

THE MOTIVATION TO SERVE IN THE MILITARY AMONG SWEDISH AND NORWEGIAN SOLDIERS. A COMPARATIVE STUDY

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The geographic location of Sweden and Norway, combined with a deteriorated security situation in the Nordic Region and a renewed focus on national defense, makes the development of their armed forces a hot topic. In Sweden, after years of downsizing, the Armed Forces are now building up again, and the NATO member Norway has the strategic location bordering the Barents Sea in the North. These circumstances underline the importance of the motivation to serve among enlisted personnel in order to ensure a sufficient manning of the armed forces. A qualitative interview study was conducted with enlisted soldiers in Sweden and Norway with the aim of studying the motivation to serve among this population. A thematic analysis was used and results show that the motivation to serve could be understood from the following three themes: The Military as a Stepping Stone, International Mission, and Geographical Location and Benefits.

Key words: *Enlisted soldiers, motivation, serving, individualization.*

1. INTRODUCTION

The Nordic countries have a long tradition of compulsory military service. Sweden was one of the last countries in Western Europe to abolish general conscription after the end of the Cold War. Despite the general conscription, in the mid-2000s, less than 20 percent of the population of 18-year-old males began basic military training. So, in 2010, conscription was replaced with an AVF, after more than 100 years of male conscription (women were able to apply on a voluntary basis from 1980). The reasons for the transformation of the SAF was the new security situation in Europe after the Cold War, which led the SAF to focus more on participation in multinational missions abroad (Österberg & Jonsson, 2012; Strand & Berndtsson, 2015). However, the SAF faced severe recruitment problems during the 9 years of AVF, hence the decision to re-instate conscription in 2018, but now making it gender-neutral. The shift back to territorial

defense and a deteriorated security situation around the Baltic Sea also contributed to the return of conscription. With the changing security situation in the Nordic region, for example increased Russian presence, there is a larger pressure on the SAF, as well as the Norwegian Armed Forces (NAF) to grow. This comes after decades characterized by downsizing, mainly in the SAF. Several countries, such as Germany, Bulgaria, and Slovenia, have raised issues on the agenda regarding the call for a reinstatement of conscription, and there are ongoing political discussions on the subject of recruitment and retention issues after armed forces conversion to AFVs (Österberg, 2018). There is a long tradition of military cooperation between Sweden and Norway, and the proximity makes joint military training expedient and practical. The aim of this study is to explore the motivation to serve among employed soldiers in the armed forces in Sweden and Norway.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The motivation to serve in the military has been studied thoroughly since the U.S. military's transformation from an army built on conscription, to an all-volunteer force (AVF). Herzberg's two-factor theory suggests that motivators, e.g. recognition for own achievement, meaningful works tasks and involvement in decision-making, contribute to positive job satisfaction. Hygiene factors (e.g. salary, job security and work conditions) on the other hand, do not give positive satisfaction or lead to higher motivation, and dissatisfaction results from their nonexistence (Herzberg, 1959; 1967). It should be noted that as per the two-factor theory, above stated factors of satisfaction and dissatisfaction act independently and absence of one does not lead to the presence of another. For instance, the absence of meaningful work tasks does not automatically lead to dissatisfaction; it is just not a state of satisfaction. Likewise, the absence of job security does not automatically lead to satisfaction. Need theories of motivation (e.g. Herzberg, 1968; Maslow, 1970; McClelland, 1976) try to explain what motivates persons in the workplace. Expectancy theory (Vroom, 1964) focuses more on the cognitive antecedents that relate to motivation and the way they relate to each other (Lunenburg, 2011). Furthermore, Herzberg (1968) highlighted that the performance at work will not be improved only by eliminating dissatisfying job factors. The assumption is that even with the best requirements of hygienic factors employees will be neither satisfied nor dissatisfied. (Herzberg, 1968).

The most common model applied to analyze work motivation is the Job Characteristics Model (JCM) (Hackman & Oldham, 1975; 1976). The JCM identifies five core characteristics thought to cause work motivation: 1) Skill variety defines the extent to which an individual must use different skills to perform his or her job. 2) Task identity refers to the extent to which an individual can complete a whole piece of work, while 3) Task

significance concerns the extent to which a job impacts the lives of others. Taken together, these three job dimensions are referred to as "job content". Furthermore, 4) Autonomy refers to the freedom an individual has in carrying out work and finally, 5) Feedback from the job concerns the extent to which a job conveys information about, and to the degree which the worker is provided with specific information about the effectiveness of his/her job performance. Researchers suggest that the motives for serving in an AVF are slightly different from the motives for serving in a draft army (Woodruff, Kelty & Segal, 2006). Ivztan et al (2013) come to the conclusion that the need for self-actualization was low in a group of younger individuals, as in a conscription system, when older individuals, 30 years plus seem to have more need for this, (e.g. in a voluntary system). Österberg and Rydstedt (2013) found that Swedish conscripts volunteering for international military service assessed themselves better for desirable values (altruism and family-oriented values), than those not wanting to do international military service. Other studies of military organizations, (see e.g. Österberg & Rydstedt 2017, Österberg et al, 2017) show that job characteristics and experienced meaningfulness are of importance for motivating and retaining personnel. However, studies (see Navarro et al 2013 & Navarro, Arrieta & Ballén 2007) show that work motivation acts nonlinearly and that work motivation seems to act instable in a dynamic nature, and Kanfer et al (2008) stress the need for exploring how motivation changes over time.

Moskos (1977) suggested a theoretical framework in order to define motivation to serve in the military. This framework describes on the one hand institutional orientation; distinct military norms and values, which create a sense of obligation, duty and loyalty. The institutional orientation suggests that difficult conditions such as long working hours and harsh training could be compensated by a solid sense of commitment (Moskos, 1977; Griffith, 2008). On the other hand, the

occupational orientation means that the military job is a job among others, like any civilian job. According to the occupational orientation, long working hours and similar sacrifices should be compensated with increased salary or compensatory time off. Accordingly, the incentives to stay in the organization are extrinsic for the occupational orientation, and intrinsic for the institutional orientation. Moskos (1977, 1986, and 2001) argues that the traditional conscripted military was mainly institutional, and that the introduction of all-volunteer forces repositioned the armed forces into a more occupational orientation. Furthermore, Battistelli (1997) made a typology based on the alleged change in modern society where he identified three types of motivational reasons for Italian soldiers to participate in peacekeeping operations. Firstly, *the post-*

modern - to do something for its own sake and for their own personal development. Secondly, *the paleo modern* - to do something for others, patriotism, for a higher purpose or ideology and, finally *the modern* - to do something for yourself). Studies suggest that there are different reasons for the motivation to serve. Ben-Dor and Pedhazur (2007) show how terrorism affects the motivation to serve in Israel while Massie (2016) shows how economic incentives relate to military engagement. Furthermore, Wong (2006) depicts contemporary soldier's motivation for combat, and Jelusic (2007) gives an overview of the mechanisms behind motivation to participate in peacekeeping operations. Caforio (2007) argues that interdisciplinary and cross-national studies of the military are crucial due to the complexity of issues at play for modern military forces.

3. THE CASE OF SWEDEN AND NORWAY

After the introduction of an AVF, the SAF faced severe recruitment problems, as described by Eighmey (2006) and Manigart (2005) who demonstrate a link between the situation in the labor market and the ability of armed forces to recruit personnel. Their conclusion is that when jobs are scarce, the armed forces have an easier time recruiting people than in times of economic growth. Sweden has had a very low youth unemployment rate since the end of the 2000s. The consequences of the low recruitment figures, and the renewed focus on national defense, made a return to conscription inevitable and in 2018, a gender-neutral conscription was introduced. The SAF demand for conscripts in 2019 is around 5000 out of cohort of 95 000, meaning that the organization to a great extent can select those motivated for service.

In 2014, the Norwegian Parliament changed the law and introduced gender-neutral conscription, and all men and women from the 1997 cohort and after could be enrolled as

conscripts (Viten, 2017). Norway was the first NATO country to implement gender-neutral conscription (Forsvaret, 2015). Several European countries are now debating both general conscription and gender-neutral conscription. The conscription period in Norway normally lasts 12 months, and in general, the soldiers are conscripted when they are about 18–19 years old. The Norwegian Armed Forces (NAF) draft about 7 000 conscripts each year (Forsvaret, 2019) out of a cohort of approximately 60000. After a recent reorganization of personnel structures in the Norwegian military, the different branches select their personnel in various ways. To become an enlisted soldier, one must first complete conscript service. Enlisting in the NAF has become increasingly popular over the last decade and the number of applicants has risen (Hellum, 2018). Since the Cold War, the NAF has focused on national defense, although changing in the mid-2000s, when the focus shifted to multinational missions. Eriksson (2004) describes this as shifting the identity of the armed forces from idealism to professionalism. Furthermore, in 2010 the NAF introduced a new enlistment and selection system for conscripts. This is a two-

step process, where step one is an online questionnaire and step two includes medical and physical examinations as well as cognitive tests and an interview with a selection officer (Køber et al, 2018).

4. CHANGES IN THE WESTERN SOCIETY

The demographic change of the European society is a major factor when it comes to the recruitment of military personnel. Many of the western democracies face the same challenge of an ageing population, hence diminishing the potential pool of applicants to the armed forces (Munz, 2011; Manigart et al, 2018). Furthermore, the alleged change of values in society, where postmodern society, emphasizing individualism, influences the way the armed forces are acknowledged by the people (Manigart et al, 2018). A positive attitude towards the armed forces seems to be the key precondition for young people to be interested in the military (Buhlmann & Wieninger 2010). Eighmey (2006) distinguished between tangible occupational goals such as job benefits or education, and intrinsic and intangible institutional goals – such as loyalty. When analyzing the motives behind enlistment decisions among American high-school pupils, Griffith (2008) found that soldiers motivated by intrinsic, institutional goals reported a higher willingness both to serve in international missions, to remain in the army, and to serve their country, in contrast to those with motives that are more instrumental. Österberg and Rydstedt (2013) found that conscripts who volunteered for international military service had significantly higher family-orientated and altruistic values than those not volunteering. Bicksler and Nolan (2009) argue that higher qualified youngsters eligible for a university or college degree are less interested in pursuing a military career. Inglehart and Welzel (2010) show how the values of the younger population are also changing from materialist to post-materialist priorities. Young people

tend to put more emphasis on self-fulfillment, individual freedom and quality of life. These values often lead towards a refusal of obedience or subordination to institutional authorities such as the military.

The contemporary security situation in the Nordic Region and the political climate in both Sweden and Norway contribute to the importance of retaining competence within the armed forces. As stated, in Sweden the recruitment to the AVF was surprisingly low, which implies that the organization is much more reliant on those already employed. Hence, it is of great importance to retain them within the organization.

5. METHOD

5.1. Participants

The inclusion criterion for selecting participants was the number of enlisted soldiers in the Swedish and Norwegian armed forces. The Swedish study consisted of semi-structured interviews with 24 participants, 19 male and five female soldiers that were carried out at two units in 2018. One unit was located in central Sweden and the other in the northern part of the country. Interviews were conducted using convenient sampling, and consisted of employed soldiers with varying work experience (stretching from one to nine years of employment), with most of the participants having somewhere between two to four years of employment in the Armed Forces. The Norwegian study consists of 13 semi-structured interviews with enlisted/employed soldiers in 2017 and 2018. The Norwegian participants were employed in an army unit in the northern part of Norway. The interviews were conducted through convenient sampling with 10 male and three female soldiers, all between the ages of 21-25.

5.2. Comparing Swedish and Norwegian soldiers

The Swedish and Norwegian comparative onset has a common interest in the same social group, namely employed soldiers operating in a military context. The data in both countries

consist of qualitative interviews. Due to these common research interests and data, we chose to conduct a comparative study with a focus on seeking similarities and differences among cases that are clearly specified or defined (Stake, 2006). The aim of this study is to explore the motivation to serve among employed soldiers in the armed forces.

5.3. Data analysis

All interviews were recorded and thereafter transcribed verbatim. Thematic analysis (TA) was used for analyzing the qualitative data. The thematic analysis represents a flexible method directed towards identifying themes, e.g., patterns in empirical materials that are either essential or interesting. In the analysis, open coding was used, where the codes were developed and adjusted during coding processes. Firstly, the Swedish and Norwegian material was analyzed separately. Secondly, the data set was analyzed as a whole, focusing on similarities and differences. In this process, the data was reduced and structured into a smaller number of categories, and after additional analysis work, three main findings were identified.

The first theme related to the soldier's motivation to serve, was the participants' tendency to refer to the armed forces as a mean to achieve an additional goal, a stepping-stone. Consequently, the analyses were consequently directed towards understanding the participant's tendency to regard the military as a stepping-stone. The second theme, international missions, was related to the importance of international missions as a work-related motivator. The third theme, geographical location and benefits, the participants' views concerning the geographical locations were two-folded. For some of the participants, the remoteness was seen as a motivator and a necessity for maintaining unit cohesion. For others, it was regarded as a demotivating element, in terms of isolation and limited opportunities for social life. The combination of the remoteness and the sense of having insufficient benefits, constituted the central part of the third theme,

focusing on aspects that many participants regarded as reasons for considering leaving the armed forces. Put together; the themes captured essential elements of the soldier's motivation to serve in the armed forces.

5.4. Validity and reliability

This comparative study consists of interviews with 37 participants. When evaluating validity in qualitative research, there has been a tendency, almost mechanistically (and in comparison to quantitative research), to comment on the often small sample size as a self-explanatory argument to establish low validity of qualitative research (Crouch & MacKemzie, 2006). Instead of discussing the possibility to generalize, the concept of transferability might be more of relevance for this comparative study. For transferability to be conceivable, it is of importance to clarify how the different steps in the analysis process were executed, from selection of participants and data collection to the analysis process (Johannessen & Tufte, 2003). In the previous section, we have described the various steps of the analysis. Additionally, we argue that the choice of methodology, semi-structured qualitative interviews, not only was the appropriate method for answering our research question, but also useful in exploring unforeseen areas. It also gave the participants the opportunity to provide comprehensive and deeper insights.

5.5. Ethics

All participants were treated in accordance with the ethical principles of human research formulated by the Swedish and Norwegian research council (Vetenskapsrådet, 2017; Forskningsrådet, 2017). Informed consent was obtained before conducting the interviews, and participants were able to opt out at any time. The recorded interviews and the transcripts were kept in a safe and no one except the researchers and the interview transcribers had access to the material during this process. All the empirical data was, and is, treated according to the GDPR rules.

6. RESULTS

Results show that motivation to serve could be understood from the following three themes: *Military as a Stepping Stone*, *International Missions* and *Geographical Location and benefits*. Consequently, in the first two themes, the presentation starts out with the Swedish sample, while the third begins with depicting the Norwegian sample.

6.1. Theme 1: The Military as fun or as a stepping-stone?

When it comes to military training, the main initial motivators among the Swedish participants appeared to be the chance to try something new, developing themselves as individuals and to be part of a community. After basic military training, a variety of elements were reflected during the interviews as decisive factors in wanting to take employment (besides international service as a strong motivator, which we discuss later on in the article). However, a large number of the Swedish participants established that their interest in undergoing basic military training should not be regarded as a well thought through or even as a planned decision. One of the participants described his experiences in the following way:

I don't know, it wasn't so much of a decision but more a simple question of which of us who were interested in continuing after basic military training, and I was thinking to myself "yeah, sure why not?" and raised my hand. Afterwards, I had to go to a shorter interview, which was over rather quickly, and I didn't think much about it. I just thought it was fun and I saw no reason not to continue.

Prior to enrollment, a majority of the participants lacked basic knowledge of the SAF, and the interest in volunteering was described as an epiphany that came to them during the recruitment process. In sum, our analysis showed that many of the soldiers' decisions to continue in the SAF after military training could be labelled as rather spontaneous.

Turning to the issue of continuing to serve, a key motivational element seemed to be obtaining new professional skills during military training, which again motivated them to take the step from recruit or conscript to becoming a professional soldier. It seemed that many of the participants viewed military education as a challenge, while also seeing it as an opportunity to try out whether the SAF would suit them. In many ways, they regarded the motivation to serve as a way of continuing doing what they considered fun and developing during basic military training. The soldiers seemed to regard the armed forces as one of many career opportunities. Finally, it is remarkable that a large number of the Swedish participants stated how the encouragement and subsequent offer of employment were given in the final stage of basic military training, when the majority of recruits already had decided to end their military commitment.

In comparison to the Norwegian sample, several similarities were identified. Relatively few soldiers pictured themselves having a long career in the military. However, some of the Norwegian soldiers regarded the military as a stepping-stone to other future career paths. One example of such a stepping-stone mentioned in the interviews was an opportunity to do something different and having a "gap year" as part of a plan for a future university education. In one of the interviews, a soldier described that his goal was to become a police officer, and that taking employment in the army was merely a step on the way to achieving that goal. One of the platoon commanders reflected upon this phenomenon in relation to recruitment:

I: The new structure, does it affect how you select and recruit?

P: Yeah, it kinda does. Earlier we've had a supplement from the Officer Candidate's School every year. So those sergeants are to rotate positions every year. Now, to a further extent, we have to provide these ourselves. And you always want to recruit "the best". Which the NAF also has been doing. But "the best" often have other plans. So we're looking into that. During the three or four years I've

been working here – all my sergeants and grenadiers have plans of studying – NTNU (Norwegian University of Science and Technology), Norwegian Business School, Medicine, Law.

In sum, we identified one interesting tendency that indicates differences in motivation between the Swedish and Norwegian sample. The Swedish soldiers described their decision to undergo basic military training and later take employment as a spontaneous decision. Instead, several of the Norwegian soldiers regarded basic military training as a stepping-stone, indicating that there are plenty of possible career paths outside of the military.

6.2. Theme 2: International Mission

A major motivator expressed by the majority of the participants in the Swedish sample for continuing in the military, was the opportunity to go on an international mission. Some regarded it as the only reason for taking employment and for staying in the SAF. The participants pictured this as an attitude shared among several colleagues. Here, one of the interviewees used the analogy that after months or years of training with the unit, it transcends into a “feeling of being out playing and throwing rocks in the forest”. To be selected to go on an international mission was described as going out in the world and being able to spread your wings and fulfilling your purpose as a soldier. Participation in an international mission was described in the following way by one of the participants:

Above all, what you want to do is almost like being a scout, you want to go out and try everything possible and see how it really is. This spring, we went to Mali and it was fun. It was a completely different experience. Suddenly, you were given more responsibility and it is like ... you felt more important. Which made it all more fun.

Our analysis showed that the participants perceive, from an organizational level, the opportunity of going on a mission as an encouragement to soldiers and thereby a way of motivating individuals to continue in the

SAF. From platoon level to management level, going on a mission is understood by the participants as having been used as an incentive during periods of low intensity, when work entailed a great deal of repetition and monotonous activities. This could be interpreted as a way of maintaining high morale at group level. One of the Swedish participants describes a situation when two of the platoons went on an international mission while the third platoon, for various reasons, did not get the same opportunity. As a consequence of the perception of a broken promise, the majority of the employed soldiers in the third platoon decided to terminate their employment with immediate effect.

6.3. Theme 3: Geographical location and benefits

When it comes to motivation, the location of the military unit was also an important aspect in both countries. The Norwegian Army has its main facilities in Northern Norway and many of the soldiers state that the remoteness has a positive impact on the social environment. Not being able to go home to visit family or friends every weekend, because it is too far away and too expensive, could generally be regarded as something negative. However, many of the participants emphasized its positive effects leading to a strong sense of social cohesion across squadrons and battalions, also outside the work environment. One of the participants illustrated this in the following manner:

The reason I think people are much happier here than in the south for the last couple of years is that the feeling of unity here is simply fantastic. [...] For most of them down there, they come from the south, or at least they can travel home more easily. Here it's much more unfeasible with only three flights a day. And it's expensive. So that's why we stay here during the weekends and hang out... [...] It's such a great unity! All the squadrons and battalions together.

Still, it is noteworthy that despite the participants' focus on the positive effects, the location also has negative implications, for the

same reasons as mentioned above; the camps are remotely located from family and friends. There are few means of transportation, harsh weather, limited job opportunities for non-military partners, and announced cuts in incentives like housing support and commuter benefits. Due to the reasons listed, this soldier who originated from the southern part of Norway did not intend to stay in the North for too long:

P: I could never imagine living up here in Northern Norway for the rest of my life. That's a pretty large factor.

I: Why not?

P: Because it's a big, black hole! It's so dark and snowy and cold! And I... those are the things I don't like. I miss the south of Norway, and all the camps here, they are so desolate. And I love cities, don't I? And kind of just be able to 'oh, I'd like to go bowling now' or 'I'd like to lend a book'. And then I can just do that, because I'll have the freedom to do things like that.

The Swedish sample consisted of similar contradictory statements, at least from the interviews conducted at a unit located in the northern part of Sweden. On the one hand, the beneficial conditions for social cohesion were mirrored in the interviews, and the well-suited conditions for training are highlighted as great advantages and are described as motivating elements in the work. On the other hand, the location also entails the same negative implications as in the Norwegian interviews, such as fewer job opportunities for non-military partners and a inconvenient distance to family and friends. A common theme in the two samples was the salary, which is described as being at an insufficient level. This is mirrored in the following quote:

I have my background as a pipe welder and I was still an apprentice when I joined the armed forces. Still, it reduced my salary with roughly 10 000 Swedish Crowns (approximately 1200 USD) after tax when taking employment. Which means we are not talking about a smaller pay gap if you have an education to fall back on, which makes it hard. [...] This line of work cannot be equated with

something else because it so narrowed and specialized and as I said earlier, you either like it or you don't. But money is a competing factor, especially when you. [...] It can be fun to work a couple of extra years when you are 20 or 24, because you still have the opportunity to start on academic studies if you find that interesting, but once you are closer to thirty and you still have a relatively limited salary, it becomes a big factor!

All the participants demonstrated an awareness of the prioritization that is required for pursuing an early career in the armed forces, which entails accepting a lower salary for other benefits. Here, a parallel can be drawn to the first theme (the Military as a stepping stone), where several of the employed soldiers regard the military as either a stepping stone to other career paths or as a relative short-term commitment. Over time, the limited salary level and perceived limited future opportunities for wage development seem to develop into demotivating factors and potential reasons for the employed soldiers to consider other career paths.

7. DISCUSSION

The aim of this study is to gain a deeper understanding of the motivation to serve among employed soldiers in the armed forces. Results show that the motivation to serve could be understood from the following three themes, *The Military as fun or as a stepping-stone?*, *International missions*, and *Geographical location and benefits*.

7.1. Individualization

In the empirical analysis, the Swedish soldiers depicted their motivation to serve in the armed forces after basic military training as characterized by spontaneity and not a deliberate decision. The Norwegian soldiers regarded basic military training as a stepping-stone towards their next career move, and the majority did not see themselves employed in a foreseeable future. Both the Swedish and Norwegian soldiers accentuated an awareness of other career opportunities. A parallel can be

drawn to Kelty, Kleykamp and Segals' (2010) article where they outlined changes since World War II and considered an altering approach to the role the military plays in the lives of young adults. Furthermore, they describe how young adults who volunteer for military service may not view the military as a duty or consider it as a future career path. Instead, they may enlist to be able to enhance their physical abilities, obtaining practical skills or educational benefits to use when applying to college. Military service could therefore represent a mean to achieve future goals. They describe it as "less a hiatus in the transition to adulthood and more an experience through which youth become adults" (Kelty et al, 2010:182). Despite Kelty et al (2010) focus on the American transition from conscription to an all voluntary-system, our results still corroborated with their portrayal of a changing attitude towards the military among young adults. As stated in the first theme, the participants described the need to challenge themselves (both psychically and mentally), the opportunity to try something new and different and a curiosity about the Armed Forces as motivators, rather than viewing the military as an impending occupation when entering. Further, the tendencies found in the participant's statements can be regarded as an utterance of individualization, meaning the process in which people to a lesser extent identify themselves with collective organizations and liberate themselves from various forms of social structures (Bauman, 2007). Changing attitudes and motivation towards undergoing military service and subsequently taking employment in military organizations is a phenomenon that needs further studies. Not only to gain greater knowledge about broader societal changes in attitudes and values, but also for military organizations to be able to adapt to societal and demographical alterations.

7.2. International missions

International missions seem to have two functions concerning group dynamics. Firstly, they work as an incitement in terms of keeping

the spirits up in the group. Secondly, they function as a foundation for cohesion between the soldiers as they as a group prepare themselves for the mission. Still, regarded as an incitement, international missions seem to be limited to a shorter period. However, results showed that using international missions as a motivator to keep soldiers from leaving the armed forces may have a paradoxical effect. In the Swedish sample, the participants describe how several soldiers decide to leave shortly after they have been away on an international mission. Consequently, in portraying international missions as a big adventure lies the risk that it gradually takes the form of "the final destination" for the soldiers, and after they might choose to end their employment.

The Norwegian participants highlight the significance of the organization keeping their promises, i.e. being trustworthy and dependable as an employer. As shown in result with the Swedish example, the third platoon was promised to go on international mission, but was then denied deployment. We see examples like this; of expectations not being met, in both countries, and believe they will rather demotivate soldiers into leaving the military than motivate them towards a further and long-term military career. At the same time, it should be underscored that the SAF is undergoing a restructuring in regards to operational capacity with an increased focus on national defense contrary to a previous focus on international missions. Hence the capacity and changed directions of the armed forces are concentrated towards extending exercise activities (SOU 2018:7), but with a more outlined national focus. This fact affects to which extent Sweden's participation in international operations with a longer perspective.

7.3. Geographical location and benefits

The geographical location has the impact of a double-edged sword. On the one hand, a remote location enhances the institutional military identity; on the other hand, it diminishes the occupational military identity. As described by the participants, an isolated

unit creates excellent training opportunities and likewise the opportunity to maintain useful military facilities, as well as creating a tight cohesion across battalions as shown in the Norwegian sample. The negative aspects can at the same time be difficulties in having a social life outside of work, and meager possibilities for a partner to work in the same region. The soldiers perceive the salary as low, but at the same time, they stated that other positive aspects of work could compensate. However, the remoteness of their working place in combination with the proportionately low salary makes it even harder to visit friends and family, making the geographical location sometimes a demotivating factor. From one perspective, a relatively low salary could be accepted, as some of the participants regarded their employment as a short-term commitment. For retaining soldiers in a long-term perspective, a higher salary or fringe benefits as travel grants or similar is required. Furthermore, the participants addressed the fact that benefits have declined since they joined the armed forces.

7.4. Limitations

There are limitations to the study that should be addressed. Firstly, our study has a relatively small sample from specific units, and should not be regarded as representative groups for the Swedish or the Norwegian Armed Forces on the whole. Secondly, the gender distribution was skewed as 26 men and 11 female participants were interviewed. However, the Armed Forces consists of 80-85 % men and has been described as a male-dominated organization (Persson, 2011). Furthermore, the newly introduced conscription system in Sweden is an area that needs further research attention, especially when it comes to motivation to serve. Depending on future strategic decisions and the pace of the restructuring shift towards a national defense, we might see drastic changes shortly to what extent Sweden and Norway participate in international missions.

Another limitation that should be stated is how the thematic analysis displayed an

inclination towards what Braun and Clarke (2012) regard as representing prevalence. Meaning, the emphasis was put on what the majority of participants expressed. The aim, and subsequently the structure of the analysis framework, was aligned with a comparative approach, with the main interest directed at identifying similarities and differences between the Swedish and Norwegian cases. Comparative military studies, at least in the Nordic Region, are rare, and knowledge is limited. Research exchange between the armed forces is a stated goal. In the study, motivators which united but also which distinguished between Swedish and Norwegian soldiers, were identified. The analysis also provided insights on what soldiers perceived as essential for them to continue in the armed forces, and at the same time showcased challenges that can make them consider quitting. The recommendation for future researchers, who intend to apply a comparative design aiming at comparing data from different studies carried through in different countries, is to take better advantage of the flexibility of the thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2012). Thereby structure the analysis in a way that enables a more deepened understanding of the phenomena at hand, and not such predetermined focus on similarities and differences.

Furthermore, this comparative study shows how this study design can be utilised in the context of recruitment and retention. Through comparison we find recognisable patterns and settings which will be resourceful in studying motivations to serve in other contexts as well. Researchers and decision makers can for example raise the question whether local recruitment enhances retention. Future research could involve several countries in a larger comparative study where other aspects of motivation could be highlighted. Furthermore, studies addressing work-life balance should be conducted in order to study the impact of mobility and the geographical location of units.

8. CONCLUSION

The motivation to serve could be understood from three overriding themes. Firstly, the military as a stepping stone, which can be related to the changes in values among young people, as some described as an increased individualization. Statements from some of our informants clearly underline that they went in to the military with a distinct goal of not completing a long career within the organization, but instead benefit from military experiences in their future employments. International missions also have an impact on the motivation to serve, and a challenge for the armed forces now when the focus is shifted to national defense, is to find other motivators for enlisted soldiers. Finally, depending on an institutional or occupational orientation, a remote geographical location and benefits will attract and retain certain categories of soldiers. In order to maintain and increase military capacity in Sweden and Norway, our findings about what motivates enlisted soldiers to serve, should be taken into consideration regarding attraction, recruitment and retention of soldiers.

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