Academic Responsibilities

The participants’ responses indicate that while training-induced fatigue did impact their academic performance, they actively sought strategies to mitigate these effects. One participant noted, “My academic performance was slightly affected because of exhaustion, but I managed to balance it through time management,” highlighting the use of planning and prioritization to maintain academic responsibilities. Similarly, another shared, “Though training was exhausting, I made sure it didn’t affect my studies too much, but there were times I struggled to stay awake in class,” reflecting the challenges of sustaining focus despite physical and mental strain. Together, these answers show that cadets develop coping mechanisms to manage the dual demands of rigorous training and academic obligations.

The participants’ answers show how demanding training affects academic performance while reflecting organizational power dynamics. One stated, “My academic performance was slightly affected because of exhaustion, but I managed to balance it through time management,” illustrating individual strategies to cope within a hierarchical system, consistent with power control theory (Hagan, 2020). Another said, “Though training was exhausting, I made sure it didn’t affect my studies too much, but there were times I struggled to stay awake in class,” highlighting how a rigorous organizational climate can create stress that spills over into academics (Schneider et al., 2021). Together, these responses show that cadets navigate authority-imposed demands while employing personal strategies to maintain performance under pressure.

“My academic performance was slightly affected because of exhaustion, but I managed to balance it through time management,”

“Though training was exhausting, I made sure it didn’t affect my studies too much, but there were times I struggled to stay awake in class.”

The physical and mental exhaustion from demanding training sessions can significantly impair cognitive functioning — including attention, alertness, and executive control — which undermines academic concentration and performance. For instance, a study found that extensive military-style training combined with restricted sleep resulted in fatigue and diminished recovery, which correlated with impaired cognitive performance in tasks demanding sustained attention and decision-making (Petrofsky et al., 2022). Other research on college students indicates that fatigue and poor sleep quality — common consequences of heavy training or workload — are associated with reduced concentration, decreased learning capacity, and decline in academic outcomes (Li et al., 2022). These findings support participants’ reports that rigorous training schedules can cause temporary academic disruption, underscoring the importance of balancing training demands with adequate rest and recovery to safeguard both physical readiness and academic success.

Struggles in Balancing Training Demands and Academic Responsibilities underscores the need for educators and training coordinators to recognize the cognitive and physical load placed on cadets. Prolonged or intensive training can spill over into academic tasks, affecting concentration, study habits, and overall performance, which suggests that time management and recovery strategies should be explicitly taught and reinforced. Incorporating structured schedules that balance rigorous training with sufficient rest, academic support, and stress-management programs can help students maintain both physical readiness and learning outcomes. Pedagogically, this highlights the importance of fostering self-regulation, resilience, and organizational skills to ensure cadets can meet dual demands effectively while minimizing burnout and academic setbacks.

3.6. Physical Hardships and Discipline as a Method of Training and Testing Cadets

Physical Hardships and Discipline as a Method of Training and Testing Cadets highlights how rigorous physical challenges are strategically used to assess cadets’ resilience, perseverance, and obedience. Participants reported that these hardships often occurred in response to minor mistakes, lapses in performance, or during critical phases of training such as drills, inspections, or early stages of the program. While some exercises aimed to build toughness and reinforce discipline, several participants noted that the intensity or duration of certain practices sometimes exceeded what was necessary, reflecting a fine line between constructive training and punitive measures. Overall, these experiences demonstrate that physical hardships function both as tools for leadership evaluation and as mechanisms to instill mental fortitude, endurance, and adherence to commands within a highly disciplined environment.

Discipline Triggered by Minor Mistakes or Performance Errors

The participants’ responses indicate that physical hardships were commonly imposed as a response to mistakes, whether minor or significant. Participant 1 noted that such measures “usually happened during corrections or

punishments for minor mistakes,” highlighting how even small lapses could trigger disciplinary actions. Similarly, Participant 2 observed that “sometimes it was triggered by small mistakes or late responses,” emphasizing the role of timing and attentiveness in determining when training punishments occurred. Participant 3 added that “they usually happened during critical inspections, field training exercises, or when mistakes were committed,” suggesting that high-pressure situations or performance errors often prompted these corrective measures, reinforcing discipline and accountability.

The participants’ experiences illustrate how authority and organizational structure shape disciplinary practices, consistent with power control theory and organizational climate theory. Participant 1’s remark that hardships “usually happened during corrections or punishments for minor mistakes” shows how authority is exercised to enforce compliance. Participant 2’s statement, “sometimes it was triggered by small mistakes or late responses,” highlights the influence of a strict organizational climate on when discipline is applied. Participant 3’s observation that “they usually happened during critical inspections, field training exercises, or when mistakes were committed” reflects how hierarchical norms and performance expectations guide the use of corrective measures.

“It usually happened during corrections or punishments for minor mistakes.”

“Sometimes it was triggered by small mistakes or late responses.”

“They usually happened during critical inspections, field training exercises, or when mistakes were committed.”

The use of rigorous physical challenges and stress-inducing discipline to test cadets’ resilience, obedience, and mental toughness is supported by research showing that intensive military-style training can impair cognitive performance and increase fatigue and stress in personnel. For example, after a week-long commando-style training, participants exhibited increased subjective fatigue, degraded parasympathetic functioning, and slower reaction times, indicating that these harsh training routines can undermine cognitive functions essential for both training and academic tasks (von Bastian et al., 2022). Moreover, a systematic review found that task-specific military training often leads to significant muscle damage, reductions in power and strength, and increased recovery times — physiological stressors that can accumulate and impact both physical readiness and overall functioning if not properly managed (Vaara et al., 2022). Thus, while physical hardships may be intended to build endurance and discipline, empirical evidence suggests that without proper recovery and balance, such practices risk causing cognitive and physiological strain that could undermine both training effectiveness and individual well-being.

Discipline Triggered by Minor Mistakes or Performance Errors highlights the need for educators and trainers to carefully balance corrective actions with supportive learning strategies. While holding learners accountable for errors can foster attention to detail, perseverance, and resilience, excessive or disproportionate discipline may lead to anxiety, reduced motivation, and hindered cognitive engagement. Pedagogically, instructors should emphasize constructive feedback, reflective learning, and gradual skill development rather than relying solely on punitive measures. Integrating corrective guidance with encouragement helps learners internalize lessons, build self-confidence, and develop both technical competence and emotional resilience in a safe and effective learning environment.

Testing Endurance, Perseverance, and Obedience

The participants' responses indicate that physical hardships were not only corrective but also intentionally used to test endurance and perseverance. Participant 1 highlighted that some challenges were designed to push cadets under pressure, emphasizing the development of discipline in high-stress situations. Participant 2 noted that these exercises served a dual purpose of correcting mistakes while simultaneously testing perseverance, suggesting a structured approach to resilience-building. Participant 3 emphasized that such hardships assessed both physical and mental capacity, indicating that training sought to measure the limits of cadets' endurance and their ability to withstand stress during drills and commands.

The responses demonstrate how hierarchical authority and organizational norms influence the imposition of physical hardships in training. According to power-control theory, testing endurance under pressure reflects the exercise of legitimate authority to maintain control and assess compliance within the hierarchy. The use of hardships to correct mistakes and test perseverance aligns with organizational climate theory, indicating that the training environment fosters a culture of resilience where stress and correction are normalized as part of learning expectations. Emphasizing the assessment of physical and mental limits illustrates how authority is exercised through structured challenges, reinforcing both obedience and the prevailing disciplinary climate within the ROTC program.

"Sometimes it was also because officers wanted to test our endurance and discipline under pressure."

"It is also sometimes used to correct mistakes and test perseverance."

"I think it happened to me as a consequence of mistakes during commands and drills. It also served as a test of how far I could endure physical and mental stress."

The use of rigorous physical challenges and stress-inducing training to test cadets' resilience, discipline, and mental toughness is supported by empirical studies showing that intensive military-style training can cause significant physiological strain and cognitive fatigue. Participants often experienced these hardships during critical phases of training, such as drills, inspections, or early stages of the program, reflecting how discipline is enforced through structured stressors (Hoffman, 2025). While such exercises aim to build toughness and reinforce obedience, evidence suggests that excessive or prolonged physical stress may impair recovery, cognitive performance, and overall readiness, highlighting the fine line between constructive and punitive training. Therefore, structured physical hardships can serve as tools for leadership evaluation and instilling mental fortitude, but they must be balanced with appropriate rest and support to optimize both training effectiveness and cadet well-being (Fernandes & Madhulika, (2024).

Testing Endurance, Perseverance, and Obedience highlights the importance of integrating structured challenges into training programs to develop not only physical capabilities but also mental resilience and self-discipline. Pedagogically, this implies that educators and trainers should design activities that progressively test students' limits while providing clear objectives and guidance, ensuring that hardships are constructive rather than purely punitive. Such an approach fosters perseverance, encourages adherence to instructions, and strengthens the ability

to cope with stress, which are essential skills in both military and civilian leadership contexts. Additionally, instructors must balance rigor with support, offering feedback and reflection opportunities to help learners internalize lessons and develop a strong sense of responsibility and self-regulation.

Excessive or Punitive Physical Practices Beyond Necessity

The participants' answers reveal that some physical training practices went beyond what was necessary, becoming excessive or punitive. One participant stated, "The forms of physical harassment I experienced include excessive physical punishments such as prolonged push-ups, extended drills, and strenuous exercises beyond what was necessary for training," showing that routine exercises sometimes caused undue physical strain. Another noted, "There were also times we were forced to do physical exercises beyond safe limits like over 300 push-ups without rest as a form of punishment," highlighting extreme intensity in corrective measures. A third participant added, "I have experienced being subjected to intense push-ups, long runs, and carrying heavy loads beyond what was necessary, even in situations where the punishment did not match the mistake committed," illustrating a lack of proportionality in discipline.

The participants' experiences of excessive physical punishments can be analyzed through power-control theory and organizational climate theory. Power-control theory explains that the imposition of intense drills, prolonged push-ups, and overexertion reflects hierarchical power dynamics, where authority figures exert control to enforce compliance and maintain discipline. Organizational climate theory suggests that the ROTC environment, shaped by norms and expectations, fosters a culture where excessive physical hardship is normalized as part of performance evaluation and toughness training. Together, these theories illustrate that both formal authority and the embedded organizational culture enable the continuation of physically demanding practices, even when they exceed reasonable limits.

"The forms of physical harassment I experienced include excessive physical punishments such as prolonged push-ups, extended drills, and strenuous exercises beyond what was necessary for training."

"There were also times we were forced to do physical exercises beyond safe limits like over 300 push-ups without rest as a form of punishment."

"I have experienced being subjected to intense push-ups, long runs, and carrying heavy loads beyond what was necessary, even in situations where the punishment did not match the mistake committed."

Rigorous physical training in military and cadet settings — including prolonged drills, intense exercises, and stress-inducing field tasks — is often used intentionally to test resilience, obedience, and mental toughness. Empirical studies show that such training reliably produces acute physiological stress, muscle damage, and impairments in strength and power in the hours and days following exercise. Further, specialized trials such as commando-style courses — involving sleep deprivation, heavy load carriage, and continuous exertion — have been documented to increase subjective fatigue, degrade cognitive performance (reaction time and accuracy), and impair decision-making processes in participants (Behrens et al., 2023). While these demanding conditions may aim to forge discipline and endurance, the literature also cautions that when hardship is excessive or recovery is

inadequate, the cost can be significant — compromising both physical readiness and psychological/cognitive functioning (Mumu, 2024).

Excessive or Punitive Physical Practices Beyond Necessity carries important pedagogical implications for training programs and instructional design. Educators and trainers must recognize that while physical challenges can develop resilience, endurance, and discipline, exceeding safe or reasonable limits can have detrimental effects on both physical health and mental well-being, ultimately undermining learning outcomes. Instructional programs should therefore include structured, progressive physical tasks that are aligned with the intended learning objectives while allowing adequate recovery and support. Moreover, trainers should incorporate reflective debriefing and emphasize ethical leadership and empathy, ensuring that discipline and performance standards are enforced constructively rather than through punitive or disproportionate measures.

3.7. Combined Verbal and Physical Punitive Training Practices Leading to Psychological Strain

“Combined Verbal and Physical Punitive Training Practices Leading to Psychological Strain” highlights how trainees experience simultaneous verbal aggression and strenuous physical punishment during high-pressure training situations. Participants reported being shouted at, scolded, and humiliated while performing exhausting drills such as prolonged push-ups, squats, and continuous exercises. These practices, often triggered by minor mistakes or unmet expectations, create an environment of fear and pressure rather than learning and discipline. As a result, trainees develop anxiety, emotional fatigue, and mental distress, showing that the combined punitive approach negatively affects their overall well-being.

Verbal Aggression and Harsh Reprimands

The participants’ responses consistently show that verbal aggression, such as shouting, harsh words, and loud scolding, was a common disciplinary method during training. Many described repeated instances of being yelled at by instructors, indicating that this behavior was not occasional but a regular part of their training environment. Several participants also emphasized that the intensity of these reprimands created emotional pressure and mental fatigue, making the experience stressful and psychologically draining. Overall, their statements reveal that constant verbal aggression significantly contributed to a hostile atmosphere that negatively affected their well-being.

The participants’ experiences of being verbally scolded and shouted at, as seen in statements like “*The incident involved intense verbal scolding...*” and “*It involved shouting, harsh words...*”, reflect the exercise of authority to enforce compliance, consistent with Power-Control Theory. This theory suggests that those in positions of power use control to maintain hierarchy and discipline, which in this context manifests as verbal aggression toward trainees. Additionally, responses such as “*The verbal aggression... made the experience mentally draining*” and “*The combination of loud reprimands... made the experience more stressful*” illustrate how the organizational climate—the shared norms and practices within the training environment—reinforces these punitive behaviors. Together, these answers show that the combination of authority and a strict organizational climate creates a high-pressure environment that prioritizes obedience over psychological well-being.

“The incident involved intense verbal scolding...”

“It involved shouting, harsh words...”

“The incident involved being shouted at...”

“This includes being shouted at...”

“I experienced being scolded loudly...”

“There were moments when instructors shouted at us...”

“Sometimes, verbal aggression adds emotional pressure...”

“The harassment I experienced included being shouted at...”

“I experienced being yelled at...”

“The verbal aggression... made the experience mentally draining.”

“The combination of loud reprimands... made the experience more stressful.”

“The incident involved being yelled at...”

Recent evidence indicates that contexts combining verbal aggression and physical punishment — such as harsh scolding, humiliation, and corporal discipline — are strongly associated with negative mental-health outcomes among trainees and adolescents (Wigg & Leow, 2025). In institutional settings, public humiliation and punitive practices have been linked to increases in anxiety, depression, stress, burnout, and lowered psychological well-being. Moreover, physical punishment itself remains associated with long-term detrimental consequences for mental health, social-emotional development, and behavioral adjustment, even when cultural context normalizes it (Cuartas et al., 2025). Together, these findings corroborate that a punitive training regime combining verbal and physical punishment is likely to produce not only immediate compliance but also enduring emotional strain and reduced psychological well-being.

The Verbal Aggression and harsh reprimands highlight the detrimental effects of using shouting, scolding, and harsh verbal punishment as a method of discipline in training or educational settings. Pedagogically, this suggests that instructors and trainers should prioritize constructive feedback and positive reinforcement over aggressive verbal correction, as the latter can create anxiety, reduce motivation, and hinder learning. By fostering a supportive and respectful learning environment, educators can maintain discipline while promoting psychological safety, engagement, and resilience among learners. Therefore, adopting communication strategies that emphasize encouragement, clear guidance, and problem-solving can improve both trainee performance and overall well-being.

Physical Punishment through Strenuous Exercises

The participants’ responses consistently show that physical exercises were used as a form of punishment during training. Statements like “...strenuous physical punishment like push-ups and long holding positions” and “...physical tasks such as prolonged push-ups” indicate that demanding drills were deliberately imposed to

enforce discipline. Many participants described continuous or excessive exercises, including push-ups, squats, crawling, and extra laps, often assigned for minor mistakes, as seen in *“Excessive physical drills for minor mistakes”*. These accounts reveal that such physically strenuous punishments not only aimed to ensure compliance but also contributed to significant physical exhaustion and strain.

The participants’ experiences of being subjected to strenuous physical exercises, such as push-ups, squats, and crawling, reflect the enforcement of authority, consistent with Power-Control Theory, which emphasizes using coercion to maintain compliance and discipline. Statements like *“...continuous physical exercises such as push-ups, squats, and crawling”* and *“Excessive physical drills for minor mistakes”* show how trainers used physical punishment to correct behavior and enforce obedience. From the Organizational Climate Theory perspective, these practices reveal a training environment that normalizes strict discipline and high-pressure expectations, shaping trainees’ perceptions of acceptable behavior. Together, these experiences demonstrate that the combination of hierarchical power and a punitive organizational climate ensures compliance but also imposes considerable physical and psychological strain.

“...strenuous physical punishment like push-ups and long holding positions.”

“...physical tasks such as prolonged push-ups.”

“...continuous physical exercises such as push-ups, squats, and crawling.”

“Assigned to do excessive physical tasks.”

“Ordered to perform push-ups and other exhausting drills.”

“Continuous exercises such as push-ups and squats.”

“Physical exercises as punishment.”

“Push-ups and other strenuous activities.”

“Excessive physical drills for minor mistakes.”

“Extra laps and push-ups.”

“It was physically exhausting.”

Evidence shows that punitive practices combining physical punishment and verbal aggression—such as enforced drills, prolonged push-ups, and humiliating scolding—are strongly associated with negative mental health outcomes, including anxiety, depression, and emotional distress. Physical discipline, even in institutional or training settings, has been linked to long-term impairments in psychological well-being and altered neural responses to stress and reward, suggesting lasting consequences beyond immediate compliance. Moreover, verbal aggression alone—such as harsh scolding and humiliation—can erode self-esteem and psychological wellness, showing that non-physical forms of punishment are not “harmless” and may compound the effects of physical punishment (Ateşoğlu & Demirkasimoğlu, 2025). Together, these findings support the conclusion that a training regime combining harsh verbal and physical punishment likely fosters not just short-term obedience—but enduring emotional strain and decreased psychological health among trainees.

“Physical Punishment Through Strenuous Exercises” highlights the negative impact of using demanding physical drills as a disciplinary tool in training or educational settings. Pedagogically, this suggests that instructors should prioritize structured, supportive, and skill-based training methods over punitive physical exercises, as the latter can cause physical fatigue, anxiety, and reduced motivation among learners. Implementing positive reinforcement, goal-oriented practice, and gradual skill development can maintain discipline and improve performance without compromising well-being. Therefore, educators and trainers should design programs that emphasize safe, constructive physical activities while fostering a respectful and encouraging learning environment.

Triggered by Mistakes and High-Pressure Training Situations

The participants’ responses indicate that punitive practices were often linked to high-pressure phases or critical moments in training. Statements like *“These situations usually appear during the more intense phases of the program”* and *“They usually happened during critical inspections, field training exercises, or when mistakes were committed”* show that discipline intensified during periods of heightened scrutiny. Some participants noted that even minor errors could trigger punishment, as reflected in *“During training... when I made errors in commands or failed to meet expectations”* and *“Sometimes appeared because of minor mistakes.”* While intended to test discipline and obedience, these measures sometimes exceeded constructive limits, as one participant observed.

The participants’ accounts show that punitive practices were most likely to occur during intense phases of training, critical inspections, or when mistakes were made, as reflected in statements like *“These situations usually appear during the more intense phases of the program”* and *“They usually happened during critical inspections, field training exercises, or when mistakes were committed.”* According to Power-Control Theory, this illustrates how instructors use authority to enforce compliance and maintain hierarchical control, particularly in high-pressure situations. Organizational Climate Theory explains that the shared norms and expectations within the training environment normalize strict punishment and reinforce a culture of discipline. Together, these factors create an environment where trainees are pressured to comply, often leading to emotional strain and reduced psychological well-being.

“These situations usually appear during the more intense phases of the program.”

“They usually happened during critical inspections, or when mistakes were committed.”

“During training... when I made errors in commands or failed to meet expectations.”

“Sometimes it appeared because of minor mistakes.”

“It was meant to test discipline and obedience but sometimes crossed the line.”

Recent empirical evidence shows that combined experiences of physical punishment and verbal aggression—such as enforced drills and humiliating scolding—are strongly associated with adverse mental-health outcomes including increased anxiety, depression, and emotional distress among adolescents and trainees. Neurocognitive research demonstrated that individuals exposed to corporal punishment show heightened neural sensitivity to

errors and a blunted reward response, which may underlie increased vulnerability to anxiety and depressive symptoms (Weinberg et al., 2022). Additional studies link harsh discipline—encompassing both physical and psychological aggression—to long-term risks of poor emotional regulation, behavioral problems, and diminished psychosocial well-being (Wiggers & Paas, 2022). Together, these findings support the idea that training regimes combining harsh verbal and strenuous physical punishments likely produce not only immediate compliance but also enduring psychological strain and reduced mental well-being.

Triggered by Mistakes and High-Pressure Training Situations” highlights how punitive measures are often applied in response to errors or during high-stakes moments in training, which can create an environment of fear and stress. Pedagogically, this suggests that instructors should focus on constructive feedback and supportive guidance rather than punishment when trainees make mistakes, fostering a learning environment that encourages growth and resilience. Incorporating reflective practices, clear communication, and gradual skill development can help trainees learn from errors without fear of harsh consequences. By emphasizing a culture of encouragement and positive reinforcement, educators can maintain discipline and accountability while protecting trainees’ psychological well-being and promoting effective learning outcomes.

3.8. Discipline-Enforced Physical Punishments Triggered by Mistakes and Performance Testing

“Discipline-Enforced Physical Punishments Triggered by Mistakes and Performance Testing” highlights how trainees are subjected to physical and sometimes excessive punishments as a method of enforcing discipline and correcting mistakes. Participants reported that even minor errors, late responses, or drill mistakes often resulted in corrective actions, such as forced push-ups, long runs, or carrying heavy loads, which sometimes felt disproportionate to the offense. Beyond correction, these punishments also served to test endurance, perseverance, and mental resilience under strict training conditions, reflecting a culture of hierarchical authority and traditional military practices. While intended to instill discipline and prepare trainees for high-pressure situations, such practices can impose both physical strain and psychological stress, revealing the dual role of punishment as a corrective and evaluative tool in rigorous training environments.

Punishments for Minor Mistakes or Errors

The participants’ responses indicate that physical punishments were commonly administered for minor mistakes, late responses, or drill errors, reflecting a strict enforcement of discipline within the training environment. Such punishments often occurred during critical inspections, field exercises, or situations emphasizing performance corrections, highlighting their role in maintaining high standards and accountability. Several participants noted that the severity of the punishments sometimes felt disproportionate to the mistakes committed, suggesting a balance between correction and psychological strain. Additionally, accountability extended to both individual and group errors, reinforcing collective responsibility and the expectation of precision and attentiveness in all training activities.

The participants’ experiences indicate that physical punishments were commonly administered for minor mistakes, late responses, or drill errors, reflecting the exertion of authority as described in Power-Control Theory, where trainers maintain strict control to enforce compliance and correct behavior. Punishments often occurred

during critical inspections, field exercises, or performance evaluations, demonstrating the strategic use of power to reinforce standards and ensure conformity. Several participants noted that the severity of punishments sometimes felt disproportionate, highlighting how excessive control can create psychological strain, which aligns with the theory's emphasis on hierarchical power dynamics. From the perspective of Organizational Climate Theory, these practices contribute to a high-pressure, disciplined environment where accountability, collective responsibility, and adherence to rules shape the overall culture, influencing how trainees perceive expectations and respond to organizational norms.

"It usually happened during corrections or punishments for minor mistakes."

"Sometimes it was triggered by small mistakes or late responses." (Participant 2)

"They usually happened during critical inspections, field training exercises, or when mistakes were committed."

"The instances usually arose when discipline enforcement or performance corrections were emphasized." (Participant 4)

"Even when mistakes were minor, the punishment felt heavier than necessary." (Participant 10)

"It happened to me due to drill errors or group mistakes."

Discipline-enforced physical punishments for mistakes and performance testing — using forced push-ups, long runs, heavy load carries, and other strenuous tasks even for minor errors — is increasingly scrutinised in military research, which shows such rigorous training can impose significant physiological and psychological stress on service members. For example, a one-week "commando" training course was found to degrade parasympathetic functioning, increase fatigue, and impair cognitive performance (reaction time and error rate) among young officers after intense field and overnight exercises. Similarly, simulated close-combat scenarios produced marked cardiovascular and metabolic strain — elevated heart rate and blood lactate — accompanying reductions in cortical arousal, indicating potential decrements in decision-making and information processing under stress (Forte et al., 2021). A broader meta-analysis of military-specific training revealed substantial muscle damage, lowered strength and power, and hormonal disruptions up to 96 hours post-activity, highlighting the acute physiological toll of such harsh, stress-inducing training regimens (Heilbronn et al., 2023). These findings suggest that although physically demanding punishments may aim to build endurance and discipline, they risk undermining cognitive performance, physical health, and long-term resilience, raising important concerns for training practices in hierarchical, high-pressure organizational climates.

"Punishments for Minor Mistakes or Errors" suggests that excessive disciplinary actions for small infractions may hinder effective learning and skill development in trainees. Pedagogically, instructors should balance corrective measures with constructive feedback to promote understanding and improvement rather than fear or resentment. By emphasizing guidance, coaching, and incremental correction instead of harsh punishment, trainees can develop accountability and precision while maintaining motivation and psychological well-being. Therefore, training programs should adopt a structured approach where minor errors are addressed through supportive interventions, fostering a positive learning climate that encourages growth and resilience.

Testing Endurance, Perseverance, and Discipline

The participants' responses indicate that physical punishments were not only used to correct mistakes but also to test endurance, perseverance, and resilience under high-pressure conditions. Participant 1 and Participant 5 highlighted that such practices assessed both physical and mental capacity, showing that trainees' ability to withstand stress was an intentional focus of training. Participants 3 and 4 emphasized that these punishments were embedded within a culture of strict discipline, leadership evaluation, and traditional military practices, reinforcing hierarchical authority and organizational norms. However, Participant 7 noted that misinterpretation of authority by trainers or cadet officers could sometimes exaggerate these practices, suggesting that the effectiveness of endurance-testing punishments depends on consistent and responsible application of power.

The participants' responses indicate that physical punishments during training were used not only to correct mistakes but also to test endurance, perseverance, and mental resilience, reflecting Power-Control Theory where authority figures maintain hierarchical control and regulate behavior through structured disciplinary measures. Such punishments were embedded within a culture of strict discipline, leadership evaluation, and traditional military practices, shaping an organizational climate that emphasizes obedience, performance under pressure, and adherence to established norms. While these practices aimed to strengthen resilience and accountability, participants also noted that misinterpretation or inconsistent application of authority could create stress, uncertainty, and perceptions of unfairness, highlighting how variations in power dynamics influence both individual experience and organizational culture. Overall, the findings suggest that endurance-testing punishments serve as a mechanism for enforcing hierarchy and maintaining a performance-oriented climate, but their effectiveness depends on consistent, responsible exercise of authority within the organization.

"Sometimes it was also because officers wanted to test our endurance and discipline under pressure."

"It is also sometimes used to correct mistakes and test perseverance."

"I think it happened to me as a consequence of mistakes during commands and drills. It also served as a test of how far I could endure physical and mental stress."

"Participants usually experience this because of strict discipline enforcement, leadership testing, or traditional military practices passed down by senior officers."

"Sometimes it is also due to misinterpretation of authority by trainers or cadet officers."

The use of discipline-enforced physical punishments for mistakes and performance testing — such as forced push-ups, long runs, and heavy-load carries even for minor errors — reflects a training culture that seeks to build endurance, obedience, and mental toughness, but recent empirical studies show such harsh regimens can also impair physiological and cognitive functioning in trainees (Tornero-Aguilera et al., 2024). For example, a one-week "commando" training course was found to degrade parasympathetic functioning, increase fatigue, and impair cognitive performance (slower reaction time and more errors) among young officers subject to strenuous field and overnight exercises. Similarly, extended military field training — characterized by high physical load, sleep deprivation, and environmental stress — has been associated with significant declines in soldiers' cognitive

performance (e.g., attention, reasoning, visual perception) compared to baseline. Moreover, systematic reviews of training-induced physiological stress reveal marked muscle damage, reduced strength and power, and impaired muscular endurance within days after military-specific activities, underscoring the acute physical toll of punitive or stress-heavy training regimens. These findings suggest that although physically demanding punishments may aim to foster discipline and resilience, they carry real risks of physical strain, cognitive impairment, and decreased operational readiness, calling into question the effectiveness and sustainability of punitive, endurance-based training in hierarchical, high-pressure organizational climates.

“Testing Endurance, Perseverance, and Discipline” suggests that while challenging training exercises can strengthen resilience and self-discipline, excessive or punitive methods may hinder learning and reduce motivation. Pedagogically, instructors should balance rigorous activities with supportive guidance, clear expectations, and constructive feedback to help trainees build perseverance without experiencing unnecessary stress. Structured opportunities to gradually develop endurance and problem-solving under pressure can foster both physical and mental growth, enhancing performance and confidence. Therefore, training programs should prioritize deliberate, progressive challenges that encourage mastery and resilience, rather than relying solely on harsh punishments to enforce discipline.

Physically Strenuous or Excessive Punishments

The participants’ responses indicate that physical punishments often involved excessive and strenuous activities, such as forced push-ups, long runs, carrying heavy loads, slaps, and being physically dragged into formation. Participant 6 and Participant 9 highlighted that these measures were not only physically demanding but also coercive, reflecting the authoritative control exercised by instructors. Participants 8 and the third response emphasized that such punishments were sometimes disproportionate to the mistakes committed, suggesting an arbitrary or overly harsh application of discipline. Overall, these accounts illustrate that physically intensive punishments were used both to enforce compliance and test endurance, but they carried significant physical and psychological strain for trainees.

The participants’ responses indicate that physically strenuous punishments — including forced push-ups, long runs, carrying heavy loads, slaps, and being dragged into formation — were used to enforce discipline and maintain hierarchical control, consistent with Power-Control Theory. These measures often exceeded the severity of the mistakes committed, reflecting how authority can be exercised arbitrarily or disproportionately, while also testing endurance and obedience. From an Organizational Climate perspective, such practices contribute to a high-pressure, authoritarian environment where strict compliance, resilience, and performance under stress are prioritized, but trainee well-being and morale may be negatively affected. Overall, the findings suggest that while physically intensive punishments serve as a tool for control and performance evaluation, they can also create a climate of fear, stress, and potential psychological strain within the training organization.

“These included forced excessive push-ups, slaps during disciplinary actions, and even being physically dragged into formation as a form of punishment.” (Participant 6)

“I have experienced being subjected to intense push-ups, long runs, and carrying heavy loads beyond what was necessary, even in situations where the punishment did not match the mistake committed.” (Participant 8)

“These included excessive punishments, prolonged strenuous activities, and disciplinary actions that seemed disproportionate to mistakes made.”

“I experienced rigorous physical punishments such as long runs under harsh conditions, carrying heavy loads, and repeated strenuous drills that sometimes felt excessive.” (Participant 9)

The use of physically demanding punishments and endurance-testing tasks — such as forced push-ups, long runs, heavy-load carries, and strenuous drills even for minor infractions — reflects a training philosophy that emphasizes toughness, discipline, and resilience (Acevedo & Zeigler, 2025). However, recent evidence suggests such punitive and high-load training often results in high rates of musculoskeletal injuries among recruits undergoing basic or commando-style training (Maupin, 2021).

In addition, a short-term “commando” training course was shown to impair autonomic regulation, increase fatigue, and degrade cognitive performance (longer reaction times and more errors) after only one week of intensive field exercises.

These findings indicate that while such harsh, endurance-based punishments may aim to build mental and physical resilience, they carry considerable risks — physical injury, fatigue, and impaired cognitive function — which challenge the effectiveness and ethicality of using punishment as a tool for discipline and performance evaluation.

“Physically Strenuous or Excessive Punishments” highlights the potential negative consequences of using overly harsh or disproportionate physical discipline in training environments. Pedagogically, instructors should prioritize structured, progressive, and purposeful physical challenges rather than punitive measures that may exceed the trainee’s capacity. By combining corrective feedback with achievable physical tasks, trainees can develop resilience, endurance, and discipline in a safe and supportive manner. Training programs should therefore focus on promoting learning, skill development, and psychological well-being, ensuring that physical exercises are challenging yet proportionate, constructive, and aligned with developmental goals.

4. Conclusion

The results showed that physical harassment in the ROTC program persists primarily due to deeply ingrained traditional military culture, hierarchical structures, and disciplinary practices passed down that make excessive physical punishment the norm. Such disciplinary practices involve protracted drills, strenuous exercise beyond safety limits, and physical hardship triggered even by minor mistakes—all in the name of ensuring discipline, testing endurance, or ensuring toughness. This constitutes physical strain, emotional distress, anxiety, fatigue, and diminished confidence among Advanced Officers, thus undermining their well-being, leadership performance, and overall training experience. It is essential that old disciplinary practices be reviewed and revised, abuse of authority be checked, and a culture of ethical leadership, respect, and accountability be fostered during training.

4.1. Future Suggestions

1. Develop and implement comprehensive anti-harassment policies that clearly define unacceptable physical punishment and disciplinary practices within ROTC, ensuring alignment with national laws and international standards.
2. Provide mandatory training for ROTC officers and cadets on ethical leadership, non-violent discipline, and the recognition and reporting of harassment, emphasizing the importance of respect and accountability.
3. Create safe, confidential channels for reporting harassment incidents, ensuring that victims and witnesses can come forward without fear of retaliation or ostracism.
4. Increase supervision during training activities and implement regular audits to monitor compliance with anti-harassment policies, holding leaders accountable for any violations.
5. Establish accessible support services, including counseling and legal assistance, for those affected by physical harassment, fostering a culture of care and recovery within ROTC units.

5. Recommendations

ROTC programs should reinforce the levels of protection against physical harassment by revising their training practices to cut down on excessively punitive measures and by making sure any disciplinary actions taken are in conformance with ethical and educational standards. Leadership training must focus on the reflective, responsible use of authority, encouraging balanced discipline that corrects students without harming them. In addition, institutions have to clearly outline reporting mechanisms, regularly monitor the training sessions, and ensure transparency to protect against abuses going unaddressed. Modern, evidence-based training approaches that center on safety, wellness, and positive leader development should be incorporated into the cadet training climate and promote the creation of a more respectful, accountable, student-centered ROTC program.

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The authors declare that they have no competing interests related to this work.

Consent for publication

The authors declare that they consented to the publication of this study.

Authors' contributions

All the authors took part in literature review, analysis, and manuscript writing equally.

Availability of data and materials

Supplementary information is available from the authors upon reasonable request.

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