

PORTUGUESE MILITARY IN VOLUNTEER AND CONTRACT SITUATIONS: REASONS WHY THEY QUIT

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ABSTRACT

Nowadays, one of the major challenges of the Portuguese Army is motivate young people to the ranks, through both volunteer and contract situations. These forms of serving the nation were created to fulfill the needs in specific areas of the human resources that couldn't be only satisfied by career military. However, reality shows that the number of volunteer candidates is far from being reasonable, and that the number of those who quit is very significant as well. The aim of this study was to analyse the main reasons why these military quit, through a questionnaire applied to a sample of 716 individuals in these conditions. Our findings indicate that the decision to quit is not influenced by factors that intrinsically characterise the military way of life, but rather by specific contractual conditions. An enlargement of the discussion over this theme is required, so that solutions to improve volunteer and contract- situations can be found.

1. INTRODUCTION

Volunteer and contract situations were created in 1992, with the objective of fulfilling the needs in specific areas of human resources of the Armed Forces that couldn't be satisfied only by military career personnel. In these cases, the soldiers have to spend one year in a volunteer situation, after which they pass to a contract regime, where they can stay for a period of eight years, maximum.

However, reality shows that the number of volunteer candidates is far from being reasonable, and that the number of those who quit is very significant as well. This fact is becoming a serious problem to the Portuguese Army, which is aggravated by the end of the conscript military service.

It was in this context that this investigation was developed, with the objective of characterising the soldiers that quit in a military and socio-biographic perspective, and of identifying the main reasons why they make that decision. We hope that this study will help the decision making process, so that volunteer and contract regimes can be seen as a more attractive option to the young Portuguese people, and that it helps to improve the working conditions of the ones which are already in the Army.

The following hypothesis were developed to study this theme:

1. The motivations which lead the candidates to adhere to these kinds of regimes are both symbolic and material;
2. Soldiers quit mainly due to material related reasons, even without the loss of the symbolic motivation;
3. If military life offers similar or better working conditions and career options than other jobs, then soldiers will prefer volunteer and contract regimes, based on their symbolic motives.

2. METHOD

Subjects:

The subjects of this investigation were all the soldiers that broke their contracts after already being in that situation, or even before they started their military service. After the application process, we received questionnaires from 74 Army units from all over the country, and we considered in this investigation the data collected in 716 valid questionnaires. Some of the questionnaires were not considered because they referred to situations not directly related to this study (e.g. cases in which the contract regime ends, and there isn't a real breaking of contract), or extraordinary cases (e.g. the case of a respondent who claimed he hadn't broken his contract).

Measures:

In order to confirm or invalidate the suggested hypothesis, a questionnaire was conceived, to give us information in different areas, such as: the initial motivation of the soldier to present his candidature; the motives why he quitted; the characterization of the new job in favour of which he quits; evaluation of the ideal conditions under which he would accept not to break his contract; Institution incentives evaluation; decision factors that influenced his rescission.

Underlining the confidentiality of the questionnaire, some identification data was assessed. There was also the concern of explaining the objective of the investigation, and the orientating hypothesis, in a way of motivating the respondents to its proper answering.

Procedure:

The application process started with the Dispatch of His Excellency the General AGE dated the 21st of December of 1998. We considered all the questionnaires that arrived to the Army Psychology Center until the end of September 1999.

A copy of the questionnaire was distributed to all Army Units in Portugal, Madeira and Azores, who passed them to the soldiers who presented their contract rescission.

Some instructions were given concerning some aspects of the application phase:

- a) The place of the application, namely to verify if it fulfils parameters of illumination and comfort;

- b) To inform the soldiers of the questionnaire objective, so as to motivate them to its proper filling;
- c) To read the instructions in a calm and objective way, responding to all doubts that might appear;
- d) To thank the collaboration of the respondents and register the difficulties that aroused in the application process.

The opened questions were the target of a content analysis.

3. RESULTS

Sample characteristics

The results found correspond to a population that is mostly of the male gender (88% of the respondents). The soldiers who quit belong mainly to the Private rank (92,5%), while there is only a small number that belongs to the Sergeants (6,4%) and Officers (1,1%) rank.

Analysing the *timing* of the quitting decision, we see that the percentage of individuals that broke their contracts while they were in the volunteer period (45,1%) is very similar to the percentage of those who broke it in the contract period (43,6%). Thus, time seems to acquire some importance in the decision of quitting: by comparing the period of time that corresponds to each case (one year in the first case, eight in the second), it is obvious that the initial period is critical in that decision. The first year in which there is a contractual link to the military institution seems to constitute itself as an experimental period, during which the soldier tests his continuation in service as he tries to adapt to a new way of living.

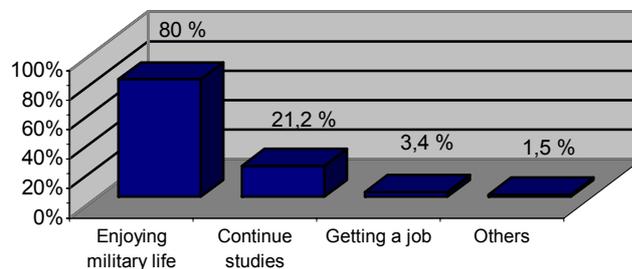
There were also some individuals that broke their contracts even before they started serving in the Army (11,3%).

In what civil state is concerned, most part of those who quit are single (88,5%), while the rest of them are married (10,6%) or divorced (0,4%). Most of them are between 21 and 25 years of age (55,2%), or between 18 and 20 (33,3%). Only a small part has more than 25 years of age (11,4%).

3.1. Initial Motivation to present the candidature to the volunteer situation:

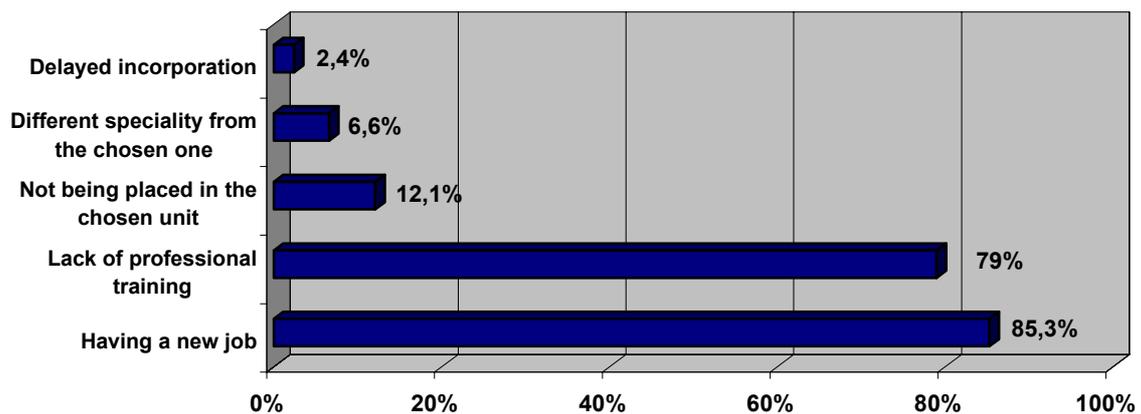
As we can observe in Figure 1, the main reason to present the candidature to the volunteer situation is enjoying military life, followed by the possibility of continuing the studies. Getting a job is also referred, but in a much smaller proportion. In this question, respondents could choose more than one alternative, because the same person could have more than one reason to candidate to the volunteer situation.

Figure 1 - Initial motivation to volunteer



3.2. Quitting Motives

The major motives to quit are related with obtaining a new job and with the lack of qualified training.

Figure 2 – Quitting motives

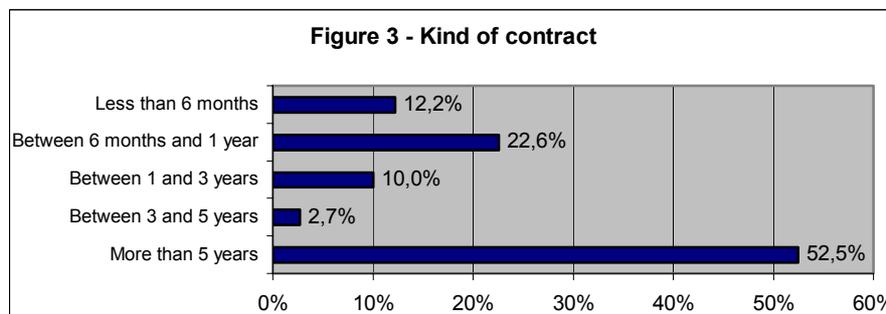
The possibility of not staying in the chosen unit, or having a different specialty from the chosen one are other factors for quitting, though less referred.

3.3. New job characterization

The respondents who said that their motivation to quit was job related, were asked to characterize the new job in the following dimensions:

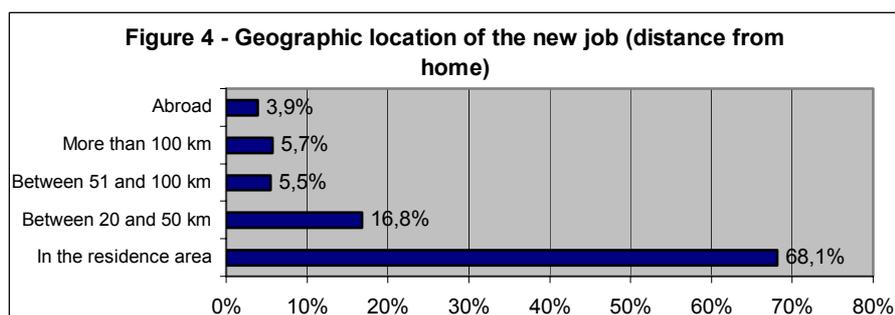
a) Kind of contract:

Most part of the respondents seem to have opted for quitting in favour of a job that guaranteed them more stability (52,5% say that their new contract has a duration of more than five years).



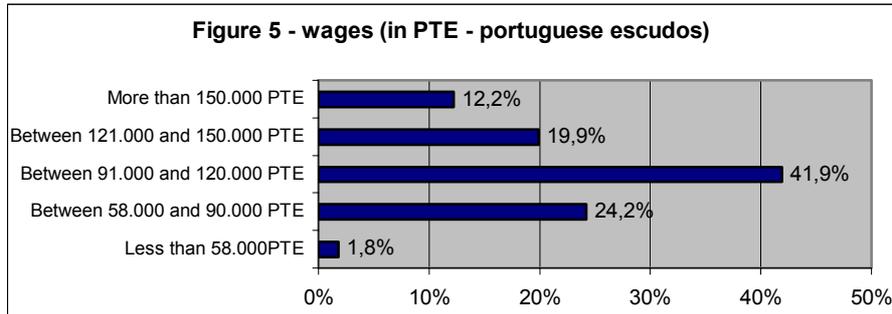
b) Geographic location

The new jobs, in favour of which the respondents quit military life, are located mainly in the residential area of each individual. The distance between the place where they live and the workplace seems to have some influence in that decision: the further the distance, smaller the number of those who quit.



c) Wages

Most of those who quit, will earn wages in the new job between 91 and 120 thousand escudos (41,9%), which is more than most part of them earns in military service (we must remember that most of those who quit belong to the private category).



Analysing the data in a global perspective, we see that 74% of those who quit will earn in their new job superior wages. Therefore, this seems to be a fundamental factor in terms of the decision of quitting.

3.4. Motivating conditions

There is a majority of respondents who claim they wouldn't have quit and they would have accepted to continue, if there were certain conditions that were different, namely:

- contract length: 83,1% wouldn't have quit if contract length reached 20 years
- 71% would't have quit if they had the possibility of choosing contract duration: instead of a contract on a year basis, they seem to prefer a contract whose duration would be defined from the start. This would permit a more efficient management of their professional careers, which is very important in a financial and psychological standpoint
- wages: 79,4% consider that the ideal would be a wage between 75 and 150 thousand escudos
- professional training or possibility to continue their studies: 79,4% wouldn't have quit if these were less difficult to attain

3.5. Incentives Evaluation

a) Known Incentives before service

The incentives referred to as being known before beginning to serve in the Army, seem to be mainly those which are publicised by the Institution: the possibility of continuing their studies (41,7%), the possibility of entering military life (33,2%), receiving qualified training (27,9%), or the possibility of candidature to other kinds of contests (e.g. the police forces)(19,4%).

b) Other incentives considered necessary:

Other incentives that could be created, according to the respondents, would be: better wages (58,2%), increasing professional formation (31,9%), better working conditions (in what concerns nourishment, accommodation or military uniforms)(14,8%), and increasing contract duration (13,7%).

3.6. Summary of decision factors

Figure 6 - Factors that influenced the quitting decision in an important way

Not being a long term job	89,2%
Low wages	83%
Not being sure of receiving qualified training	79%
Having obtained a new job	78,5%
Duration limit in contract situation of 8 years	70,4%

Figure 7 - Factors that had small importance in the quitting decision

The possibility of being nominated to Peacekeeping Operations	65,1%
Military discipline	60,7%
Working shifts 24 hours long	57,8%
Family influence	56%
Weekend shifts	54,3%
The possibility of being placed away from home	49%

4. DISCUSSION

In the first place, this investigation shows that a sometimes-referred crisis in the military vocation amongst Portuguese youth has no sustainability, neither the difficulties in the acceptance of a very particular way of living. It shows, on the other hand, the urgent need of implementation of measures to fight an event that is aggravating, mainly in the private rank, because they are the ones that most quit, and are also the rank that the Army lacks most.

Consequently, one of the hypothesis initially advanced regarding quitting reasons, seems to confirm: the one that refers to these reasons as being more of a material rather than of a symbolic nature. We can observe that, in its majority, the respondents enjoyed military life when they joined the Army, and if they had different conditions they wouldn't have quit.

By comparing the motives of the initial candidature to the volunteer situation with the motives that led to the rescission, we can see that the reason "getting a job" is only important when it comes to quitting. It is possible that derived from the experience they had inside the Army, they don't consider it to be a satisfying job. In what concerns the initial motivation, other factors assume a much greater importance (such as enjoying military life), while material reasons are secondary.

This investigation shows that the decision of quitting was not significantly influenced by factors of an intrinsic military nature, such as having to work in shifts of 24 hours, including weekends, the possibility of being placed away from home, or even military discipline.

In what is related to the new job in which they engage, the most important factors in terms of the quitting decision, are the possibility of having a career and the wages they earn.

The possibility of obtaining qualified training or the possibility to continue their studies, assume a primordial importance as a motive for continuing in military life, because they can guarantee better chances of getting a job at a civilian level. Although these incentives are publicised by the Institution as a way to attract volunteers, they don't seem to be having a practical application, according to the number of respondents who refer these factors as very important in what concerns the decision of quitting.

It's not at all surprising that this is a motive of great dissatisfaction, because it was something that had been promised before they begun their service, but that afterwards became very difficult to attain.

This investigation confirms the initial hypothesis, in the sense that the respondents maintain, in general, the symbolic motives that link them to the military life. However, they quit due to the fact of not having a long-term job and being less paid than other jobs that they arranged.

We can say that no matter how well organized a campaign to attract volunteers, it will only be successful if it has a strong basis of support and it is based upon firm and realistic incentives, instead of upon promises that are difficult to attain. Any marketing campaign which doesn't take these facts in consideration, can reach lots of interested people and even make them enter the Institution, but won't prevent an undetermined amount of them to quit right after that.

Problems at recruitment level can impose the necessity of lowering the standards of admission, and can have also negative consequences in terms of the admission of less qualified personnel.

Once the new status of the volunteer and contract regimes is presently in discussion at the Ministry of National Defence level, this investigation and its conclusions assume an even greater relevance. We hope that the empirically validated knowledge obtained through this investigation will contribute to the decision-making at that level.

This national wide investigation contributes with important information to help in the definition of a recruitment policy that is realistic. Its urgent to put it into practice to avoid more serious moral and financial costs, but also to avoid effects on the national and international reputation of the Portuguese Army, which must not only be maintained but improved, through the qualification of our soldiers.