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Inclusive management of ex-servicemen in India: Satisfaction of air force veterans from resettlement facilities with special reference to Tamil Nadu

Kari Maharajan ^{a,*}, R. Krishnaveni ^b

^a Centre for Research, Anna University, Chennai, India

^b PSG Institute of Management, Coimbatore, India

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Abstract Resettlement of ex-servicemen of army, navy, and air force in India is an important management function of the resettlement framework, which includes the government and other stakeholders. The resettlement network extends various facilities to ex-servicemen and their families. However, the efficacy of existing systems to ensure inclusive management of the resettlement facilities is yet to be proved. This study finds that the satisfaction of ex-servicemen is around average for the resettlement facilities, which need to be progressed towards overall effectiveness. The present bureaucratic resettlement environment needs to be revamped for scientifically managing the satisfaction of ex-servicemen with the resettlement services.

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Introduction

The armed forces of India are among the largest in the world, which employ more than a million personnel in the various arms and cadres. The Indian Air Force (IAF) today stands as a credible air power counted among the foremost professional services in the world (Indian Air Force, 2016). In order to keep a youthful profile of the forces, almost 55,000–70,000 personnel of the army, navy, and the air force

inevitably relinquish their uniform every year¹ (Kishore, 1991). Such personnel who are discharged from the armed forces become ex-servicemen (ESM). Even though the ex-servicemen of the IAF are referred to as air force veterans in the current IAF parlance, the awareness and use of the term veterans is yet to become prevalent in India. Even in the international scenario, a study in the United Kingdom (UK) noted that the term veteran did not have a universal meaning, connoting different things to different people, whether military personnel,

* Corresponding author. Fax: +91 422 2369106.

E-mail address: prof.maharajan@gmail.com (Maharajan K).

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¹ Kishore (1991) estimated that 65,000–70,000 veterans were released per year. The Prime Minister of India (Rao, 1995) put the figure at approximately 55,000 personnel. According to Uppal (2011) 60,000 ex-servicemen were added annually.

national governments, or the general public (Dandeker, Wessely, Iversen, & Ross, 2006). Yet another study on UK ex-service personnel concluded that only half of all veterans in the ex-service group described themselves as “veterans” (Burdett et al., 2012). Hence, we consider it prudent to use the term ex-servicemen and veterans on a mutual basis so as to enhance clarity and wider understanding.

Resettlement as a process involves seeking a second or subsequent career after putting in a major part of one’s economically productive life to a given employment (Kishore, 1991). However, resettlement may not be the result of an individual’s own choice, but due to the conditions of his/her previous service. The process of resettlement falls in between settlement and rehabilitation as resettlement is a joint responsibility to be taken up on a mutual basis by the individual and the State (see Kishore, 1991).

This study is focussed on the Personnel Below Officer Rank (PBOR) released from the Indian armed forces in general and the Indian Air Force in particular. A significant amount of national resources in terms of taxpayers’ money, time, infrastructure, and human capital are utilised in the process of recruitment, training, and operations involving personnel of the defence forces. Ex-servicemen constitute a well-trained, disciplined, experienced, and versatile team of human resources. Further, the ex-servicemen are mostly in the age group of 30s or early 40s when released from the armed forces. Therefore, it becomes the responsibility of the nation to effectively provide the required services to this dedicated class of individuals in their resettlement. Moreover, it behoves society in a developing nation to use such a human resource in the task of nation building. In addition, ex-servicemen are from well-knit organisations and, if not managed well, may prove to be a concern for the government and society for untoward reasons.

At the individual or micro level, since the age of an ex-serviceman is in the late 30s or early 40s when released from service, he still has major responsibilities towards his family. If we consider the average age of marriage as late 20s or early 30s, most of the ex-servicemen have children to educate when they leave the armed services. The privileges and facilities previously availed by the ex-servicemen while in their uniformed service are partially withdrawn. On the one hand, the ex-servicemen need to fulfil enormous responsibilities, and on the other hand, they have limited resources, relying mainly on their pension. In consideration of all these aspects, the significance of providing satisfactory services to the ex-servicemen for their resettlement assumes greater magnitude.

Facilities for resettlement of ex-servicemen in India

The Central and State governments in India extend various facilities in the process of resettlement of ex-servicemen (Guide Book, 2011). These facilities range from statutory provisions, assistance in finding suitable employment, medical facilities and welfare for the families of ex-servicemen. Following is a brief description of the facilities considered for this study.

1. **Zilla Sainik Board (DSSA Board):** Zilla Sainik Boards (ZSBs), which function under the Kendriya Sainik Board through Rajya Sainik Boards, are established in most of the districts. The ZSBs, known earlier as District Soldiers’ Sailors’ and Airmen’s (DSSA) Boards (Ex-servicemen Guide Book, 2007), are the grassroots level agencies involved in the resettlement of ex-servicemen at the district level. These boards are the touch points for the ex-servicemen soon after their discharge from the forces till the rest of their life. The ZSBs undertake primary and secondary employment registrations of ex-servicemen under priority categories (Information Handbook Under Right to Information Act, 2012), and also extend assistance to ex-servicemen and their families through various schemes, including self-employment.
2. **Pension disbursement:** Pension is disbursed to ex-servicemen by the Government of India mostly through nationalised banks and a few private sector banks. Receipt of monthly pension is an essential component of life for many ex-servicemen and their dependents.
3. **Canteen facilities:** The Canteen Stores Department (CSD) extends canteen facilities to ex-servicemen and their families, in the form of subsidised household appliances and consumables, including liquor. These entitlements are stipulated on monthly and annual bases for various categories of veterans.
4. **Local service formation:** The nearest establishment of the army, navy, and the air force extend administrative support to the ex-servicemen with respect to CSD Canteen, medical schemes, etc. Some welfare schemes for the ex-servicemen and their families are routed through the nearest service formations.
5. **Air Force Wives Welfare Association (AFWWA):** The AFWWA provides various financial and non-financial assistance to the wives and children of both serving personnel and ex-servicemen (Handbook on Pensionary Benefits for PBOR, 2006). The AFWWA is organised at three levels viz. the central, regional and local formation levels.
6. **Ex-servicemen Contributory Health Scheme (ECHS):** The ECHS is a contributory health scheme for ex-servicemen and their dependents. Under this scheme, ex-servicemen can avail of cashless medical facilities through ECHS polyclinics, defence hospitals and empanelled civil hospitals in the country. This scheme also provides for reimbursement of medical expenses incurred in an emergency at non-empanelled facilities with certain restrictions (Handbook on Pensionary Benefits for PBOR, 2006).
7. **Placement cells of Indian Air Force (IAF):** Placement cells of the IAF aspire to provide a crucial link between the ex-servicemen (known as air force veterans) and prospective employers in the civil sector. The IAF placement cell is organised on central and regional levels and operates websites for registration of the ex-servicemen and prospective employers. These cells disseminate information on job opportunities and occasionally organise placement related events for the ex-servicemen and the air force personnel about to be released within a year.
8. **Government employment exchanges:** Government employment exchanges are organised at the district level and professional employment exchanges are organised at the cluster/state level. The exchanges at district level provide for registration for employment of undergraduates/ graduates, whereas the professional level exchanges offer

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