



Research article

Voluntary military service for Hungarian people who have lost their job due to the COVID-19 pandemic – A qualitative study

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ABSTRACT

This qualitative study deals with the military service of people who have lost their job due to the Covid-19 pandemic. In addition to its basic tasks, the Hungarian Defence Forces has been the first to get involved in the Hungarian Government's Economy Protection Action Plan by creating jobs for unemployed citizens. The study was conducted among those who had signed up for the temporarily created special volunteer reservist service aiming to find out what motivated them to choose the military career and what their future ambitions are. After the Grounded Theory analysis of 49 semi-structured interviews, it was found that the special volunteer service provides livelihood and daily routines for those involved but still they have very few plans for the future.

1. Introduction

This qualitative study focuses on the analysis and assessment of the employment by the Hungarian Defence Forces of persons having lost their job due to the Covid-19 pandemic. The aim of the research is to analyse and assess the motivations of these persons to sign up for special volunteer reservist service in Hungary between 1 July 2020 and 31 October 2020. We also intended to explore their attitude toward the Hungarian Defence Forces and their willingness to move towards another status in the military (territorial reservist, contract).

The study is based on qualitative methodology, uses the GT analysis of the transcripts of the career motivation interviews (Corbin and Strauss, 2015) and includes the valuable observations and experience gained during the interviews.

1.1. Theoretical background

The infectious disease discovered in Wuhan, China in December 2019 was named by researchers Covid-19 (Coronavirus disease 2019) (Kozicki and Górnikiewicz, 2020). The disease was highly contagious and deadly and caused pneumonia and respiratory problems among the older generation (Harloff, 2020). The epidemic was declared a pandemic by the World Health Organisation on 11 March 2020 (Satomi et al., 2020). Although all country leaders took several measures to control the spread

of the epidemic, to save lives and to sustain the economy, Covid-19 slowed down the economic growth of every country (Luisetto and Latyshev, 2020; Khan et al., 2020; Grima et al., 2020). The impacts of Covid-19 on the labour markets of the countries hit by the pandemic caused huge problems in each of them and they still face the challenges of tackling these problems. As a result of the pandemic, there has been an increase in unemployment in the countries concerned (e.g. the USA, Poland, Hungary, Slovakia, Germany etc.) (Kawohl and Nordt, 2020; Grima et al., 2020). The governments worked out several action plans to help those who have become unemployed. The Hungarian Government has also implemented several measures to provide livelihood for people and families. One of the most important of them is the Special Volunteer Military Service, which was created as a new type of service within the Hungarian Defence Forces and which the current research is based on.

1.2. The impact of Covid-19 on the labour market

As a result of the increased unemployment due to Covid-19, more and more people have chosen/choose to be employed in this form of military service. According to unemployment statistics between June and August 2020, on average 214,000 persons lost their jobs, and it increased to 283,000 persons by January 2021, which is 54,000 persons more than in the same period of the previous year.¹ The employment data show a similar pattern: in January 2021 the number of people in payrolled

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employment was 4,537,000, which is 55,000 persons fewer compared with the same period of the previous year.² Considering the fact that Hungary's population is 9.7 million,³ these figures can be considered rather high. There is extremely high unemployment in the tourism and hospitality sector and in the recreation and entertainment industry, but it is also rather high in the construction industry and in the agriculture. The number of unemployed people has further increased in the counties where employment rates had always been low (Borsod-Abaúj-Zemplén, Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg, Hajdú-Bihar), as well as in Nógrád county, where the employment rate is generally not high. In these counties, the ratio of people living in poverty is high compared to the population and they are typically poorly educated or have no qualifications, have reduced work capacity, permanently rely on social benefits and are frequently members of a minority group (mostly Roma). Csongrád-Csanád county in south-east Hungary, where unemployment has increased among people with low educational attainment, is among those which are in a moderately difficult situation in terms of the labour market. The most populous Pest county and Budapest (the capital city of Hungary) have high employment rates, but they are also faced with the problem of remarkably high unemployment. There, even the number of unemployed people with higher educational attainment (secondary school certificate, university degree) is high. In the western part of the country, Győr-Moson-Sopron county suffers from a lower unemployment rate thanks to the Audi factory. In Baranya county the unemployment figures are quite high despite the fact that it has considerable industrial activity (cement, porcelain, beer, footwear, leather, dairy, electronics), and crop farming and viticulture are also significant. Zala county's economic activity has also decreased, which is mainly due to the closures affecting the tourism and hospitality industry, the underemployment of people and the existence of several minority groups in the region. The escalation of the pandemic caused a decrease in the number of employed people in the other counties as well, which besides its adverse effect on the economy, had a negative effect on the livelihood and social, physical, psychological and mental wellbeing of those left suddenly unemployed and of their families. The summer period of 2020 brought temporary relief owing to seasonal work, but it had not solved the problem.

1.3. The social psychological characteristics of unemployment

People aged 18 to 35 with low educational attainment are hit the hardest by unemployment but people aged 36 to 45 are also cumulatively exposed to it and it affects people over 50 as well. Unemployed people's health and sustenance indicators show an unsatisfactory picture. The gender inequalities are determined by their participation in economic activity, based on which it is impossible to clearly establish whether unemployment rates are higher among men or women. Due to their inadequate problem-solving skills, their human capital and insufficient interpersonal skills, workers with a lower level of education are more likely not to find a job at all or find it very hard to get one. (Jean-Francois and Walkowiak, 2009). Unfavourable social and demographic characteristics and low educational attainment can lead to an inequality of opportunities, discrimination and segregation (Jean-Francois and Walkowiak, 2009). Those who have been unemployed for a long time are in a much worse situation in the labour market than those who have just become unemployed. Finding employment depends on the geographical location of the place (Cécile and Gagné, 2009) and on the individual's human capital. In addition to its geographical location, the place's historical, cultural and economic characteristics are also relevant. The most important resources of human capital are those attributes of the

individual which are connected to values, knowledge, psychological skills and personality (McKee-Ryan et al., 2005; Gagné et al., 2016). The density of employment opportunities in a region also has a great influence on finding employment and the duration of unemployment is also an influencing factor (Jahoda and Rush, 1980). From this perspective, those who live in the countryside in a marginalized and socially disadvantaged situation are at a disadvantage compared to those who live in cities in terms of commuting time and available employment opportunities.

Becoming unemployed even more long-term unemployment create a life situation which affects the individual's thinking, emotional and physical functioning as well as their social relationships. Simply the news about the Covid-19 pandemic can have an adverse and even irreversible effect on mental health. As a result, exhaustion, anxiety and depression ensue. A failure to control them in time may lead to physical aggression, anxiety attacks, involvement in criminal activity and suicide. All of these pose a cumulative risk to unemployed people (Wade-Bohleber et al., 2020). Persons who have lost their job feel worthless and useless, which is further aggravated by the Covid-19 pandemic (González-Sanguino et al., 2020). Thus, they feel incapable of returning to the world of employment, their capacity to work deteriorates and so does their self-esteem (Wade-Bohleber et al., 2020). The likelihood of serious physical dysfunctions and illnesses increases. Social distancing, a product of the pandemic, can further damage the social relationships of jobless people and can cause domestic conflicts. Loss of income can lead to financial deprivation and almost invariably means poverty, which is the most common concomitant of unemployment (Darity and Goldsmith, 2015). Not having a daily routine to follow, unemployed people often become passive, their social networks and the area where they spend their days shrink, which are the most obvious consequences of unemployment (Hutchings and Gowerik, 2009). The emotional states of an unemployed person change dynamically and include hopelessness, depression, apathy, unhappiness, sadness, relief and frustration. However, the most important changes happen in their satisfaction with life, which goes hand in hand with the lack of prospects and with hopelessness. The extent of the difference between the individual's former perception of themselves and their perception of themselves while being unemployed has a significant impact on the emotional consequences of unemployment (Wade-Bohleber et al., 2020).

The above-mentioned factors have a huge effect on an unemployed person's return to the labour market, which is made even harder by the Covid-19 pandemic. A jobless person's motivations are restricted to finding the financial means to support themselves, achieving a better financial situation and their overarching need for security. An improved financial situation, more social contacts and feeling appreciated make them persevere, which will consequently boost their self-esteem and they will become able to find and achieve new ambitions in their lives.

1.4. Special Volunteer Reservist Military Service

The Hungarian Defence Forces (hereinafter: HDF) as one of the biggest employers of the country, in response to the Covid-19 pandemic and as part of the Hungarian Government's Economic Protection Action Plan, on 1 July 2020 launched the Special Volunteer Reservist Military Service (hereinafter: SVRMS). Within the six months of this form of service, the participants receive training in basic military skills and acquire defence-related knowledge. On completion of the training there is an opportunity to choose longer term volunteer reservist or contract service, which can be followed by career service. This new form of service is open to adult citizens who are capable of work. During their six months of service, they receive a minimal wage, but they are not entitled to sick leave (sick pay). The HDF provides a travel allowance and one daily hot meal for the participants. The training is conducted during normal working hours, which means 8 h per day. Their clothing, 2015M (pattern) combat uniform and a beret, is provided by the HDF. They do not wear rank insignia

² Central Statistics office: Hungary, employment https://www.ksh.hu/doc/s/hun/xfpt/gyor/fog/fog2101.html?utm_source=kshhu&utm_medium=banner&utm_campaign=theme-munkaero.

³ Central Statistics Office: The population of Hungary <https://www.ksh.hu/ne-pesseg-es-nepmozgalom>.

because they are privates. Their training is conducted by the battalions of the HDF Territorial Defence Regiment closest to their homes. The training includes basic military training, marksmanship training and individual training in a special field of the participant's choice. This special form of employment can be terminated with mutual consent at any time. After completion of the six months of training, the SVRMS can be extended by another six months, after which the soldier can return to civilian life or can choose contract status (IAS, 2020).

This new form of service is not an independent legal status; it provides an opportunity to sign a contract with the military within the Volunteer Territorial Reservist (VTR) status but on different terms. This form of service is primarily recommended for those people who are prepared to do tasks different from their civilian qualifications and are open to acquiring new knowledge, wish to stay near their homes and are looking for a temporary solution. Applicants must have a clear criminal record and are required to pass a simplified medical and psychological test (IAS, 2020).

The aim of the present research is to find out about the motivation of people who have become unemployed due to the Covid-19 pandemic to join the military and also about their future plans using the method of qualitative design.

2. Method and sample

2.1. Sampling

The survey was conducted among people who had become unemployed during the Covid-19 pandemic and joined the Hungarian Defence Forces SVRMS in 2020, using the answers given to questions asked in career motivation interviews. They enlisted at several locations in several counties at stated times. The survey was conducted in the 4–6 weeks following their enlistment where the interviews were recorded.

The volunteers for special reservist service were trained in compliance with the pandemic-related public health measures in force at the time. The career motivation interviews were carried out as recommended by the first author (MP). The participants of the sample were personnel from the special reservist service who enlisted at the given location, anybody who had applied was invited. Prior to the survey we contacted the experts in the territorial defence battalion in the region and checked with them the aim of the research, the number of participants and the causes of the attrition that had already happened. Participation was based on anonymity and voluntariness. All participants agreed to have the interview and there were no exclusions for any reason. Command and training personnel were not allowed to be present during the interviews, which was conducive to honesty and trust in the researchers. However, following the interviews, the findings were discussed with the trainers and/or battalion commanders.

2.2. Data collection

The questions in the semi-structured interview were as follows:

How did you become a soldier? Why did you choose the military career?

By using the question words “how” and “why” (Charmaz, 2008) it is possible to get a deeper insight into the motivation of the research subjects to join the military and into their attitudes.

What do you think are the strengths of the Hungarian Defence Forces compared with other employers? What do you think are the weaknesses of the Hungarian Defence Forces compared with other employers?

The answers given to the questions about the strengths and weaknesses of the military indirectly reveal information about what the research subjects require of the military as well as about their knowledge

regarding the armed forces. In other words, about what they can identify with Willig and Rogers (2017) and what they expect from the army.

What does the uniform mean to you?

The uniform itself is workwear, but it also generates several emotions, and learning about these emotions provides information about attitudes towards the armed forces. With this question, the focus was once again on their expectations toward the military.

Life goals (Hunt, 1988) play a determining role in a person's life and to achieve these goals short and long-term plans must be made. Getting to know the participants' life goals makes it possible for us to see how committed they are to the armed forces and what plans and ambitions they have beyond the world of work. In order to find out about this, the following question was asked:

What kind of plans do you have for the future?

In the scope of our research, we also focused on the participants' satisfaction with their military training, accommodation and other services.

After presenting each question, the participants had been asked to start responding; the first responder then was asked to pass the answering option to a next participant, and so on, until every participant provided his/her answer to the given question. The moderator provided enough time for every participant to freely express his/her opinion. We had not applied any special motivating tool or rigor, just had let them to talk freely, we felt not to apply any force to bother the participants. As a result, all participants gave at least a short reply, nobody had been left out.

2.3. Sample

The research was conducted in 28 locations with the involvement of 593 privates who had joined the SVRMS. The group interviews were conducted in 12–15 person groups with the seats arranged in a semi-circle. There were locations where only a few, other places where larger number of participants applied for the interview. In the latter case, the larger group was divided into smaller ones interviewed separately. Individual interviews should have taken too much time, plus in the group situation they could motivate each other.

The interviews lasted 2 h and the participants wore their uniform (Fassinger, 2005; Charmaz, 2008; Ponterotto, 2005, 2010). During the interviews, we ignored the military regulations regarding communication with superiors, which greatly contributed to the formation of honest opinions (Krueger, 1988, 1993, 1998; Corbin and Strauss, 2008, 2015), and it also made it possible for us to find out about the participants' motivation, their attitude towards the armed forces and their way of thinking (Barbour and Kitzinger, 1999). The transcripts of a total of 49 interviews were analysed using the Grounded Theory method (Charmaz, 2008; Corbin and Strauss, 2015). Answering the questions, the participants expressed their opinions, emotions and thoughts elaborately. We did not study the sociological characteristics of the respondents, nor their names or other data about their identity, only recorded their gender and age.

2.4. Data analysis

We applied GT analysis (Charmaz, 2008; Corbin and Strauss, 2015; Bryant, 2017) to obtain information about the privates' motivations to choose the military career, their emotions and thoughts about the uniform and their life goals (short- and long-term plans). This type of qualitative analysis of the data collected is suitable for formulating new ideas and relationships, recategorizing previous knowledge and re-arranging meanings of existing concepts (Corbin and Strauss, 2015). Through the systematic analysis of data, a relevant theory can be

formulated (Corbin and Strauss, 2015; Khan, 2014). During the analysis we used three phases of coding: first *open (basic) coding*, then *axial coding* and finally *selective coding* (Pákozdi and Bárdos, 2020a, 2020b, 2022a, 2022b). When reading the transcripts several times while formulating a theory, we first used open codes to identify the significant elements. We used axial coding to reveal the interrelationships of open codes and dimensions. Finally, during the selective coding process, we compared the system of codes that had already been created with the original transcript, refined the coding process, integrated it with the transcript and constructed the final (selective) codes (Corbin and Strauss, 2015). We showed the code categories in a diagram to help the reader understanding the interrelationships between the codes (Corbin and Strauss, 2015). The coding was done by the first author. After the initial analyses were completed, we discussed the findings. There were no disagreements, so it was not necessary to involve further colleagues.

Ethics approval

The APA latest ethical guidelines have been carefully observed. The study was conducted in accordance with the Declaration of Helsinki (2000), and the protocol was approved by the Ethics Committee of the ELTE Faculty of Education and Psychology. Project identification code is 2020/400. The study had also been approved by the Deputy Commander of the Hungarian Army.

3. Results

3.1. General findings

The age distribution of the participants is between 18 and 60 years, most of them being between 25 and 40. Most of them are male except for Szolnok (Jász-Nagykun-Szolnok county), where many of the participants are females. During their employment, only a small number of them requested discharge from the military, the reasons of which were the following:

- finding a job in another (e. g. original) field of employment
- difficulty getting to work daily: distance and/or cost
- health issues
- family reason
- unsuitability due to an injury during training
- unsuitability for military service based on their own assessment
- unmet expectations
- inability to adjust to military discipline
- personal reason

The cost of getting to work, health and family reasons and unsuitability for military service based on their own assessment were the most common reasons for requesting discharge among the respondents. However, it can be considered a positive fact that after discharge for personal reasons, the individuals moved towards voluntary reservist military service, which shows that they are motivated by patriotism and want to defend their country. It is important to mention that owing to the findings of this research, they were issued with a certificate by the Hungarian Defence Forces, which entitles them to use public transportation free of charge to go to work. Originally, their travel expenses were reimbursed, which was a great financial burden for a significant proportion of the participants.

3.2. Accommodation and other services

In many garrisons, the personnel are provided accommodation outside the base and they said that they missed the military atmosphere. Despite this, all of them are satisfied with their accommodation as well as with their training, which some of them find physically too demanding.

They find their training instructors humane and considerate. They are satisfied with the free midday meal in kind. At the time of our visits, there was no real unit cohesion, and, in many cases, there were conflicts within the unit, which the training staff effectively helped to solve.

The training staff gradually increases intensity of the recruits physical conditioning and they also pay attention to the mental and psychological load.

3.3. Concepts associated with wearing the uniform

When asked: “What does wearing the uniform mean to you?”, all of them answered that it meant belonging somewhere, protection and unity, which show their desire for *security*. Moreover, they mentioned respect, responsibility and duty. When talking about duty, some of them perceived compliance with the strict behaviour standards for military personnel as a drawback (Bátonyterenye, Nógrád county). In contrast, they see abandoning their former “negligent” lifestyle as a benefit. For several persons, besides its many positives, the uniform is also associated with fear, which represents their fear of the unknown.

The concepts associated with wearing the uniform:

1. security, good feeling, pride, belonging somewhere, unity, cohesion, protection, team,
2. respect, strength, courage,
3. responsibility, which for them meant giving up their former “negligent” lifestyle,
4. power – wearing the uniform has several advantages
5. duty – compliance with the strict behaviour standards, i.e. when one is wearing the uniform, one “must not eat or smoke”, regarded as a negative factor
6. fear – fear of the unknown, which is expressed in the question: “What is in store for me here?”
7. modern and practical wear
8. compared with the police, the public perception of the military is better

3.4. Sports and free time activities

Sports are not the strength of the personnel; in almost every garrison sport activity is limited to the daily physical conditioning session, which is symbolized by the phrase “we do sports here”. Their physical fitness is well described by the fact that having been exhausted by the daily activity, they, admittedly, do hardly anything in their free time. A small minority of them, especially the young recruits, who are preparing for a career in the military, run, do self-body weight training, cycle, play football or do karate as well. Those who are interested in doing sports, usually do it in their free time but socializing and using social media are also common free time activities. They also engage in other activities in their personal time, including gardening, taking care of animals, hunting, cooking, hiking, reading and spending time with their families. However, it is a fact that for many people, free time means doing nothing. Being passive and doing nothing in one’s spare time further exhausts the mental and spiritual resources of persons who are already at a low point, which starts a vicious cycle until total exhaustion. In contrast, creative activities (drawing, painting, dancing) have a beneficial effect on both spiritual and mental health, which some of the respondents do several times a week.

3.5. Getting information about SVRMS

The Labour Offices were mentioned as the primary source of information about the SVRMS, which was followed by television. The Prime Minister’s speech on the radio regarding this topic also played a significant role. Several people mentioned being informed by acquaintances or family members. Some people got the information from newspapers, the

internet and from recruiters or from the leaders of the Roma minority group.

3.6. The self-efficacy of the personnel

The stress and conflict management strategies of the SVRMS personnel are rather inadequate, which adversely affects their self-determination. In order to enhance their self-efficacy (Deci and Ryan, 2000) and to improve their life skills, they were taught and given practice in the basics of stress and conflict management (Deci and Ryan, 2008), which showed them ways to achieve a happy life and consequently may help them endure the burdens of life and recognize the opportunities to break out. It is a good sign that they got actively involved in these practices. Through getting to know the routes to sustainable happiness (Lyubomirsky, 2009) (1. family, 2. belief in oneself, 3. social relationships and teamwork, 4. life-long learning, 5. genetic background) they

receive reinforcement that a happy life is achievable by everyone and that they might even have it right now.

3.7. GT-based findings

Table 1 shows the three selective codes (ENROLLMENT, PATHFINDING, VISION) and the relevant concepts (open and axial codes) associated with them (method: Corbin and Strauss, 2015).

The selective code ENROLLMENT is based on safety (Maslow, 1943, 1987), including a secure livelihood and a stable salary, i.e. everything that serves the satisfaction of the individual's basic needs and provides a compass and support for them, in other words everything that their life is lacking in the current situation. An additional factor, the Covid-proof state and employment reflect to the current situation. The rules and regulations, i.e. the military's own rules and regulations, organisation (Maslow, 1943, 1987) is regarded as a basic advancement by those for whom respecting others and living and working in accordance with the

Table 1. The selective codes (in CAPITALS) and the associated axial (Bold with capital initials) and open (regular letters) codes.

ENROLLMENT	PATHFINDING
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Search for safety: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • secure livelihood and a secure job, where one can work until retirement, • a secure and stable salary • “an old state firm, which will always exist” • stability, a Covid-proof, stable, state employment” providing a regular income 2. Rules and regulations: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • own rules and regulations, compliance with the rules and regulations • organisation 3. Salary (regarding this, the personnel are divided): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • reasonable salaries 4. Virtues and strengths: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the appreciation for human values • respect, discipline, courage • predictability • <i>military courtesy as a show of respect for rank</i> 5. Teamwork: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • cohesion, “One heart, one beat”, teamwork, the power of community, “cohesion is much stronger than in other firms” • esprit de corps • social safety net within the armed forces 6. Need for development: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the opportunity to study and further develop • varied daily schedule 7. Defence: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the defence of the homeland and its population, • patriotism, • border defence tasks • NATO membership 8. Search for challenges: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the opportunity for a tour of duty abroad • the opportunity to serve at the borders 9. Career: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • a career in the military 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Family relationships: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • being away from the family, it takes away time from the family, not family-friendly 2. Organisation: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • restrictions, permanent availability, weekend duty • discipline, overregulation, constraints, need for mobility • too much bureaucracy, administrative problems 3. Income (regarding this the personnel are divided): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • uncompetitive salaries • low beginning salary especially for privates • the salaries are good, except for privates and junior NCOs 4. Recruitment: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • false information, “What I got is not what I’d been promised” • information with lacking in credibility, 5. Technical background <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • equipment, • military technology, • accommodation 6. Disorganisation: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • lack of cohesion, • disorganisation 7. Depreciation of values: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the lack of appreciation, the low social prestige of soldiers • “the segregation of the armed forces within society, the military has secluded itself from the people” • the legacy stereotypes from the old days (humiliation, excessive strictness, tough world, ordering about, discipline) • the low number of permanent personnel, “few fighting soldiers” 8. Communication problems: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • internal miscommunication • the lack of advertisements in the media (TV, radio, Government Customer Service offices) • the lack of interviews with soldiers • insufficient information about military service in Labour Offices 9. Fear: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “We might even die.”
VISION	
Short term plans	Long term plans
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Military service <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • contract soldier 2. Being undecided <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “We don’t even know what will happen to us tomorrow.” • “There is nothing to plan for.” 3. Lack of knowledge: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “I don’t know. Is there anything like that?” • “Acélkocka” (“Steel Cube”) • NCO Training System 4. SVRMS <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • completing the special volunteer reservist military service 5. Border defence tasks 6. Going abroad 7. Civilian employment 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. They do not think at all – “God knows!” “Who knows?” “Fate will decide!” “You can’t tell in advance!” “Well, I’ve never thought about this!” “Who knows what it will be like then?” “It depends on the circumstances.” “I don’t know.” 2. Military career <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • operational tours of duty abroad • a short military career and then civilian employment 3. Studying <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • learning languages 4. Establishing future <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • family • housing, • establishing themselves financially • buying a car

rules are a basic need, which is present in all areas of our life (family, friends, shopping, school, etc.). This is supported by **Salary**, that shows a varied picture at every location. Some of the personnel think it provides an adequate livelihood and others think it is low, especially for privates, while regarding the other categories of personnel salaries are mentioned as a strength.

Under the axial code **virtues and strengths** - which goes hand in hand with development - *military courtesy showing respect for rank* was mentioned suggesting a low self-esteem as well as the lack of knowledge of the system, which leads to the selective code **PATHFINDING**. However, major values under this code are associated with the structure and operation of the military, *discipline, courage and predictability*, which result in *appreciation of human values and respect*.

Teamwork also reinforces safety for the individual through the *power of community* (Maslow, 1943, 1987), i.e. *esprit de corps* (McClelland, 1961, 1987), which was mentioned as a strength at every location. The **need for development, studying and developing** (Herzberg et al., 1959, 1966, 1968), as an option is the need of the individual to be able to break out of their current situation and create *value* and being *appreciated*.

Defence, which can be connected to security and means *the defence of the homeland and its population*, was not mentioned at every location, which shows the individual's need for security. The **search for challenges** (Atkinson, 1974a, 1974b; Atkinson et al., 1976), i.e. *doing an operational tour of duty abroad and border defence tasks* was mentioned only a few times, especially by those who wanted to move towards military service (reservist, contract).

Career (Maslow, 1943, 1987; McClelland, 1961, 1987) goes beyond the individual's need for safety, which coupled with the **search for challenges** was typically mentioned by the young respondents, however, only by a small number of them.

In the case of the personnel at Barcs (Zala county) it must be emphasized that for them it is a huge positive factor that the HDF accepted them, and they do not feel discriminated against due to their Roma origin, which is not the case elsewhere. They were always very disciplined, respectful and modest. They communicated bravely, honestly and openly and asked numerous questions.

The selective code **PATHFINDING** reflects to the uncertain aspects of this form of military service and represents the process through which the newcomers try to find their place and way in the new environment.

The first axial code is **family**, where the phrases *not family-friendly, takes away time from the family* are used as a weakness of the HDF and indicate a lack of knowledge as well as the individual's need for social relationships to provide support and security, which is a reflection of their current situation.

Organization, the negative parallel of Rules and regulations of the **ENROLLMENT** selective code, was mentioned at every location as a weakness, meaning giving up their former free life – *"I knew I would have a lot more restrictions if I came here"*. The loss of freedom is further intensified by a fear of the unknown. Their negative opinion of **recruitment** was expressed at several locations, which is shown by the sentence: *"What I got is not what I had been promised"*. **Income**, the parallel to **Salary**, mirrors the different opinions about the views regarding the salary provided by the HDF to this group; for some it is an improvement, whereas for others a step backward.

What they said about **equipment and military technology** also shows a lack of knowledge, which is confirmed by the fact that they do not follow the news about military development in the media. The respondents mentioned *the shortage of barracks in the given garrison and the shortage of service flats*, which are also expressions of their own needs and suggest that they might even choose military service in the hope these conditions would be provided. This is reinforced by their *need for mobility* mentioned under rules and regulations, which was also regarded as a weakness.

It was interesting to see that *lack of cohesion* also appeared as a weakness as represented in **disorganisation**, again as contrast to the other side (teamwork) with numerous positive aspects. The

depreciation of values, *the segregation of the armed forces within society, the low social prestige of soldiers and the legacy stereotypes from the old days* (humiliation, excessive strictness, tough world etc.) also strongly indicate that they have little information about the current armed forces. Under **communication problems** they mentioned *internal miscommunication*, which was their own experience. They expressed their need for *access to military-related information and the lack of advertisements about the armed forces*, which indicates that they are interested in the military. The sentences *I don't know. Is there anything like that?* are honest expressions of their lack of knowledge, which we experienced at several locations. The **fear** of losing one's life (Atkinson, 1974a, 1974b, Atkinson et al., 1976; Oláh, 2005) is expressed in the exclamation *"We might even die!"*, a realistic vision from the unconscious, which, also unconsciously, may prevent an individual from choosing the military career.

The selective code **VISION** is divided into two sub-codes which represent the participants' short and long-term plans (Grant and Shin, 2012).

Due to the low self-esteem and aimlessness of the participants, a life planning coaching session was held, where, through concrete examples from the personnel, the ways of achieving short and long-term plans were shown to help them to achieve realistic life goals and also find the meaning of life. Only a small number of them are considering becoming contract soldiers, which was corroborated by the results of a visualisation exercise in connection with the uniform. This exercise is about choosing the military career and according to this exercise it can be predicted that those who can visualise themselves wearing the uniform will become committed to the military career. However, there were only a few such people.

When directly asked about joining the military as a contract soldier, half of the personnel raised their hands at all locations. However, only a small fraction of them expressed this intention as a short-term plan. All this allows us to conclude that based on their experience so far and driven by their increased need for security, they insist on their current form of service, they "cling to the uniform" because for them it means belonging, appreciation (Maslow, 1943, 1987) and also something to be proud of. These are opportunities to break out of the life situation they are in. There was one exception to this, the personnel in Balassagyarmat (Nógrád county), where nearly half of them would like to become contract soldiers, and they regard the mobility associated with it as the basis of the military profession.

Many of them mention *fate and the effect of their environment and the fast-paced world* as a cause (Oláh, 2005) of their current situation, quasi exonerating themselves and wait for outside help, which shows a low level of self-assertion combined with little belief in themselves. This kind of attitude was also quite common among those who had a higher level of educational attainment (e.g. school-leaving exam, college degree).

It is mostly the young men who are keenly interested in this type of training who have *"Steel Cube"*⁴ plans as part of their military career. At several locations, with Szolnok (Jász-Nagykun-Szolnok county) being at the top, participation in *border defence tasks* as a plan and an opportunity were dominantly present. Choosing *civilian employment* was also frequently mentioned, but without any particular idea, which does not suggest a very determined and elaborate life goal. Some of them mention *studying* but they do not say what exactly and when they might want to study.

The majority of the participants, driven by uncertainty and hopelessness, do not plan their future, *they do not think about it at all*, and they express it explicitly: *"I don't know."*, *"Who knows?"*, *"There is nothing to plan for."* What is really worrying is that only a small percentage of young people are planning to start a family and they ruled it out even when the questions were targeted at this topic.

On the other hand, it must be mentioned that there are some who regard the armed forces as a stepping-stone, where they will continuously

⁴ "Steel Cube": the new type of NCO training.

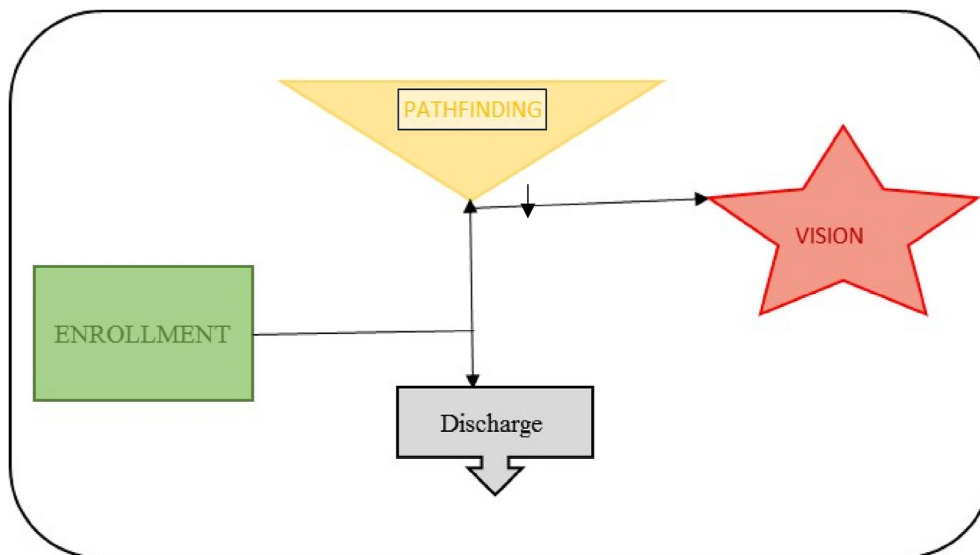


Figure 1. The GT-based symbols of SVRMS.

improve themselves for 5–10 years, do operational tours of duty abroad and then they will leave the military and use the experience gained in the army somewhere else. These are conscious decisions and will lead to goal accomplishment.

3.8. Limitations

The present study has its limitations because qualitative research cannot reach the whole target group. Furthermore, the present research is not longitudinal, its findings are limited to the group interviews conducted by the authors in 2020. Our approach was diagnostic and focused on better understanding the motivations of the participants to choose the military career or any other type of employment. The high number of participants allowed us to get some information about their future plans in addition to the military career motivations of privates.

There were no incentives for interviewing the participants in large groups, so it is likely that a few individuals were not motivated. The number of respondents varied between 10 to 40 persons from location to location, which we consider to be a limitation of the research. The fact that the first author wore her uniform during the interviews can be regarded as an advantage from the point of view of the research since it greatly increased the participants' trust. The value of the research was increased by the honest, emotional expressions of opinion by the participants and, also by two-way communication. However, it was hard to analyse those interviews which conveyed emotions that were triggered by the pandemic. While analysing the interviews, the first author had to be careful not to become too involved in what was said by the participants. During the research, strict rules had to be observed, which served the specific purpose of finding out about the military career motivations of special volunteer reservists (SVRMS) and also about their vision of their future. No soldiers other than training and command personnel were excluded. Since during the pandemic hardly any research was done in this field, the empirical research was based on the relevant theoretical literature. The aim of this study was to gain detailed information about the military career motivations of privates.

4. Conclusions

The current form of service provides stability and livelihood for the participants. They are satisfied with the conditions (training, catering, accommodation) provided by the HDF. Every participant emphasized the

humanity of the training staff and the help and support they received so that they could accomplish the training tasks. The graphical representation of the GT-based analysis (Figure 1) best illustrates the participants' emotional and thinking patterns regarding the HDF and their vision of their future.

The ENROLLMENT in the square supports the individual from all sides. Safety, teamwork, rules and regulations, search for challenges, studying and development, military values and income, which can be found in it, both jointly and independently give the individual strength to survive one seemingly hopeless day after another. It can stop the individual from “going under” and help them through the difficulties and uncertainties of PATHFINDING, which are pulling them down.

The symbol of PATHFINDING is a triangle on its vertex, which for a while is capable of holding everything that is hard and hurts, but later as it fills up, it gets narrower and narrower and forces the individual to make a decision. Family, being away from the familiar environment, fear stemming from lack of knowledge, ignorance and a lack of information about the modernisation of the HDF all belong here. The fact that income and teamwork also appear under the code ENROLLMENT is another factor that works against choosing the military career.

VISION is a star, the shining of plans and life goals, which seem impossible to achieve for the majority of participants in their current situation. They only concentrate on the near future, i.e. completing their current training. The plans that are mentioned by some of the participants become life goals as they overcome the hurdles of PATHFINDING and actualize themselves (employment, establishing themselves financially, family, housing).

The two-way arrow that starts from the selective code ENROLLMENT passes through PATHFINDING and ends in VISION symbolizes the emotions, desires and thoughts of the participants. The question is to what extent strength can support the individual's intentions to choose the military career or any other employment and to achieve their future goals. If only to a little extent, as we experienced during the research, the soldier will request *Discharge* and leave the armed forces, which is also symbolized in the graph by an arrow pointing downwards.

The creation of this type of military service can be seen as a positive factor from the perspective of those who have become unemployed, society as a whole and the Hungarian Defence Forces alike. This form of service made it possible for jobless people to have continuous livelihood and, furthermore, to enhance their social relationships and acquire new knowledge. In addition to improving the public perception of the Hungarian Defence Forces, it increased the number of personnel with

potential operational availability since they have been prepared for the defence of the homeland.

In summary, it can be established that this new form of military training greatly helped tackle the unforeseeable unemployment resulting from the Covid-19 pandemic by offering a provisional form of service which meant a kind of solution for both the individual, the HDF and society as a whole. This study has shown that those losing their job during the Covid pandemic have found a good opportunity for getting a promising job and really appreciate this option. It would be reasonable to further study this form of service because researching it longitudinally could facilitate the acquisition of information that can hardly be obtained in any other way.

Declarations

Author contribution statement

Márta PÁKOZDI: Conceived and designed the experiments; Performed the experiments; Analyzed and interpreted the data; Wrote the paper.

György BÁRDOS: Conceived and designed the experiments; Analyzed and interpreted the data; Wrote the paper.

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Data availability statement

Data will be made available on request.

Declaration of interest's statement

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

Additional information

No additional information is available for this paper.

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