

ABSTRACT

Every year an estimated 70,000 human resources of the Indian Army, Navy and Indian Air Force (IAF) are released from the Services, rendering the personnel jobless at the prime of life. Such combatants, who are released to maintain a youthful profile of the armed forces, are called ex-servicemen (also called as Air Force Veterans in the IAF). These versatile and experienced human resources are left with considerable productive years in their life. However, these ex-servicemen face enormous resettlement challenges to sustain a decent quality of life, and encounter difficulties in adjusting to civilian ways of life. This study is focused on managing the resettlement of ex-servicemen in the category of Personnel Below Officer Rank (PBOR), especially that of the IAF.

Resettlement of ex-servicemen is not limited to the process of seeking a subsequent career after putting in a major part of one's economically productive life to a given employment. Moreover, resettlement is not the result of an individual's own choice, but due to the conditions of his/her previous service. Therefore, it becomes the responsibility of policy makers to effectively utilize the enormous potential of these human resources at the macro level. At the micro level, as the ex-servicemen are in their prime age, they have major responsibilities towards their family; but they have limited resources to manage the same. On the social front, the sudden entry of the ex-servicemen into the civil society throws its own challenges and problems in their resettlement.

In contrast to the retirement age for civilian government employees in India, which is set at 58 to 60 years or even higher in some cases, the service of most of the defence personnel are truncated at a much younger age. There are about 2,500,000 ex-servicemen (including 400,000 widows of the veterans) in India; about 60,000 join this list annually. However, there is a paucity of academic research in India and even internationally in countries like the UK on managing the resettlement of ex-servicemen. Therefore, this present study

involving a wider approach to resettlement is relevant in the current context. This is most probably the first exclusive study on air force veterans in India.

The survey covered two representative districts of Coimbatore and The Nilgiris in Tamil Nadu State, which respectively represent the relatively developed and underdeveloped regions typical of India. This study used inferential statistical techniques with confidence interval approach to determine the stratified sample sizes of 280 veterans from Coimbatore district and 120 veterans from The Nilgiris ($n = 400$). This facilitates the drawing of inferences with district (regional development) wise, comparative and collective statistics, for generalizing at Tamil Nadu State level and to the Indian national level.

Primary data was collected with an original validated questionnaire (Cronbach Alpha=0.8) involving quantitative and qualitative responses. The analysis shows that 71% of the respondents are in the age group of 41 to 60 years. The majority of the personnel were discharged during 36 to 40 years of prime age from the IAF, i.e. before the normal age of superannuation. Further, majority of the respondents were with higher secondary school qualification when joining the IAF and most of them are graduates or diploma holders at the time of release from the IAF. However, majority of ex-servicemen were drawing a meagre monthly pension between Rs.7,000 and Rs.10,000.

Most of the veterans could not avail the resettlement courses organized by the Directorate General of Resettlement. Most of the ex-servicemen preferred jobs in government, Public Sector Undertakings/banks for their re-employment. Among the ex-servicemen in the working age (less than 60 years), 8% were unemployed. Moreover, 53% of the veterans perceive that their present income is less than their last pay in the Services. Further, there is statistically significant association between the year of release and perception on present income versus Services pay of the veterans. Besides, 90.6% of veterans liked their current job, whereas job insecurity was the prime reason for disliking the present profession.

The study unearthed interesting and valuable patterns in resettlement of ex-servicemen. Majority of the veterans originally belonged to villages but resettled in cities. This revealed a pattern of indirect migration of ex-servicemen from villages to cities. Besides, merely 2% of respondents were allotted a house by Air Force Naval Housing Board. Regarding the resettlement facilities, the veterans' satisfaction score was the highest for regular pension disbursement (not amount of pension) and the least for employment exchanges. Independent sample t-test revealed that the overall mean satisfaction score was higher in the developed region. As the variable resettlement locale (village, town, or city) bears negative coefficient in discriminant function, there is a need to widen and strengthen the reach of resettlement facilities in the rural areas.

The researcher developed a new model to depict the ten crucial facets in resettlement that comprise individual, social, administrative and economic environment. This study reveals that the veterans perceive themselves more capable than their civilian counterparts. Further, the veterans felt that they were underutilized assets; and they could be successful entrepreneurs. Yet, they least agree that the government policies and departments show concern for their resettlement. The researcher devised suitable strategies with a SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats) model, validated with factor analysis. Further, there is a consensus among the veterans on the facets of resettlement across their present professions and the diversely developed regions.

Regarding the identified aspects in resettlement, the veterans ranked 'support from family' as the first and 'adjustment with civil society' as the second in the importance for resettlement. Factor analysis relevantly classified the resettlement aspects into internal, external and augmentation factors. Besides, veterans in reasonably developed region perceive the resettlement aspects as more important than those in underdeveloped region. Further, the study confirms that lower the age of veterans, greater is the importance on the aspects in resettlement.

The researcher constructed a new continuum depicting the ten identified socio-economic needs in resettlement. Garrett ranking revealed that the need of 'children education' secured the first rank in the order of priority of veterans, followed by 'getting a civilian job/business', and third rank was for the need 'acquiring a house'. Comparative Garrett ranking proved consensus among veterans of the two distinctive districts. The study built a unique motivational model for significance of socio-economic needs in resettlement based on essential needs, security needs, comfort needs, esteem needs, and social needs. The resettlement needs are also sorted on the timeline as immediate needs, short term needs, medium term needs, long term needs, and very long term needs.

The veterans indicated a conservative preference for entrepreneurship, mainly due to their unfamiliarity with the civil society. Ex-servicemen mostly became entrepreneurs for rendering social service or sustaining the quality of life. Moreover, ex-servicemen entrepreneurs earned more than their employed comrades. Therefore, proper guidance and preparation will turn the job seekers into job providers. Further, the study included an analysis on the qualitative responses of veterans to get a deeper insight. It also pragmatically analyzes the ethical and managerial implications of the One Rank One Pension (OROP) issue. OROP seeks to ensure equal pensions to ex-servicemen, commensurate with the rank and length of military service, irrespective of the date of release.

The study revealed that the majority of ex-servicemen encountered problems in their resettlement which entail difficulties in adjusting with civil society, financial hardships, no support from their family of origin, and inadequate support by governments. Hence, resettlement of veterans involves wider aspects of socio-economic issues, rather than just re-employment. Therefore the planning premises must be based on inclusive growth strategies with concerted efforts by all stakeholders. This pioneering study is expected to serve as an eye-opener to the policy makers, resettlement organizations and the society in the pursuit of inclusive management of the ex-service veterans.