

Hazing in the Military: A Pilot Study



DEFENSE EQUAL OPPORTUNITY MANAGEMENT INSTITUTE
DIRECTORATE OF RESEARCH DEVELOPMENT AND STRATEGIC INITIATIVES

Dr. Richard Oliver Hope Human Relations Research Center
Directed by Dr. Daniel P. McDonald, Executive Director
366 Tuskegee Airmen Drive Patrick AFB, FL 32925
321-494-2747

Prepared by
LCDR Leedjia Svec



Technical Report No. 07-13

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“Hazing is an extraordinary activity that, when it occurs often enough, becomes perversely ordinary as those who engage in it grow desensitized to its inhumanity” (Newer, 1999). Hazing is an activity typically steeped in tradition, bound by silence, and ritualistic in nature. Hazing is thought to mark a transition, celebrate an achievement, or bring someone into a social or professional circle. However, hazing costs and sometimes kills. The cost of a hazing incident at the U.S. Air Force academy in 2012, for example, amounted to \$14,062.50 worth of lost productivity in a single day for the 27 cadets involved. Hazing also kills. In 2012, one Army soldier took his own life in response to alleged hazing. Hazing kills organizations as well as individuals. In the case of the soldier, his entire unit was disbanded as the investigation took place and the Army received an onslaught of negative press. No service is immune to hazing, as all have experienced incidents and repercussions. Hazing takes away from missions as well. For example, in 2009, in the Dhi Qar province of Iraq, U.S. soldiers shot an ancient guard tower. Shooting the tower was an act of inclusion for new members of the team. Unfortunately, the local Iraqis who witnessed this transgression lost respect and goodwill in addition to requiring reparations (Rush, 2012). Hazing must be taken seriously; lives and missions depend on an environment free from hazing.

Hazing

Hazing is often used interchangeably with other terms, such as bullying or extra military instruction; however, each is conceptually different. These acts have similarities, but the root cause of the behavior is different. It is important not to assume they are the same in policy or treatment. A policy covering hazing may enable workplace bullying to go unnoticed, while an education program to reduce workplace bullying will not likely transfer to decrease hazing.

Blanket policies, such as “dignity and respect,” which cover all these terms and more, may not provide specific enough understanding or counteractions for military members to implement.

Conceptually, hazing involves a desire to bring an outsider into the group. The method by which an outsider is brought in involves a rite of passage, initiation, or various tests that the member must pass in order to be considered eligible for group membership. The prospective member is expected to follow the orders of the person or persons leading these required activities without question. Possible activities that prospective in-group members may experience include cognitive, physical, and behavioral demands.

Cognitive demands include tests of intense knowledge or memorization (of the history of the organization, unit, or group they are joining), nicknames, receiving insults or derogatory remarks, engaging in insults or derogatory remarks toward others, deception, assigning demerits, social isolation, vows of silence, and psychological harassment.

Physical demands include physical activities, such as expecting certain items to always be in one's possession, horsing around, physical exertion, physical deprivation or exhaustion, receiving physical blows, forced drinking and/or eating, branding, burning, nudity, lack of hygiene, exposure to extreme conditions, and deprivation of privileges granted to other members.

Behavioral demands include the requirement to perform various acts, which may or may not relate to the purpose of the group. Examples include threats or implied threats, as well as requiring new or potential members to perform useless drills; sexual activities; destruction of property or people; duties not assigned to other members; personal service to other members, such as carrying books, errands, cooking, cleaning, etc.; asking new members to wear embarrassing or humiliating attire; and stunt or skit nights with degrading, crude, or humiliating acts.

Often, all three categories are simultaneously employed in acts of hazing. The degree of hazing varies in severity. On one end of the spectrum are psychological, physical, or behavioral demands that are seen as no big deal. This may include nicknames, knowledge tests, useless drills, horsing around, performing duties for other members, and the like. On the other extreme are the behaviors that cause physical or emotional damage or death. Figure 1 (see Appendix) illustrates an example of the spectrum of hazing as it could apply to a new fire station recruit.

It is important to note that hazing, no matter where it is on the spectrum, is a behavior that amplifies superiority among those who are included and exclusion among those who are not. Simply put, hazing does not relate to or support the mission of the unit, command, or community that the potential member is attempting to join. Hazing behaviors that seem benign, such as cleaning out someone's locker, introduce unhealthy dynamics of power and control, which do not serve any function to support the needs of the unit or the skill set of the individual. Over time, these behaviors may evolve into hazardous requirements for either the new person or people who arrive after the new person. As each act of hazing is completed, an environment and attitude of acceptance is created.

Bullying

Bullying is simply harassment with no endpoint. Bullying originates from a desire to exclude another and involves misuse of power. Bullies exploit an unequivocal power imbalance that renders the victim powerless to prevent or stop the behaviors (Steinhauser, 2012). Bullying is often thought of as "school playground" behavior; however, it is also found in the adult workplace. Bullying behaviors, like hazing, may be psychological or physical in nature, vary in severity, and may be done covertly or overtly. Bullying has been correlated with absenteeism,

sickness, stress, employee turnover, team breakdown, and more. It is costly in time, lost productivity, and health, and it takes away from the work mission.

Where bullying differs from hazing is in the intent. The intentions of hazing are to bring a member into the group. Bullying is never meant to bring one into the group. However, for members who are unpopular or deemed unworthy of acceptance, what began as hazing may turn into bullying. One comment frequently heard by those who experienced hazing is that “it is a way to learn who likes you and who doesn’t, who’s a jerk and who isn’t” (personal communication, 2012). The overall feeling for these individuals is that hazing provides a nuanced way to obtain intelligence on the personalities of and relationships with others.

Another differentiating factor between bullying and hazing is that when one says the word “bully,” people respond with the desire to correct the issue. No one likes a bully. Hazing, on the other hand, evokes a mixed response. An analysis of comments in an anonymous online chat room on the topic of military hazing revealed that the reaction toward hazing was divided. For some individuals, hazing may be viewed positively, as a source of pride and reason for superiority.

Research Study

Data on hazing in the military is limited. Most references cite college or sports-related hazing, rely on subjective perceptions, and are limited in scope and method. There are also many anecdotal beliefs with regard to hazing. For example, it is believed that no one will talk about hazing, which may discourage formal study in military members.

The goal of this pilot study was to determine the feasibility of studying hazing through several methods to include subjective perceptions of hazing and bullying, assessment of hazing

experiences and attitudes, any training received, and an objective assessment of knowledge regarding hazing and bullying.

Methods

A mixed-method survey consisting of open-ended response, yes-or-no response, and categorical forced-choice response was utilized to determine participants' understanding of hazing. Demographics included branch of service, rate/rank, primary career field, sex, age range, and combat zone experience. Knowledge included yes-or-no responses to questions testing understanding of the definition of hazing, its relationship to equal opportunity, and military law application. Participants then wrote out their definition of hazing and bullying. Participants were asked if they received training on hazing, and if so, what training they received. Experience and perception questions were yes-or-no format and asked whether they have witnessed, received, or participated in hazing during their careers and within the last year. Participants were asked if they found that hazing occurs more frequently in a combat zone and whether hazing had interfered with or aided their mission accomplishment. Hazing assessment presented 20 scenarios and asked the participants to determine the type of behavior that was displayed; the choices were just having fun, hazing, bullying, and not sure.

The hazing assessment questions (scenarios) were designed to systematically manipulate components of hazing and bullying according to conceptual and technical definitions. Scenarios were drawn from and based on prior research into varied and common means of hazing and bullying. Components of hazing included acceptance into the unit, celebration with the unit, unit development, and relief of boredom. Components of bullying included demeaning verbal or physical behavior. Both hazing and bullying consisted of verbal behavior, physical behavior, and behavior acted out on objects. These scenarios were also manipulated to be minor, such as a light

or non-permanent physical behavior or major, such as physical damage. These scenarios were randomly mixed in order of presentation. The last question was an open-ended question inviting thoughts on hazing and bullying.

Participants consisted of DEOMI staff members and were recruited orally and randomly to volunteer to fill out the survey as well as provide any feedback on the survey itself for further refinement. Participants were told the survey was anonymous, not to put their name on it, that it was completely voluntary, they could quit at any time with no retribution, and that their responses would be aggregated to determine the potential value of data, learn information about hazing in the military, and improve the instrument.

Results

Demographics

A total of nine participants engaged in the study, and there was no attrition. The majority (78%) had deployed. Of the participants, 67% were male, and 33% were female. The majority (33%) was in the 30-40 age range, and 45% were O1-O3 officer level. Participants were equally distributed among Army, Navy, and civilian categories. There were no Marines, Coast Guard, or Air Force participants.

Knowledge

In response to whether participants knew their service definition of hazing, 100% marked yes. In response to whether participants knew how hazing related to equal opportunity, 90% marked yes. In response to whether participants knew what the law is regarding hazing, 90% marked yes.

Training

The majority (89%) of participants marked that they did receive training. This took the form of computer-based training such as NKO and GMT and equal opportunity-related training (lectures).

Experience

At some point during their military career, 89% of participants had witnessed hazing, 67% had been hazed, and 44% had hazed others (see Figure 2, Appendix). Within the last year of military service, one participant had witnessed hazing, while none had been hazed or hazed others. One participant believed hazing was more frequent in a combat zone, while the remaining subjects did not. No participants believed that hazing had interfered with their mission; however 33% believed that it aided their mission, while 67% marked that it did not aid their mission (see Figure 3, Appendix).

Participants' open-ended responses to what they believed the definition of hazing to be included the concept of initiation in 86% of the definitions, while negative components (suffering, degrading, and humiliating) were listed in 57% of the definitions.

Participants' open-ended responses to what they believed the definition of bullying to be included the concept of intimidation and force by 86% of participants, while the remainder listed being picked on or insulted as central to their definition of bullying.

Assessment

Participants scored an average of 54% correct on the scenario judgment test. The lowest score was a 35%, while the highest score was a 65%. Participants scored higher on their assessment of bullying than on their assessment of hazing (see Figure 4, Appendix).

Participants' responses were further analyzed by type of question and type of response. A response of "not sure" toward any given scenario was the least likely response, while responses of hazing and bullying were the most likely (see Table 1, Appendix).

Although determining the scenarios to be "fun" was the third least likely response on average, it had the highest standard deviation. Further analysis showed that 67% of participants marked an average of 4 hazing scenarios as fun. Individual assessment varied; the lowest number of hazing scenarios marked fun was 1, while 6 was the highest number of hazing scenarios marked fun. In contrast, no participants marked any bullying scenarios as fun. The scenario that was designed for a "fun" response was correctly identified 100% of the time.

Though this was a small sample size, data comparisons were made among Army, Navy, and civilian populations for the hazing assessment. Results show more differences among these populations on hazing assessment with fewer differences for bullying. Overall, the Army had the highest percent correct and the lowest standard deviation score (5.7), compared to the Navy and civilian participants, who scored lower but had higher standard deviations (13.2 for both; see Figure 5, Appendix). The Army participants showed little difference between hazing and bullying assessment accuracy; however, the Navy and civilian participants both showed greater accuracy in assessing bullying than hazing.

Comments

Only one comment was made. The participant wrote "Difficult to accurately identify hazing and bullying at the individual and unit level. We should all work on correcting this daily in our units."

Survey Feedback

Participants offered minor suggestions for survey improvement, primarily in the area of formatting.

Discussion

Participant demographics were limited; however, differences among services were observed. While it is possible these differences may not replicate in a larger study, it is not unreasonable to hypothesize that they would. The services differ in their time of origination; they also have different missions, different ways of operating, and different approaches to challenges as they arise. A high-ranking member of the Army, for example, remarked that he saw the Navy repeating the same mistake they had made ten years earlier with regard to an equal opportunity-related initiative (personal communication, 2013). While unable to be explored in this study, participants' occupations would likely cause differences in hazing attitudes and experiences.

All participants marked that they knew the definition of hazing according to their service, while the majority (90%) marked that they knew how hazing related to equal opportunity, as well as the law. The participants in this study may not reflect the population at large, or the population at large may be reflected in these participants; however, this finding was surprising. A hazing forum assessment conducted in 2012 illustrated that 24% of the participants did not have an adequate grasp of hazing as it relates to equal opportunity or legal matters (personal communication, 2012).

The majority of participants marked that they received training with regard to hazing. Training was either annual online training found in the Navy or external material (such as lectures) unique to DEOMI. Demographics did not allow for further examination; however, it is likely that participants in the population at large may differ in this factor as well. While all

services may have varying degrees of training with regard to hazing, the nature of the training may range from basic to experiential, which would influence the outcome. The fact that not all participants had training on hazing is important as well, as outreach and objective assessment are needed to ensure that training is effective and reaching all segments of the military population.

The majority of participants marked that they had witnessed or received hazing at some point in their military career, while 44% had participated in hazing others. This is an important finding to keep in mind as the DoD moves forward in revising training on hazing and legal matters. Past experiences of military members must be recognized and addressed. Care must be taken not to traumatize or alienate military members who have incorporated hazing into their understanding of military culture. These members may be a sizeable portion of the population, and differences in the training that may be helpful or required for these members remains to be studied.

The finding that 33% of participants felt hazing aided their mission supports a different study (Svec, 2013) finding that some military members engage in hazing to create greater teamwork, gain knowledge, relieve boredom, and for other similar aims. The good news is that these are all behaviors that the military provides positive outlets for, so attention may be needed to determine if there is a broken link and where the broken link is located.

This finding also reinforces the challenging nature of hazing. While no one supports bullying, hazing is another matter. Hazing intervention will need to address this finding, acknowledging participants of this mindset. Further research would be helpful in determining whether these participants require a different approach to training than those who may not view hazing favorably.

Given the high rate of hazing training and the high rate of knowledge regarding hazing definitions, it would be expected that participants would have scored higher in the scenario assessment. This discrepancy supports two possibilities. One is the idea that knowledge does not equal behavior. The other is that hazing differs in conception and practice.

Participants scored high in knowledge but low in behavior. It has been well established in the health field, for example, that knowledge does not equal behavior change. When the HIV/AIDS epidemic became prominent, many programs focused on teaching people how it was transmitted and what could be done to prevent its acquisition. It was assumed that this knowledge alone would create a behavior change. This did not occur (Svec & Wang, 2003). Further research found issues such as efficacy, intentions, and attributions to be important factors. Ultimately, knowledge is only part of the equation when it comes to changing behaviors. As with the prevention of HIV/AIDS, participants may possess accurate knowledge of hazing, but they may still lack the needed skills or desire to act appropriately toward it, which shows as inaccurate recognition.

Another possibility is that participants have a basic understanding of hazing but lack the accurate understanding needed to correctly judge the scenarios. In the previous situation, they have accurate knowledge but don't act on it. In this situation, they don't have accurate knowledge needed for correctly assessing a situation. Hazing does have different conceptualizations for different people, which may or may not include the legal or technical definitions. Examining participants' written definitions of hazing showed that 86% of the definitions contained the element of initiation, while 57% contained negative components (suffering, degrading, and humiliation). Participants clearly differ in their conceptions of hazing. Clearly addressing hazing from legal, conceptual, practical, and definition standpoints will be

necessary to ensure military members achieve a complete understanding that will be shared by all members. A third possibility is that participants have a combination of the above. Further research with a larger scenario set is required to make this determination, but it would prove worthwhile.

Scenario selection analysis within the hazing and bullying scenarios supports the belief that hazing and bullying are conceptually different with regard to acceptability. Though they share similar elements, participants did not mark any bullying item as fun, while hazing items did get marked as fun by 67% of participants an average of 4 times. Bullying was rated correctly at a higher rate (69%) than hazing (46%). Although bullying was distinct from fun, hazing and bullying together were confused by the majority of participants, with hazing assessed as bullying and bullying assessed as hazing.

Examination for any pattern of response within the question sets revealed that participants perceived hazing as bullying when significant damage was inflicted, while hazing was perceived as fun when there were celebrations involved and damage was minor. Variations existed within participants; however, at least one participant marked “fun” to all but two of the hazing scenarios. The scenarios not viewed as fun involved derogatory names or permanent damage for the purpose of inclusion; however, permanent damage for celebration or derogatory names, if desired, was perceived as fun. The mental concepts of hazing and bullying may be situational and outcome dependent to service members. This must be addressed in training to aid service members in recognizing hazing and bullying.

More participants would be needed to properly determine correlations. However, initial data showed differences in accuracy among services. It is likely that differences in perception would exist among career fields and ages as well.

Conclusion

This study illustrates support for the concept that service members will share their hazing perceptions. Hazing and bullying are similar but perceived differently by service members. Bullying is viewed more accurately than hazing. Hazing may be viewed positively by some service members. A large number of service members had experienced hazing as witness, recipient, or participant. It was possible to determine hazing and bullying knowledge objectively, and the outcome suggests revisions may be necessary to current training. Revisions to the study include more and varied scenarios and comparison with command climate assessment questions. Focus groups may be needed to validate or further explore the findings and solutions that will be applied to them. Though this study was exploratory and small in sample size, results encourage continuation with a larger sample size after revisions have been made.

References

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Appendix

Table 1

Scenario Selections

	Average	SD
Fun	4.00	2.83
Haze	7.44	2.19
Bully	6.56	1.88
Not Sure	2.00	2.78

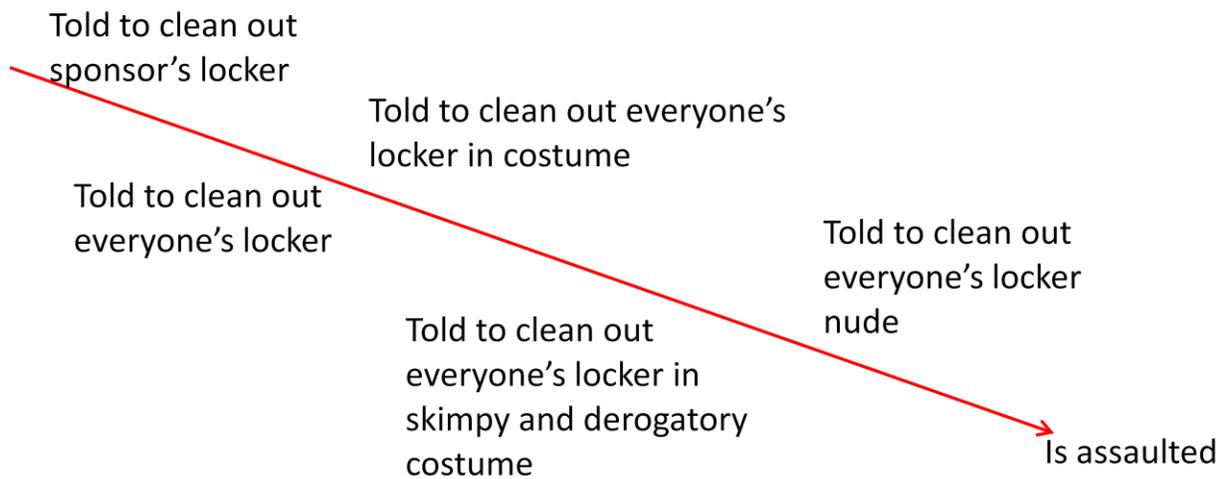


Figure 1. Spectrum of Hazing

Figure 1. Hazing Training Recieved

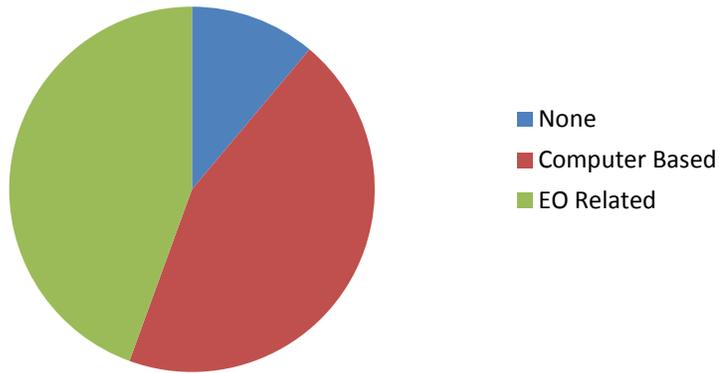


Figure 1(cont'd). Spectrum of Hazing

Figure 2. Hazing Experience in the Military

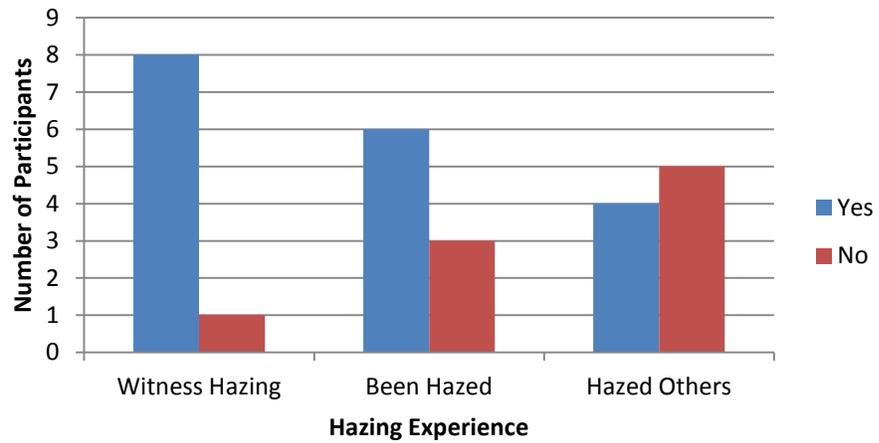


Figure 2. Hazing Experience in the Military

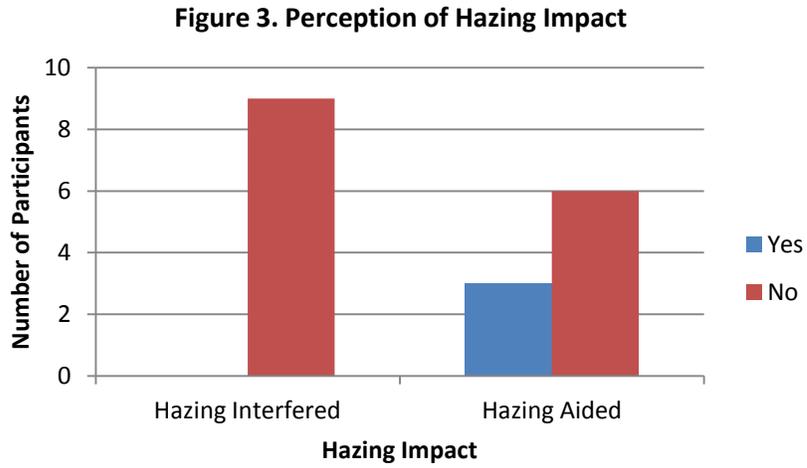


Figure 3. Perception of Hazing Impact

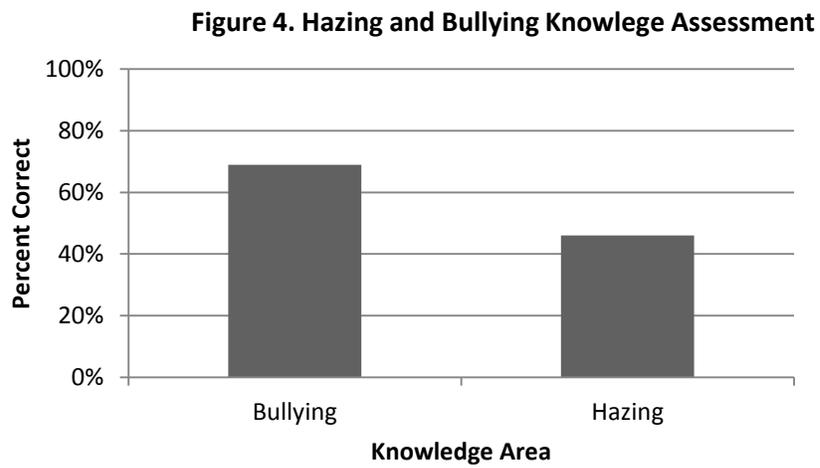


Figure 4. Hazing and Bullying Knowledge Assessment

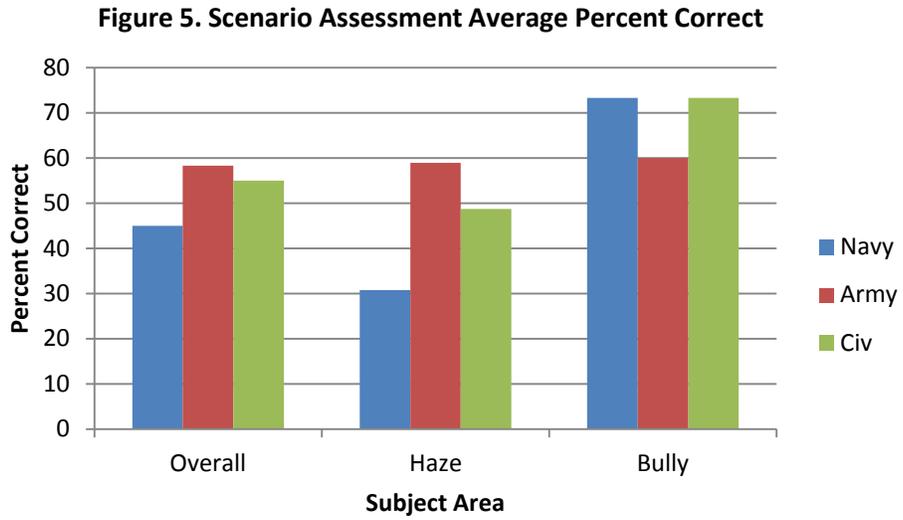


Figure 5. Scenario Assessment Average Percent Correct