

An Exploration of the Life of Retired Defence Personnel

Saloni Srivastava^{1*}

ABSTRACT

Serving the defence forces can be enervating for a lot of reasons but doing it for 30-40 years and then getting retired and going back to the civilian life can take an extra toll on the mental health of the defence personnel. Because of this it becomes important to understand the life experiences of the retired defence personnel. This qualitative study aims to explore the life experiences of the retired defence personnel when they were serving the forces and after being retired. For achieving this goal twelve participants were approached and semi structured interview were conducted. Using thematic analysis on the data it revealed that family, aspects of serving the defence forces, transferring as an inevitable part of the job, professional and social aspects of being retired and the challenges faced after being retired, and emotions attached to the forces and ultimately the motivation to serve the forces came out to be the major themes in this study. This study paves path for further research to explore the challenges faced by defence personnel and ways to improve mental health of the defence personnel.

Keywords: *Retired defence personnel, serving, transfer, retired life, emotions attached, motivation*

Migrating across the country every now and then with all belongings can be enervating, but being in the defence forces this is something that a person cannot escape. Migrating around the country can become challenging for so many reasons including adjusting to the new environment and getting acquainted with the new environment (Morin, 2011). But extra issues are posed on the defence personnel when they get retired and go back into the civilian life. Being in an isolated campus for most part of one's life and then going back to civilian life can put an individual through social, emotional and work adjustment issues. In the past study issues are seen in the retired defence personnel who serve the forces for 30-40 years of their life and now after retirement returning to civilian life. From living a life of serving others to realizing that they now have to focus more on building their personal life puts a lot of pressure on the retired defence personnel (Zogas, 2017). More available research has shown that problems of ex-servicemen after retirement has nothing to do with the parameters of retirement such as mode of retirement, the time since retirement and rank at the time of retirement (Tripathi, 2016).

¹Post Graduate Scholar, Department of Psychology, CHRIST (Deemed to be University), Bengaluru, Karnataka, India

*Corresponding Author

Received: April 08, 2022; Revision Received: December 27, 2022; Accepted: December 31, 2022

An Exploration of the Life of Retired Defence Personnel

Sam, et al. (2016) Found in research that ex-servicemen face issues in adjusting to civilian life post-retirement - Personal issues like a drastic change in the perception of everything, having more leisure time, and physical fitness. Career issues like low salary, lack of exposure to the technology, getting back and habituated to other career options and lastly social issues like lack of social connectedness as they keep on moving from one place to another, and safety and security they have financially as well as physically. Tripathi (2016) did a study on issues of the ex-servicemen and found that the issues that the ex-servicemen face are exclusive of the factors of retirement and are more focused on the social and work adjustment issues that the person has to face after the retirement.

Parker, et al. (2019) did a study and found out that the transition from military to civilian life is very challenging in many aspects, but it was found that readjusting to the civilian life was somewhat easy for the retired defence personnel as they are used to getting transferred to new places in every few years. They further explained that roughly one-in-four retired defence personnel said that it was difficult for them to adjust to the civilian life after serving the forces for 20-30 years. Maguire, et al. (2017) in research found that the retired defence personnel have issues after being retired and settling in the civilian life because the rules are different in military environments compared to civilian ones and that defence personnel must navigate a complex cultural transition when moving between environments which is not the case for civilians. University of Southern California (2017) did a survey asking questions to the defence personnel where questions were directed towards them in order to understand the difficulties of transitioning to civilian life. They found that the most significant difficulty retired defence personnel face in terms of adjusting to the civilian life is they are unable to understand and relate to those around them. The structure of civilian life is complex, and the defence personnel are used to having a rigid lifestyle.

Norwich University (2020) conducted a survey and found that military services is one of the most demanding careers, and it presents many challenges on the defence personnel who is returning to civilian life. These challenges happen because of the purpose they lack when they join the civilian life back. It was also found that though the unemployment rate of the ex-servicemen is decreasing it still is a large percentage and it impacts the psychological problems of the retired defence personnel.

Excluding the data that is available in this expanse, limited is known about what happens after defence personnel retires and returns to civilian life, especially in the Indian context. What is the coping mechanism they use to adjust and reduce their new settlement anxiety? To understand this transition for the ex-servicemen and address the research gap on post military transition, the Life after Service Studies (LASS) research program was initiated (Van, 2010). Through extensive research, it was found that little is known about the experiences of retired defence personnel and how they mitigate through the issues (Sweet, 2009). It was also found that the literature that is present on the experiences of the retired defence personnel does not talk about the definition of the successful military to civilian transition (MacLean, 2013).

Hence, conducting this research will lead to laying the foundation for further research in problems for the retired and serving defence personnel. In India, defence personnel and their life is an unfrequented subject, and the mental health of defence personnel is not paid much heed. This makes it indispensable to do research and explore this area to bring awareness about mental health problems in defence personnel. This research also opens up ways for future work in this area that could reveal ways to better the working conditions and

An Exploration of the Life of Retired Defence Personnel

situations for the defence personnel to adjust their settlement positively. Defence personnel leave for the civilian life after serving the forces for more than 30 years of their life. This research can help find ways to make this transition for the defence personnel smooth for the retired defence personnel.

METHODOLOGY

The objective of this current study is to explore the life experiences of retired defence personnel in different time frames of their serving and retired defence life. This study explores the experiences when the defence personnel was serving, and when they got retired. This study also encompasses the understanding of the struggles defence personnel do through the transfer process and the struggles they face in different facets of their life including social, professional, and personal lives after retirement.

The present study is a qualitative study, which uses the phenomenological design as this study focuses on the phenomena of the experiences. The Sample comprised of retired defence personnel with a gender ratio of 1:2 female to male gender. The sample size was decided upon the available data and when the data saturation was reached (12 participant). The sampling technique used for this study was purposive sampling. The inclusion criteria for the sample was that the participants be older than 60 years, should've served the forces for more than 25 years, should not have been retired for more than 5 years, and the defence personnel should be from India. The exclusion criteria for the sample were that the defence personnel who took voluntary retirement were not taken into consideration, the study takes into account only the defence personnel who have served the forces and got retired after the age of 60.

The data was collected through one-on-one semi structured interview method. The interview lasted for 30 minutes, where open as well as close ended questions were asked to the participants. The interview was transcribed and thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke thematic analysis) was used on the data obtained. First data was familiarized and primary codes were assigned to the data, pattern and themes emerged from the code, these themes were then reviewed and then defined. Reflexive report was taken into account when doing the analysis to check that patterns and themes are not forced.

The sample was selected using inclusion, exclusion criteria, where the sample was approached via word of mouth. After the participant agreed to be a part of the study, semi structured interviews were taken individually and it was made sure that the client reads the consent form and understands their rights. After this the collected data was analyzed using the thematic analysis, and the findings were reported.

All ethical considerations were kept in mind while conducting the research. Informed consent was obtained from all subjects. In order to maintain research rigor data audit and member check was used. Confidentiality and anonymity of all subjects was assured and maintained in this study. Approval from the defence campuses was maintained in order to keep them informed about the study.

RESULTS

Table No. 1 Experiences of retired defence personnel while serving the defence forces and after being retired are presented as Themes, subthemes and meaningful codes.

Themes	Subthemes	Codes
Family	1.1 Family Support	Stood with me, dedicated, adjustments, sacrifices, unnoticed service, bigger hero than me
	1.2 Spending time with family-before retirement	Lunch time with family, dinner with family, distance, tough time, children felt left alone
	1.3 Spending time with family-after retirement	Marriage, have fun family time, make up for the losttime, focus on them
Experience of serving the force	2.1 Fixed schedule and Discipline	Timetable, fixed work, discipline
	2.2 Perks of serving theforces	Financial support, medical support, education support, pension, security, best life standards
	2.3 Struggles of serving theforces	Communication, risk, away from family, nature of job
	2.4 Motivation to serve theforces	Never die approach, materialistic goods, benefits, self-worth boost
Transfer: an inevitable part	3.1 Part of the job	Inevitable, every few years, came with the job
	3.2 Nature of transfer	Rank, work experience, location
	3.3 Helping factors inshifting	Family, friends, support from theforces department
	3.4 Challenges in shifting	Changing places, changing schools, no stable job forthe partner, new surroundings, new social circle
	3.5 Personal beliefs	Fear and anxiety, mental stress, past bad experiences
Retirement from the defence forces	4.1 Professional life after retirement	Business, no plan as such, pension
	4.2 Challenges after beingretired	Schedule, no meaning to life, less understanding of the new world
	4.3 Social life afterretirement	New circle, permanent house, civilians, away from secluded campus
Emotions attached to the forces	5.1 Finding meaning of life	Beyond individual, nation, serving people, deeper understanding of life
	5.2 Thankful to the forces	Personality, life, facilities, security, financial stability, education, respect in civilianarea

An Exploration of the Life of Retired Defence Personnel

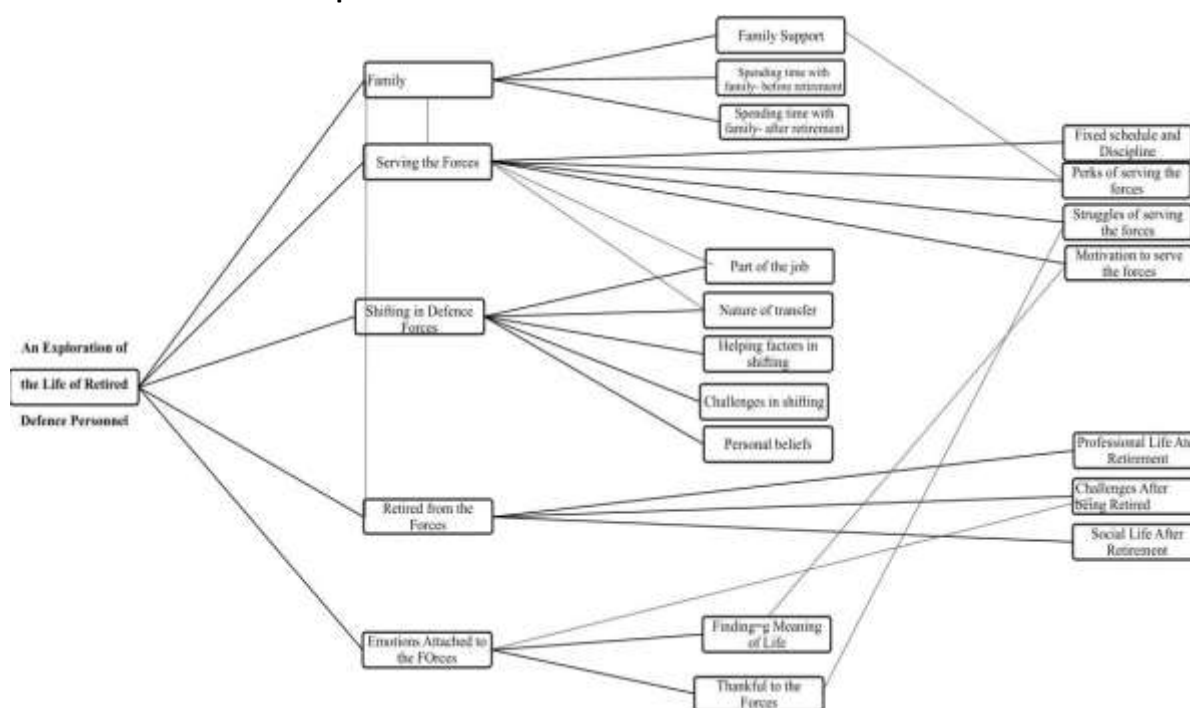


Figure 1: Thematic network representing the major and sub themes pertaining to the results of the study

Figure 1 shows the thematic map for this study shows the relationship between the themes and the subthemes for the given study. There was a connection seen between the main theme of family which related to the experiences of serving defence life as when they were serving the defence personnel were not able to spend time with their family and after getting retired a priority was placed on spending time with the family. The subtheme of motivation to serve the forces is also related to the subtheme of being thankful to the forces and finding meaning to life. The defence personnel feels that the motivation to serve the nation also came from a place of being thankful to the forces as it gave them an opportunity to them to serve the nation and the people.

Family

Family is one of the broad themes of this study because it was seen that the defence personnel talked about how their family was a part of a lot of their transitions that they made through the serving as well as after being retired from the forces. Subtheme of family support, Spending time with family before and after retirement came out prominently in the interview process.

“But gladly, even at that time, my wife, and even my parents stuck with me, because they knew that working in the defence force, was a tough job, and without them it would not have been possible.” (Participant 1, male, 63)

Serving the forces

Different aspects of serving the forces like the fixed schedule and discipline, perks of serving the forces, struggles and motivation to serve the forces came out in this broad theme. The retired defence personnel look back at their experience of serving the forces and felt that these areas were especially vital in shaping their good as well as bad experience of serving the forces.

An Exploration of the Life of Retired Defence Personnel

“We used to work, multiple shifts, and the work pressure at that time was just too much. But yes, the never die. Never Say Die attitude kept me going.” (Participant 7, female, 63)

Shifting in defence forces

Shifting from one place to another is an inevitable part of the job description of being in defence forces. The participants recalled that during the time they were serving the forces the shifting from one place to another sometimes brought a lot of emotions in them as well as their families. As it is an inevitable part of the job the experiences of serving defence personnel cannot be determined without looking into this aspect.

“I used to always have this anxiety whenever it came to shifting from one place to another... amm you know because of some negative things that happened to our family when we were shifting earlier, one time our luggage got stolen then next time in the new place our whole family was really sick and a lot of other things so because of that I always used to get a puja done before leaving for the new posting,” (Participant 3, male, 61)

Retired from the forces

In order to explore the experiences of the retired defence personnel after the subthemes that were obtained were the challenges and experiences of the retired defence personnel in terms of their professional life, social life and personal life.

“Living in the campus for such a long time and now living in the civilian area presses a lot of changes on the social circle as well, like our friends and the people we used to hang out with.” (Participant 5, male, 64)

Emotions attached to the forces

While talking about the experiences of serving the defence the participants went into exploring the emotions that they felt while serving the forces in almost every participant being part of the defence forces was something beyond the goods provided by the forces. Because of this the subtheme of finding meaning to life and being thankful for the job was seen in the participants.

“When I look back at it, it was one of the most beautiful experiences of my life, and I really wouldn't exchange it for anything anything. It was the best experience so, it was the best life, I served my country.” (Participant 1, male, 63)

DISCUSSION

This study identifies a range of areas in the life experiences of the retired defence personnel which has impacted various timelines of their life while serving the defence forces and after being retired from the perspective of retired defence personnel. These findings of the study are consistent with previous studies which shows that there is significant relevance of certain areas in the life of the defence personnel which affects their experiences. Even though the experiences are dynamic for each defence personnel still there is some continuity and similarity found in the experiences of the defence personnel. In accordance with the current research, retired defence personnel were taken into consideration they were found to face certain significant and common issues when it comes to their experiences of them serving and being retired from the defence forces.

Family

The theme that came as one of the most dominating themes in this study is family. Family has played an important role in the kind of experiences the defence personnel have. While serving the forces family support has come out to be an important aspect for the personnel as they mentioned that the families also have to go through a lot while somebody from the

An Exploration of the Life of Retired Defence Personnel

family is serving the forces. These sacrifices include making adjustments with the job profile, shifting from place to place, not being able to have a stable lifestyle because of the dynamicity of the job. The support and sacrifices of the family is something that most of the participants are thankful for. Another aspect of family affecting the experiences of the defence personnel is the time they spend with the family while serving the force or after getting retired. The urge to spend more time with family but not being able to do it while serving the forces and because of that using most of the time after retirement with the family was seen to be a common in all participant showing that the defence personnel are not getting enough time to spend with the family reason being the nature of the job and the defence personnel at times being posted to extreme areas where they can't take their families which results in them being away from them for years.

Experience of serving the force

Another important theme that came across in this study was the different aspect of the experiences of the defence personnel while they were serving the forces. The nature of the job that is having fixed schedule and incorporating discipline from the training period itself in the defence personnel. These two qualities have defined the lifestyle and ultimately the life experiences of the personnel while serving the forces. There are certain perks and struggles of the experiences of the serving of forces for the personnel. These perks include the financial stability, medical, educational and other materialistic benefits that the defence personnel and their family has been found be one of the most important motivating factors for the defence personnel to continue with this job. But when the motivation to serve the forces come into the picture the defence personnel also expressed their concern about the challenges and struggles they face in the forces which sometimes hinders their motivation. These challenges include being away from their loves ones and the basic risk involved in the job and the demands the job places on the personnel. But the motivation was still found to be not affected by these challenges because of the mental ideology the personnel have to serve the nation.

Transfer: an inevitable part

Shifting from one place to another is an inevitable part of the job profile for a defence personnel. This being an integral part of the job has effects on the experiences of the defence personnel. The shifting affects the personnel based on being a part of the job and the nature it comes in for example the nature of the transfer depends on the rank and work experience of the personnel. This nature will determine how frequent they will be transferred and ultimately their adjustment problems or perks will be determined based on that. The helping factors in the transfer of the personnel include support from the friends, family and the forces in order to adjust to the new location and settle down in their work as well. The challenges faced by the defence forces is something that came out as a relevant topic from the interview. These challenging factors include the change in place which includes changing of workplace for the defence personnel, change of school for their children and the spouse of the personnel not being able to have a stable work life. adjusting to new social setting and forming new social circle every few years can be taxing for them initially but in the longer run it has given them the ability to mix up with people from different cultures without difficulty.

Retirement and emotions attached to the defence forces

The experiences of the retired defence personnel were influenced by how they are living their lives right now after being retired from the forces. There are certain aspects of the life of the retired defence personnel after being retired including the professional aspect, and the

An Exploration of the Life of Retired Defence Personnel

social challenges that they have to face after serving the defence forces. Professional life after retirement of the defence personnel was not something the participants were very keen about. Most of the participants mentioned that they have no plan to work after being retired, some said business or using the pension for solving their financial needs. Being retired brings a lot of challenges for the retired defence which includes the shifting of schedule and trying to find meaning to life now. The retired defence personnel go through emotions that are attached to defence forces which included finding meaning of life through looking at the forces as serving the nation and feeling it is a beyond themselves, and serve the people. The meaning they associate with serving the forces is deeper and they are very thankful to the forces for every aspect of their personality and life that they have. The defence personnel feels that they have a proper functioning life and a lot of facilities for them and their family and they owe it all to the defence forces.

CONCLUSION

The current qualitative study aimed at studying the life experiences of retired defence personnel when they were serving the forces and after getting retired. For achieving this objective of the study, a qualitative non-structured interview was conducted on 12 participants. The responses of the participants revealed that the defence personnel have majorly explained that while serving the forces the main areas that influences their experience was their family, different aspect of their professional life while they were serving the forces, perks and problems of shifting from one place to another. Another major aspect affecting the experiences of the defence personnel was the professional, social aspects of the life of their retired life, including the challenges after being retired. Emotions came out as an important aspect of how the defence personnel look at their experiences related to serving the defence forces and ultimately the nation. This study can be used as a basis for future researches to explore about the challenges of the experiences of the defence personnel and how to improve the mental health of the defence personnel.

REFERENCES

- Maguire, L., Caddick, N., Godier-McBard, L. R., & Fossey, M. (2017). Transition From the Military into Civilian Life: An Exploration of Cultural Competence. Research gate https://www.researchgate.net/publication/312116394_Transition_From_the_Military_Into_Civilian_Life_An_Exploration_of_Cultural_Competence
- Mary Beth Maclean, Linda Van Til, Thompson, J. M., & David John Pedlar. (2013). Postmilitary Adjustment to Civilian Life: Potential Risks and Protective Factors. ResearchGate; American Physical Therapy Association. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/239525063_Postmilitary_Adjustment_to_Civilian_Life_Potential_Risks_and_Protective_Factors
- Morin, R. (2011). The Difficult Transition from Military to Civilian Life. Pew Research Center's Social & Demographic Trends Project; Pew Research Center's Social & Demographic Trends Project.
- Parker, K., Igielnik, R., Barroso, A., & Cilluffo, A. (2019). Readjusting to civilian life. Pew Research Center. <https://www.pewsocialtrends.org/2019/09/09/readjusting-to-civilian-life/>
- Sam, A., & Trupti Poduval. (2016). *Exploration of Problems Faced by Ex-Servicemen of The Indian Armed Forces in Adjusting to Civilian Life...* ResearchGate; https://www.researchgate.net/publication/304452477_Exploration_Of_Problems_Faced_by_Exservicemen_of_The_Indian_Armed_Forces_in_Adjusting_to_Civilian_Life_Post-Retirement

An Exploration of the Life of Retired Defence Personnel

- Sweet J, Thompson JM., (2009) Literature Review of Military to Civilian Transition: Results of Initial Searches. Charlottetown, Prince Edward Island, Canada: Veterans Affairs Canada.
- Tripathi Prasad Shastri. (2016). Retirement Adjustment among the Ex-Servicemen. World Wide Journals (WWJ), IJAR, IJSR, GJRA, PARIPEX.[https://www.worldwidejournals.com/indian-journal-of-applied-research\(IJAR\)/recent_issues_pdf/2016/January/January_2016_1451652442__146.pdf](https://www.worldwidejournals.com/indian-journal-of-applied-research(IJAR)/recent_issues_pdf/2016/January/January_2016_1451652442__146.pdf)
- Van Til L, MacLean MB, Thompson JM, Pedlar DJ. Life After Service Studies: a program of population health research at Veteran's Affairs Canada. In: Aiken AB, Bélanger SAH, eds. Shaping the Future: Military and Veteran Health Research. Kingston, Ontario, Canada: Canadian Defence Academy Press; 2011:317–322.
- Zogas, A. (2017). US Military Veterans' Difficult Transitions Back to Civilian Life and the VA's Response.https://watson.brown.edu/costsofwar/files/cow/imce/papers/2017/Zogas_Veterans%27%20Transitions_CoW_2.1.17.pdf

Acknowledgement

The author profoundly appreciates all the participants who participated in this study. The author also acknowledges and appreciates the support from the defence campuses who gave access to the defence personnel to conduct this study. Lastly the author appreciates Dr Manjusha Warriar, Assistant professor, Department of Psychology, Christ (Deemed to be) University for her guidance throughout the study.

Conflict of Interest

The author carefully declares this paper to bear no conflict of interests.

How to cite this article: Srivastava, S. (2022). An Exploration of the Life of Retired Defence Personnel. *International Journal of Indian Psychology*, 10(4), 1885-1893. DIP:18.01.179.20221004, DOI:10.25215/1004.179