

# Understanding the Motivation of Young Adults to Enlist and Pursue Military Leadership Studies to Become Professional Soldiers

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**Abstract:** Since the beginning of 2005, conscription service in the Czech Republic ended, leading to the full professionalization of the Czech Armed Forces. Consequently, a career soldier system has been established. The purpose of this article is to identify the factors that motivated young adults, reflecting the specifics of the military profession, to join the army, as well as the factors that motivated them to apply to the Faculty of Military Leadership at the University of Defence for military studies. Data was collected through a semi-structured questionnaire completed by 179 respondents who were first-year military students at the University of Defence. This institution is the only military higher education establishment within the Czech Armed Forces, offering students comprehensive knowledge in the field of command and control. The questionnaire included both open-ended and closed-ended questions. In addition to their motivations, respondents also provided insights on how the Russia-Ukraine conflict influenced their decision to enlist in the army, as well as who supported or discouraged them from doing so. The results indicate that career growth, adventurous activities, job security, physical readiness, fieldwork, and interpersonal relations were among the most influential factors for the respondents. The majority of respondents agreed that the current security situation in the world supported their decision to become a soldier and strengthened their desire to defend their homeland. Parents, extended family, partners, and friends were the primary sources of support in their decision-making process. Just like any other employer, volunteer forces are seeking their own positions and competitive advantages in the labor market. Therefore, it is important for the defense sector to understand the motivations of future commanders to join and remain in the armed forces.

**Keywords:** Soldier, Army, Military, Leadership, Motivation, Russia-Ukraine conflict

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## 1. Introduction

Enlisting in the military is a significant decision made by young people. Understanding the factors influencing young adults' decisions about professional military career is essential for educational institutions, policymakers and society as a whole. The objective of this study is to investigate the motivations and influences behind these young adults' decision to pursue education at a military university and embark on a career as professional soldiers.

The aim of the research is to find out how significantly selected factors reflecting the specifics of the military profession motivate young adults to join the Czech Armed Forces (CAF) and apply to the Faculty of Military Leadership of The University of Defence (FML UoD).

The research questions of the paper can be formulated as follows:

- What are the factors that motivated first year military students of the Faculty of Military Leadership of UoD to join CAF?
- What are the factors that motivated them to apply to military university?
- What are the factors that were discouraging from joining CAF?
- How did their close ones influence them during their decision-making?
- How did the current Russia-Ukraine conflict influence their decision-making?

From the beginning of 2005, the conscription service in the Czech Republic ended and led to the full professionalization of the CAF and career soldier system (Pernica, 2007). Currently, Czech Armed Forces consist of 27 000 soldiers. The University of Defence is the only military higher education establishment within the CAF, offering knowledge in the military field of command and control. 1400 students are currently studying there. In order to be accepted to study at UoD, one must reach the age of 18 and provide proof of a clean record. The applicant must successfully complete an entrance examination, undergo a medical examination and complete two-months initial military training. After successful admission, all students undertake a general introduction together. In the 3rd year, they are divided into 12 specializations (e.g. commander of mechanised units, reconnaissance units, logistics, financial and human resources etc.). After graduation, students are assigned to the troops according to their preferences and the current needs of the CAF. Studying and a pursuing military career involve certain risks and limitations such as the risk of injury, limited possibilities to engage in business or to be politically active etc. (according to Zákon o vojácích z povolání, 1999). However,

military career offers valuable benefits including job security, retirement and other allowances, the support of improving physical condition etc. The soldier may, at their own discretion or upon orders from the CAF, participate in a military operation abroad.

## **2. Theoretical Background**

Motivation is related to management and leadership. Management focuses on working with all organisation resources (finance, information, people, material), while leadership focuses mainly on people (Armstrong and Stephens, 2008). Thus, transformational leadership in particular is strongly linked to motivation, but the relation between them can be perceived differently by individual authors. Adair (2009) states that leadership and motivation are "like brother and sister". It is difficult to think of a leader who does not motivate others. Maddock and Fulton (1998) are even convinced that leadership is motivation. Other authors perceive motivation as one of the components of leadership (Armstrong and Stephens, 2008; Shelton, 2012; Bass and Riggio, 2012). According to Blanchard and Conley (2022) the leadership focuses on vision, direction and results - all these aspects can only be achieved through the motivation of workers.

Motivation can be defined in different ways and refers to the forces either within or external to a person that arouse enthusiasm and persistence to pursue a certain course of action (Daft et al., 2010). The motivational tools can be categorized, e.g. to job evaluation, social conditions, material conditions and job characteristics (Blažek, 2011).

A person's decision to join the military is complex and motivated by a number of intrinsic and extrinsic factors (Ginexi et al., 1994). Several key factors have been identified as motivations and influences for young adults choosing to study at military academies and universities - financial incentives, sense of purpose and service, career aspirations and opportunities, personal development, peer and family influence. Some studies show that young people join the military for material reasons. Economic factors, such as financial stability (e.g. monetary rewards, salary and benefits) and job security, have been identified as motivations for example by Moskos (1982) and Griffith (2008). For young individuals who may face limited employment prospects or financial constraints, military service can provide a stable income. Moreover, financial factors (scholarships, tuition fees etc.) offered by military schools can make these institutions more attractive to students seeking financial support for their education (Barr, 2016 and 2019).

Research however indicates that not only material factors but also value-oriented reasons such as personal, social, and patriotic motivations drive young people to enlist in the military (Eighmey, 2006). Lawrence & Legree (1996), Eighmey (2006) or Griffith (2008) found that soldiers often possess a strong sense of duty and commitment to serve their country. They perceive military service as an opportunity to make a meaningful contribution and demonstrate their loyalty to their country. Park & Avery (2016) and Lewis (2018) found that young people who have a strong sense of patriotism are more likely to choose military service. They perceive it as a way to defend the values of their country and protect their fellow citizens. Similar findings were confirmed by Woodruff et al. (2006) - intrinsic values such as patriotism and desire to serve play a key role in the decision-making process to join the armed forces. For 52 American and 11 Bulgarian servicemen, the most important factors were participation in military operations and an opportunity to serve their country (Grigorov, 2020). Similarly, a strong sense of purpose and desire to serve their country or community motivates young adults to military studies.

Career considerations also play a significant role. Ginexi et al. (1994), Grigorov (2020), Woodruff et al. (2006), or Gade & Elig (1986) emphasize that military service offers structured career paths, job security, and opportunities for skill development. The military provides training and education that can lead to valuable civilian career prospects. It makes an attractive option for young individuals seeking stability and long-term prospects. Some are drawn to military academies due to the emphasis on personal development, self-discipline, independence and leadership skills.

The influence of peers and family members plays a crucial role in young adults' educational and career choices. Gibson et al. (2007), Griffith (2008 and 2011) or Kleykamp (2006) found that family members who have served in the military can positively influence young individuals' perception of military service. Their family's experiences and values may instill a sense of duty and tradition.

Other motivators can be the desire for adventure and the challenge of pushing personal limits. Physically and mentally demanding activities, as well as the opportunity to travel and new experience can be attractive factors (Lerro et al., 1993). Helmus et al. (2018) explore also the role of social identity in military service –

establishing a sense of belonging and identity within the military community that is a platform to develop camaraderie, teamwork, and shared sense of purpose.

### 3. Data and Methods

With regard to the aim, the research was set in a quantitative paradigm. The self-constructed questionnaire survey appears to be the most effective data collection technique for this purpose. Data collection was carried out in October 2022 through the printed questionnaire. The target population consisted of the first-year military students of the Faculty of Military Leadership of UoD. The validity of the questionnaire was verified in a pre-survey conducted among selected military students during June 2022. The purpose and aim of the research including full assurance of anonymity, were explained to all the research participants prior to data collection.

The respondents were motivated to complete the questionnaire by the personal presence of the researchers, they could ask for additional information if necessary. It ensured a return rate of 100%. The results are thus representative of the population (the first-year military students of FML UoD). 179 respondents took part in the research - 21 % women and 79 % men. 97 % of the respondents were 19 - 22 years old, 3 % of them were older. 93% of the respondents had never been a member of the CAF before, 7% were graduates of Military High School.

To answer the first and second research question, 32-item and 13-item closed-ended battery of motivational factors with responses on the Likert scale was created. The 32 factors were divided into three groups – work evaluation (salary, benefits and moral evaluation), work characteristics and other motivators. Respondents were allowed to add their answers through open-ended questions. To answer the third research question, 10-item closed-ended battery of demotivational factors was created. The possibilities of answers were - insignificant, rather insignificant, rather significant and very significant. To answer the fourth research question, one closed and one open question were created. To answer the fifth research question, one open question was created. The set of factors was created based on content analysis of resources related to motivation both in general and in military environment. Furthermore, the results of brainstorming session with five soldiers and 35 UoD students were used as well as the results of the "Motivation to join the CAF" study of The General Staff of the CAF, which interviewed 2 229 recruits in 2018.

Quantitative data was statistically analysed. Qualitative data was analyzed through open coding according to grounded theory which enables structuring of a large amount of data and organizing them into categories according to their similarities.

### 4. Results

The first research question aims at finding a level of significance of 32 motivational factors - divided into three groups - for joining the CAF. The results are shown in Figures 1, 2 and 3.

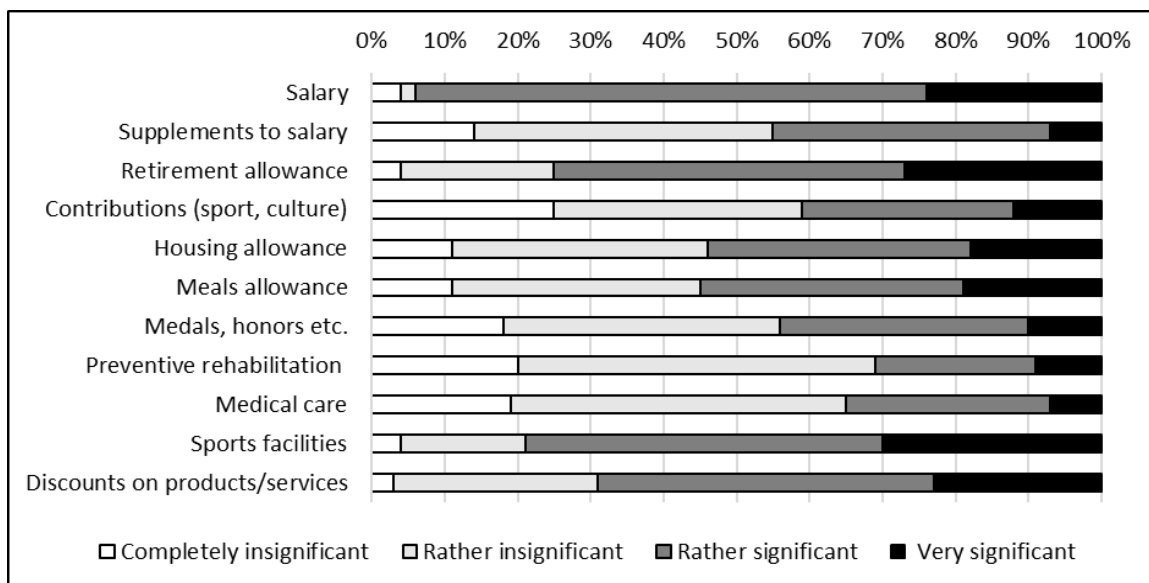


Figure 1: Significance of motivational factors for joining CAF – work evaluation

Among the job appreciation tools, salary, retirement allowance, sports facilities and possible discounts on products/services, are the most important motivators. Salary is significant for more than 90% of candidates. Less important aspects are allowances (for recreation, culture, sports etc.), preventive rehabilitation and organisational medical care. Even so, these benefits are important for 30-40% of the respondents.

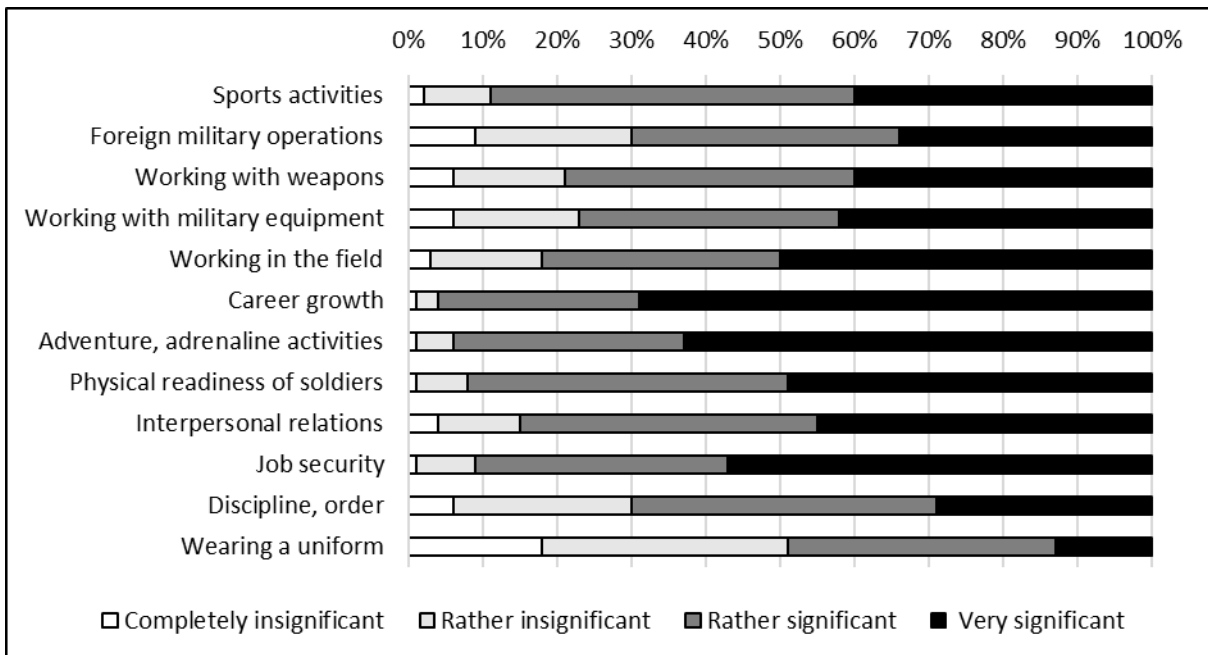


Figure 2: Significance of motivational factors for joining CAF – work characteristics

Motivation aspects connected with work characteristics are definitely the most important group of criteria in the decision-making process about military career. All aspects (with the exception of wearing the uniform) are important for at least 70% of applicants. Career growth, adventure and sports activities, physical readiness and job security are meaningful even for 90% of them. Moreover, the frequency of "very significant" responses is significantly higher compared to the job appreciation instruments.

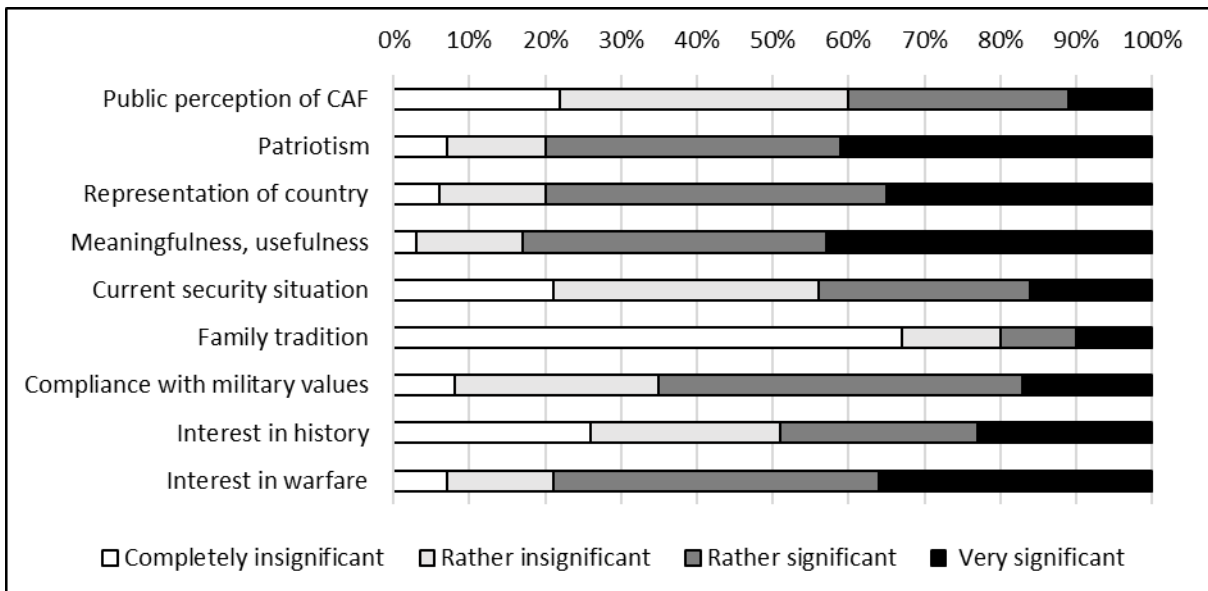


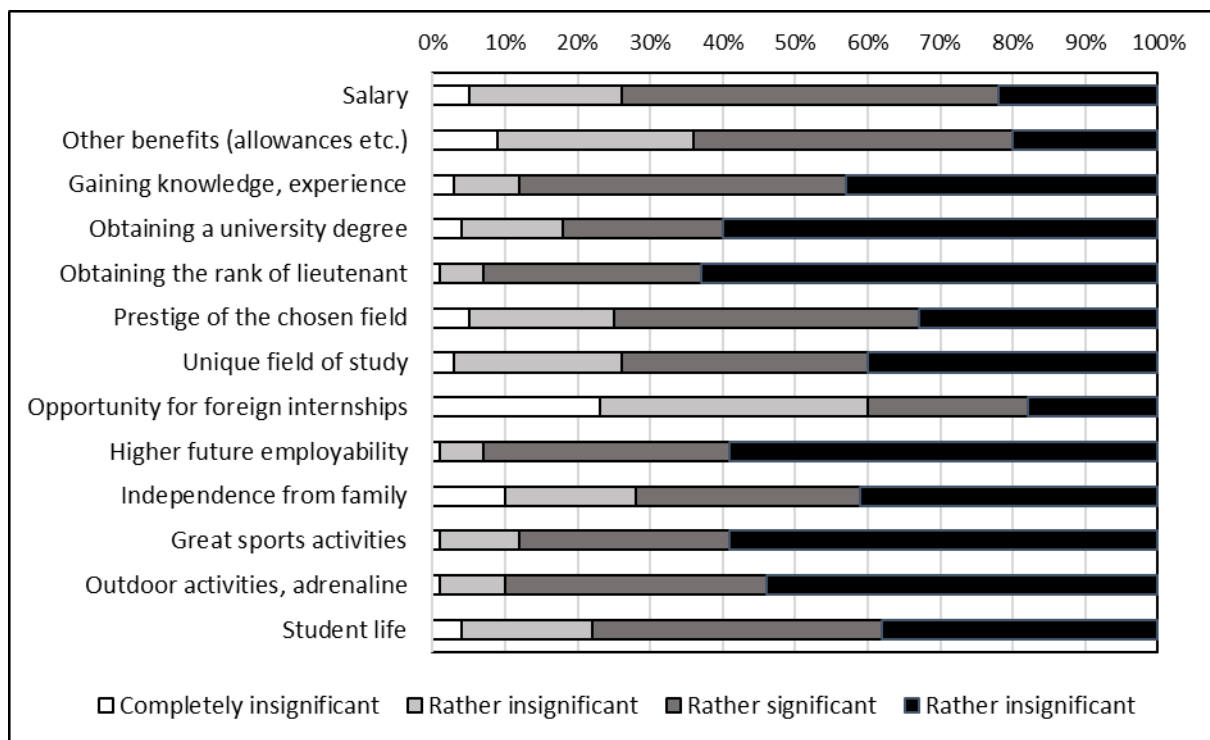
Figure 3: Significance of motivational factors for joining CAF – other motivators

Other factors are usually connected with soft characteristics such as the values and interests of the candidates, their relationship with the public and to their homeland. These motivators are also considered to be significant by a large part of respondents, especially those related to patriotism, meaningfulness and interest in the military and military values.

Open-ended questions revealed some additional factors or explained the above ones. As part of the process of open coding of the text according to the grounded theory, the diverse formulations of the responses were arranged according to similarity into the following categories:

- Altruistic motivations – 11 respondents declare they are motivated by the opportunity to help their own family or nation (“To become a more beneficial person for others, to help others and at the same time to be braver and able to defend myself and my family if necessary”).
- Self-development - 10 students emphasize aspects related to personal growth, self-development and the desire to try something new (“I want to do what I enjoy and I want to be the best at it”, “I want to do what not everyone can do”, “I want to get to know myself in difficult situations”).
- Pride, admiration for the army - 7 respondents mention aspects related to the pride for being a soldier and the effort to be a role model for others (“I want to show the world that even a small country can be strong”, “I want to be a part of army culture”).
- Job security - seven respondents highlighted job security in the armed forces as a motivating aspect.
- Motivation by loved ones - four respondents state that (“...positive experiences and stories from friends”, “I wanted to follow in my father's footsteps”).
- Long-term interest in military values (warfare) - six students state they have also been involved in activities close to the military (“it is connected with my high school”, “I go to military-themed airsoft camps”). Some of them mention that becoming a soldier is their "childhood dream".
- Independence - in two cases, the possibility of becoming independent from family or living with a partner emerged as a motivating factor.

It was followed up on the motivational factors influencing entry into the CAF by examining the significance of factors that influenced the decision to study at the military school in CR - the University of Defence. The results are presented in Figure 4.



**Figure 4: Significance of motivational factors for applying to military university**

The most important reasons for the decision to attend a military university are to obtain of the rank of lieutenant and related higher employment in the CAF (both important for 90% of respondents). Additionally, students are attracted by the possibility of enjoying sports while studying, attaining the university degree, gaining high knowledge and experience, student life and salary (rather or significantly important for more than 70% respondents).

In open-ended question, security, pride in the military profession and self-development are largely declared (“*proving to myself that I have what it takes*”, “*...gaining self-discipline and the ability to overcome myself*”).

The factors discouraging from studying at the UoD largely replicates those related to CAF (see below). Thus, especially distance, signing on for many years, and the stage without student status are mentioned.

Furthermore, aspects discouraging from military career in CAF were examined - the results are shown in Figure 5.

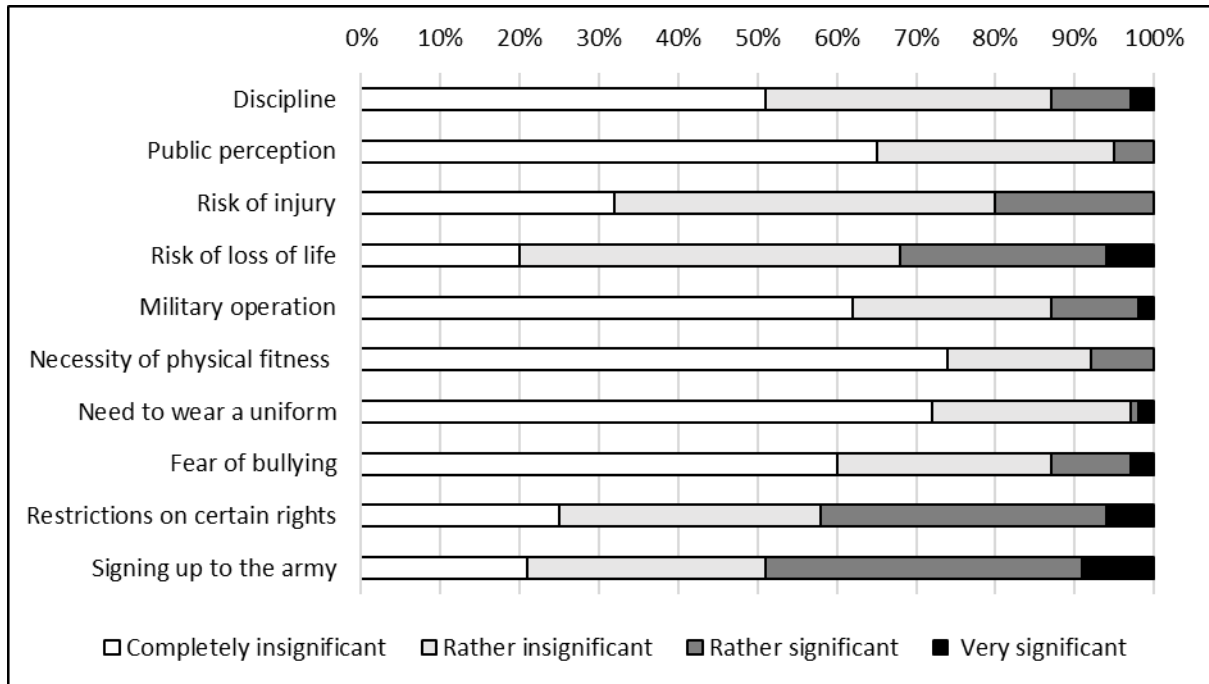
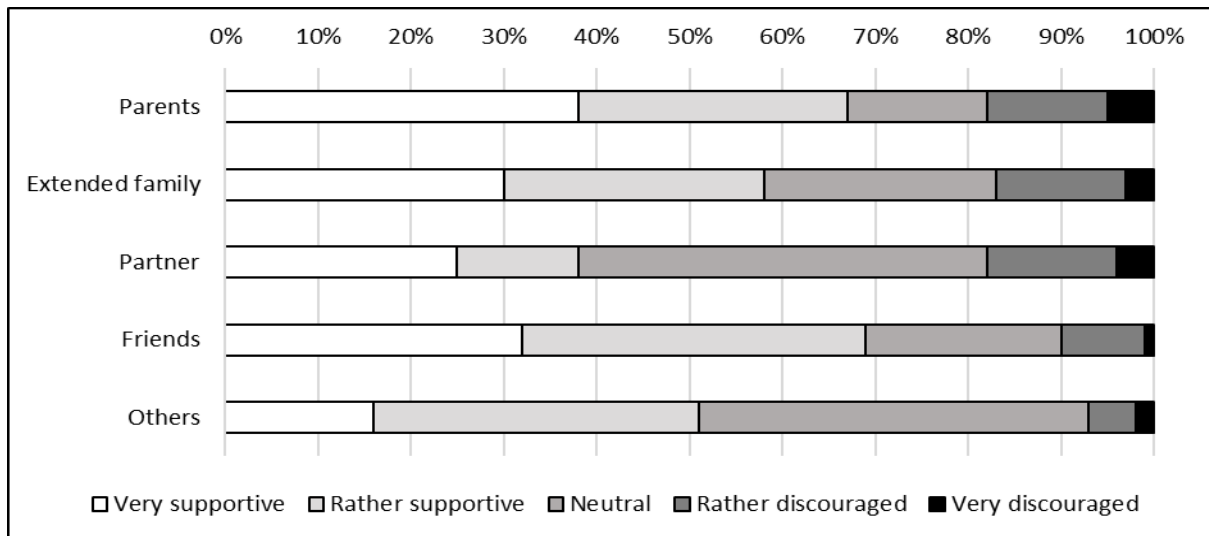


Figure 5: Discouraging factors from joining CAF

Generally, the submitted factors turned out to be in most cases not very discouraging. Mostly students perceived signing up to the army, restrictions on some rights (e.g. entrepreneurship or entering politics) and the risk of loss of life or injury as discouraging. The open-ended question was filled by 43 respondents. The most frequently mentioned aspects can be classified into the following groups:

- Long distance from home and uncertainty accompanying the military profession (22 respondents). Most students experience separation from their families while studying at the UoD and further on when they are placed as a commander in a particular troop. Related to this is the uncertainty connected with a location of the troop where the commander will work after graduation. The problem is also that the applicant does not know at which troop he/she will be needed and whether the given job will correspond to his/her preferences (*"fear of not getting to the specialisation I want"*).
- Potential negative aspects (perceived or real) connected with the military profession - *"demanding, stress, possibility of burnout", "possible arrogant behaviour of superiors", "poorer logistics and organisation of command", "underfunding of the army" or "collective guilt"*.
- More difficult coordination of military and personal life – *"In military, possibility of career growth is more affected by family life (especially for women)", "less possibility to find and keep a partner", "less time for family"*. These concerns are mentioned in some form by 5 respondents.

The motivation of young people is certainly influenced (positively or negatively) by their surroundings - family, partners, friends or other people. A closed and open-ended question verified the intensity and direction of their support. The results are shown in Figure 6.



**Figure 6: The influence of close ones on the decision to join the CAF**

Almost 70% of respondents experienced strong or moderate support from family and friends. Partners and others are more often neutral (40% of respondents). 5% of respondents experienced a high degree of discouragement by parents, and less than 5% of respondents by other people. Less than 20% of respondents experienced rather or significantly discouraging reaction from their family and partner, and only minimally from friends and others.

The fifth research question focuses on determining the influence of the current security situation in the vicinity of the Czech Republic - Russia-Ukraine conflict. The conflict has begun at the exact time of respondents' consideration regarding the military enlistment (submission of application to the UoD). 129 out of 179 respondents answered the open question connected with this topic. Following categories of answers were found by open coding process (in descending order of frequency of occurrence):

- *Yes, the current situation supported my decision positively* - 67 (37%) of all respondents. The students state that the security situation has even strengthened their determination to be ready to defend their homeland. They are often very resolute in their attitude - "...definitely, unequivocally, the situation supported my conviction", "Before the war I thought about the army, but after the war started I was determined", "The war proved that the army is still very much needed". Such an awareness and reminder of the importance of the army is mentioned in several answers ('the situation just convinced me of the importance and purpose of the army').
- *Yes, the situation influenced my decision rather negatively*. A total of 11 interviewees answered in this way, however, it appears seven times that this insecurity came from the family. Only 4 respondents admit that they themselves were surprised by the situation - "You realise that you can really fight for your life in a war at a young age", "I was confused by how close the conflict broke out to us", "Yes, I was uncertain, I can not imagine going to war".
- *No, the deteriorating security situation did not affect me* - 48 (27%) of all respondents. Students often express a high level of awareness of the possibility of an armed conflict breaking out even in times of peace. Therefore, the situation has not affected them so much - "Conflicts and wars are always taking place in the world, I am and I was aware of that", "There will always be some armed conflict in the world. Now it is just closer than our generation is used to" or "The situation has not affected me, I believe in NATO and I always wanted to become a NATO soldier".

## 5. Discussion

The importance of motives for military career choice was measured on selected motivational factors reflecting the specifics of the military profession – work evaluation (salary, benefits and moral evaluation), work characteristics and other motivators. Moreover, the factors discouraging from joining the CAF were analysed as well as the impact of the Russia-Ukraine conflict on young people's decision to become soldiers.

Salary is very or rather significant factor for more than 90% respondents while the employee benefits are the least important group of motivators (but still quite important). On contrary, the work characteristics are the most significant – especially career growth, adventure and adrenaline activities, security of employment and

team atmosphere in military collective. The revealed reasons for joining the army are highly consistent with the studies of Ginexi et al. (1994), Moskos (1982) or Griffith (2008). Moreover, the research confirmed the results of Grigorov (2020), Woodruff et al. (2006), or Gade & Elig (1986). It highlighted career paths, job security, and self development opportunities as the primer reasons for military career. The research results of Helmus et al. (2018) is also in harmony. It stresses the significance of team spirit and collective atmosphere in the military community (need to belong somewhere, to share a sense of purpose etc.).

Other important criteria in deciding to join the CAF are connected with values and interests - patriotism, usefulness for society or interest in the military values and warfare. Additionally, respondents often mention the desire to help people, the opportunity for self-development or independence and admiration for the army. The importance of these "soft" motivators is confirmed also by the studies of Eighmey (2006), Lawrence & Legree (1996) or Griffith (2008). Woodruff et al. (2006) even revealed that patriotism and desire to serve the public play a key role in the decision-making process. The conclusion is further supported by the studies of Park & Avery (2016) or Lewis (2018).

The reasons for studying military university are, to some extent, in line with the reasons for joining the army as whole - salary, better future employability, the possibility of enjoying sports while studying, obtaining a university degree, self-development and student life. The finding is in line with Barr's studies (2016 and 2019) confirming that financial incentives plays a significant role in young adults' decisions to pursue military education and career.

As for the discouraging factors, the most crucial were signing up to the army, restriction of certain rights and risk of loss of life or injury. In the open question respondents add distance from home and some other weaknesses of military, e.g. the time-consuming nature of a military career.

According to Gibson et al. (2007), Griffith (2008), Griffith (2011) or Kleykamp (2006) the influence of peers and family members plays a crucial role in young adults' educational and career choices. In this research the impact of relatives is mentioned quite rarely. However, family, friends and partners are perceived by respondents as mostly supportive. Only a few cases of discouraging from joining the armed forces were noted.

The beginning of the Russia-Ukraine conflict meant rather a confirmation of the students' decision. Only individuals declare a concern arising from the deterioration of the security situation, mainly from the side of their family. A third of the respondents stated that the situation did not influence their decision, because the emergence of an armed conflict anywhere and at any time must be expected.

## **6. Conclusion**

Based on the results of the research conducted with 179 first-year military students of the University of Defence, the main conclusions can be drawn, and the stated research question thereby answered. The most important motivators for join CAF are salary, career growth, adventure, job security, patriotism, team spirit and interest in military values. On the contrary, the dissuasive aspects are mainly enlistment for 10 or more years, restriction of certain rights, risk of loss of life or injury and distance from home. The outbreak of the Russia-Ukraine conflict reinforced the decision of the majority of respondents to join the CAF. Only individuals declare it has made them or their families insecure. However, in general, those around respondents - family, friends and partners - tend to express support for their beliefs or at least a neutral attitude.

The conclusions of the research are valid for the given sample and are intended to be further verified with the help of quantitative and qualitative research. It would be for example useful to analyse differences between motivational factors of students of the UoD and recruits joining the CAF directly (to military troops). It is possible to compare results with other security forces (such as the fire department and police department personnel) or make an international military comparison. Another interesting direction would be a longitudinal study of this research sample to find out how the motivational factors change over time.

All volunteer forces, like any other employer, are looking for their own positions and competitive advantage in the labour market. Therefore, it is important for the Ministry of Defence of CR to learn about and ascertain the motives for joining the CAF. Understanding the motivation of the candidates can help educational institutions and policymakers to develop appropriate recruitment and marketing strategy and support systems to better meet the diverse needs and aspirations of young individuals considering a military career.

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