

Soldier of the Portuguese Army: equal or different profiles?

El Soldado del Ejército Portugués: perfiles iguales o diferentes?

Abstract: The Portuguese Army has been experiencing a difficult renewal of human resources, in particular in the rank of Private. With the purpose of studying the reasons that interfere in this target population, the present article aims at analyzing the socio-demographic profiles of young men incorporated, through the application of an internal questionnaire, of admission to the Army's Common General Training Course for enlisted men. The results allowed the identification of four groups of young volunteers for military service through the intersection between the zone of residence, academic background, reasons for joining and perceptions about the Institution. The data obtained revealed that during the recruitment phase, the promotion of military service should enhance the diffusion of the values and incentives it provides.


Keywords: Portuguese Army; recruitment; ingress; military profile; attractiveness.

Resumen: El Ejército portugués ha registrado una difícil renovación de recursos humanos, en particular, en la categoría de Alistados. Con el propósito de estudiar los motivos que interfieren en esta población objetivo, este artículo tiene como objeto analizar los perfiles sociodemográficos de los jóvenes incorporados mediante la aplicación de un cuestionario interno, de carácter reservado, en el momento de su ingreso al Curso de Formación General Común de Alistados de Ejército. Los resultados permitieron identificar cuatro grupos de jóvenes voluntarios para el servicio militar a través de la intersección entre el área de residencia, la historia escolar, los motivos de ingreso y las percepciones sobre la Institución. Los datos obtenidos revelaron que, durante la fase de reclutamiento, la divulgación del servicio militar debe potenciar la difusión de los valores y los incentivos proporcionados por el mismo.


Palabras clave: Ejército Portugués; reclutamiento; ingreso; perfil militar; capacidad de atraer.

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Received: 28 Oct. 2022

Approved: 06 Feb. 2023

COLEÇÃO MEIRA MATTOS

ISSN on-line 2316-4891 / ISSN print 2316-4833

<http://ebrevistas.eb.mil.br/index.php/RMM/index>



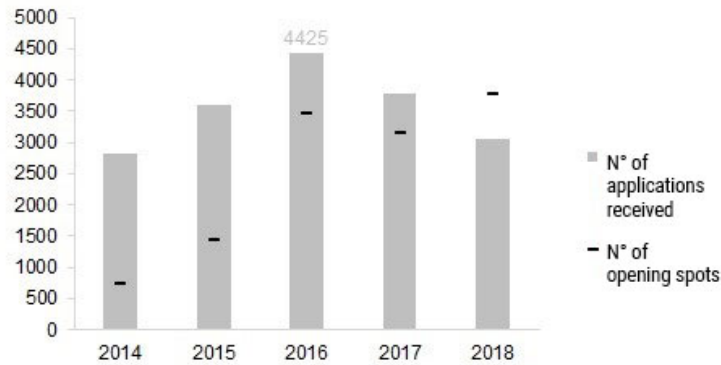
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1. INTRODUCTION

In 2004, the Portuguese Army (EP) was faced with the end of compulsory military service and the implementation of a human resources (HR) model based on volunteering (Coelho *et al.*, 2019). With this transformation, the EP was faced with the need to resort to hiring young people for the ranks, thus being dependent on their attraction and competitiveness compared to the rest of the available labor market, requiring new efforts in recruiting and managing the human capital necessary to fulfill the assigned missions. The adaptation of the EP to the new paradigm has revealed challenges that have resulted in an increasing difficulty in attracting and retaining young people for military functions (Silva *et al.*, 2019). This phenomenon is not restricted exclusively to the Portuguese context and has been the subject of studies (Lievens, 2007; Marrone, 2020; North Atlantic Treaty Organization; Research And Technology Organization, 2007), largely due to the financial and operational costs that the difficult regeneration of HR entails, essentially in the category of Private (Lievens, 2007; Marrone, 2020; North Atlantic Treaty Organization; Research And Technology Organization, 2007).

The low adherence of young people, especially to the Private rank, currently represents one of the great challenges facing the EP. Chart 1 shows the evolution of the annual figures for open vacancies and their applications. The growing need to increase the military force and a concomitant decrease in young candidates have resulted in a negative trend in the number of candidates per vacancy, with values that can be considered critical reported in 2018 (Silva *et al.*, 2019). The difficulty of attraction has been verified in the data collected, during the attraction that occurs throughout the selection and training process of the new military, in the voluntary departure (of the active military) and in the mandatory departure (of the military that reaches the maximum limit of contractual renewals). The relationship between the phenomena triggered the notion of a vulnerability at the level of the Army's HR, which motivated the development and application of intervention measures, among which the following stand out: the decrease in waiting time from the application to the call for the selection process, the elimination of minimum physical fitness requirements, greater geographical distribution of military training courses, the increase in salary during training and the flexibility of tattoos (Silva *et al.*, 2019). In the same sense, the regulation on incentives for the provision of military service was also updated (Decreto-Lei nº 76/2018), however, the set of measures implemented did not prevent the lack of adherence to military service and a voluntary exit that represents amorphous models for the system itself.

Faced with the problem and considering its similarities with the challenges also felt in the international military context (for example, in the USA and Belgium, among others) (Bertonha, 2008), the following analysis intends to know and differentiate the young people who are incorporated into the Army and, thus, contribute to the improvement of the recruitment system.

Chart 1 – Annual number of open places and applications received for the category of Private

Source: adapted from Silva et al. (2019).

Research on the topic suggests the need to investigate the different factors, individual and organizational, that can contribute to a greater attractiveness of military personnel (Lievens, 2007; Marrone, 2020; North Atlantic Treaty Organization; Research And Technology organization, 2007). The present study aims to analyze the profiles of young people incorporated in the category of squares of the EP. The analysis is based on data collected at the time of incorporation, when individuals do not yet have a tacit knowledge of the institution and distinguishes profiles based on the individual characteristics of the trainees, but also their perception of organizational characteristics, attractiveness factors and the level of information of the institution. The results obtained allow us to have a greater knowledge of the young people who have been recruited by the organization and to formulate contributions to new recruitment strategies.

2. METHODOLOGY

The investigation carried out is intended to provide information to support the decision of the Army Command. Thus, a questionnaire was constructed to monitor and measure a set of variables about young people who are starting military life in the EP. This questionnaire is carried out online through the LimeSurvey platform and its application takes place during the incorporation process. The moment of incorporation refers to the day on which candidates, determined in the selection tests, begin the military training necessary for the provision of military service on a voluntary or contract basis. The data collection carried out at this time has as main objective to know the HR that are in the process of integration in the organization, in order to improve internal processes, promote the institutional image and intervene in the investment without return associated with the early exit of the organization (Lomascolo, 2008; North Atlantic Treaty Organization; Research and Technology Organization, 2007; Lomascolo Strand; Berdndtsson, 2015). In total, 2,082 young people participated in the Army's Common General Training Course for enlisted men, held between 2018 and 2020 and, for the purposes of the study, data on gender, area of residence, school and professional path, motivations and perceptions about the institution were used. It should be noted that to carry out this study in the

Portuguese Army, there is no need to submit a research protocol to an ethics committee, it is only necessary to obtain the superior authorization of the Command. It is also added that it was the Army Command itself that assigned responsibility to the Army Center of Applied Psychology for the continuation of the analysis of the phenomenon.

2.1 Statistical Analysis

Multiple correspondence analysis (MCA) is an exploratory method that aims to verify and study the interrelationships between the categories of variables under analysis. Being a method of investigation, the interpretability of the plan of the categories is undoubtedly the essential element for the study. The graphical analysis of the MCA allows, in a representative way, to visualize the relationship of the distribution between the variables. The respective categories to the variables under analysis are represented by points and the distance between them allows to interconnect the existence or not of relationships, translating into the construction of profiles.

The graphic construction has preponderance according to the variables that focus on the axes (which represent the dimensions created) and that their categories are strongly correlated between them and the axes, as can be seen in the following table:

Table 1 – Measures of Discrimination and contributions of variables

Variables	Dimension 1		Dimension 2	
	Discrimination	Contribution	Discrimination	Contribution
Area of Residence	0,241	13,40%	0,045	2,90%
Qualifications	0,617	34,30%	0,009	0,60%
Reason for admission	0,015	0,80%	0,273	17,20%
Want to compete in a higher category	0,015	0,90%	0,251	15,80%
History of school failure	0,441	24,50%	0,022	1,40%
Willingness to follow studies	0,265	14,70%	0,015	0,90%
Level of information about the Army	0,011	0,60%	0,420	26,50%
Perception of Remuneration	0,055	3,10%	0,294	18,60%
Conditions offered in the labor market	0,139	7,70%	0,255	16,10%
Inertia	0,200		0,176	
% variance explained	11,50%		10,12%	

Source: Portuguese Army

The software used for the analysis was IBM SPSS.

According to the table presented, it is observed which are the variables that contribute most to the definition of the axes composed of Dimension 1 and Dimension 2, which were called “Area of residence and history of school failure” and “Reasons for admission and perceptions about the institution”.

3. PRESENTATION OF RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Characteristics of new recruits

To understand the profile of young people who joined the category of Private of the EP, a set of questions about sociodemographic characteristics was analyzed. These data described in Table 2 revealed that most of the graduates have a history of school repetition (64%) and at the level of education, the secondary completed (63.3%), registering, however, a significant percentage of cases (34.3%) that had only the 3rd cycle of basic education, not completing, thus, the 12th year of schooling (in Brazil, the 3rd cycle of Portuguese basic education corresponds to elementary education and the 12th year of schooling corresponds to Brazilian High School), as described in national legislation (Decreto-Lei nº 176/2012). It should be noted that, since the 3rd cycle is the minimum schooling for applying for the Private rank (Portugal, c2021), obtaining HR with low qualification level may negatively influence the professional performance of the recruited workforce (Ng; Feldman, 2009). Table 2 shows that most of the respondents come from the north of the country. These data are grouped by “area of residential “ and result from the combination of cases with a better distribution of the sample and a geographical relationship between residential districts. As an example, the districts belonging to the territorial units of Alentejo and Algarve were grouped into “South” residential zone for statistical analysis purposes.

Table 2 – Characteristics of graduates at the time of incorporation

Characteristics of trainees	N	%
Gender		
Male	1736	83%
Female	346	17%
History of school repetition		
Repeated	1339	64%
Never repeated	743	36%
Education		
3rd cycle	714	34%
Secondary education	1317	63%
Higher Education	49	2%
Other	2	0%
Professional status prior to entry		
Unemployed	1401	67%
Employed	681	33%

Characteristics of trainees	N	%
Area of residence		
North	1072	51%
Centre	514	25%
South	307	15%
Autonomous Regions	189	9%

Source: Portuguese Army

3.2 Ingress characteristics

After analyzing the characteristics of the young people incorporated in the EP, it is also important to know their motivations, aspirations and perceptions about the institution. Regarding the motivation for joining, in Table 3, it is possible to observe that the majority of young people (69%) decided to enlist because of the possibility of “serving the homeland and defending the country”, contrary to a minority who joined because of the conditions offered and opportunities provided.

To understand the attractiveness of military service, we resorted to the theory of Moskos (1986), which distinguishes occupational values from institutional values. According to the author, the entry motivated by the defense of the country can be classified as an institutional value defined as an intrinsic and differentiating attribute of the military institution that appeals to a cause superior to the individual interest of the young person. In contrast, motivations based on working conditions, among others, can be included in occupational values characterized as personal interests or motivations (Helmus *et al.*, 2020). According to the author, the current voluntary military service would lead the military organization to lose its institutional values in favor of occupational values oriented to salary and other benefits (*idem.*). However, the results obtained reveal that institutional values continue to prevail over occupational values, suggesting the importance of promoting organizational identity as a factor of attractiveness (LIEVENS, 2007).

The analysis described in Table 3 shows that most of the new graduates (62%) felt informed about the institution, however, a significant percentage had a low or moderate level of knowledge. Regardless of the conditions offered at the time of admission, the decision to enter also depends on the path that the institution provides to the young person. In this sense, it was observed that, at the time of incorporation, most recruits aspire to compete for a higher category (77%) and many have the necessary qualifications for this ascent in the military hierarchy (63%, see Table 1). With the increase in the level of education in the Portuguese population (PORDATA, 2021), admission based on academic qualifications tends to increase eligibility for higher categories¹, facilitating upward movements that make it difficult to fill vacancies at the

¹ As an example, both categories of Privates and Sergeants compete for young people with secondary education and a similar age range.

base of the pyramid. It is also added, in references to future aspirations, that the majority of respondents expressed a desire to continue their studies (70%). The data reinforce the relevance of disseminating and ensuring access to incentives related to professional and academic training provided for in regulation (Decreto-Lei nº 76/2018).

Table 3 – Ingress characteristics of graduates

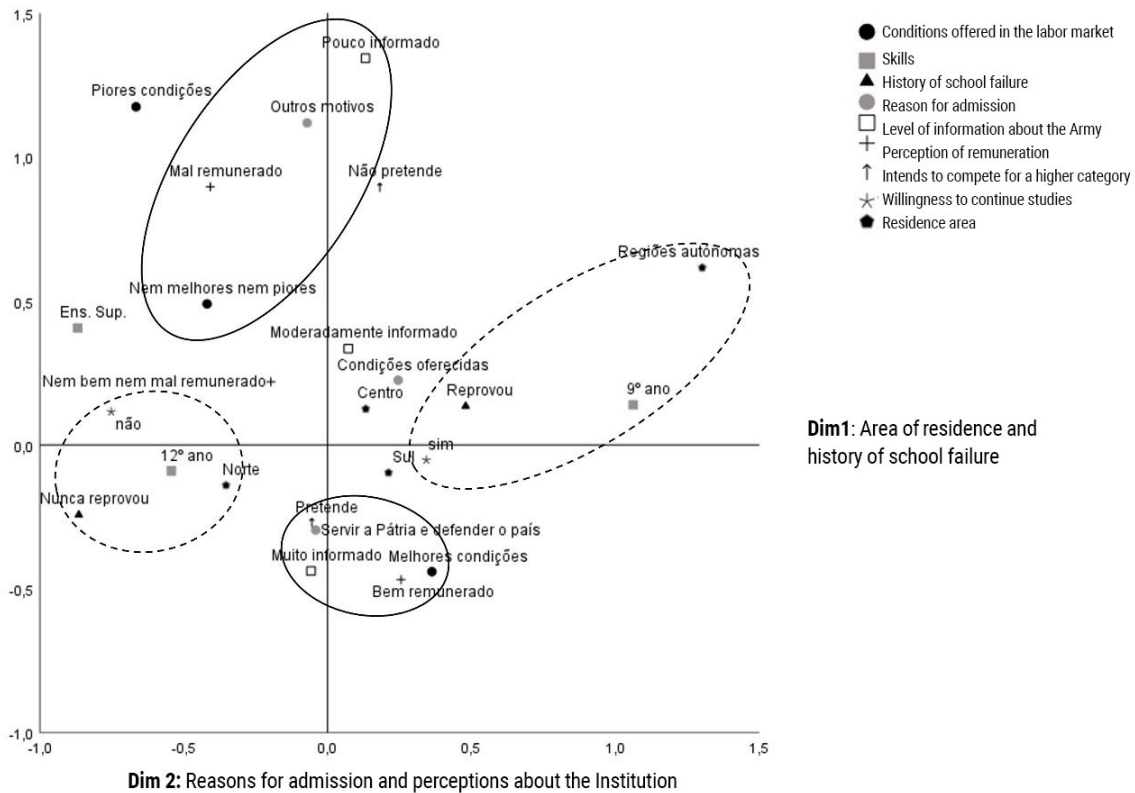
Ingress characteristics	N	%
Reason for ingress		
Serve the motherland and defend the country	1436	69%
Working conditions offered	333	16%
Fitness, action & adventure	117	6%
Be independent	169	8%
Not having another opportunity	27	1%
Market conditions		
Better conditions	1131	54%
Not worse, not better	904	44%
Worst conditions	47	2%
Perception of remuneration		
Well paid	1126	54%
Neither well nor poorly paid	488	23%
Poorly paid	468	23%
Level of information about the Army		
Very informed	1292	62%
Moderately informed	491	24%
Poorly informed	299	14%
Want to appl		
Intends	1599	77%
Not intended	483	23%
Willingness to pursue studies		
Yes	1430	69%
No	652	31%

Source: Portuguese Army

3.3 The Profile of the Military that competes for the Portuguese Army

Based on the variables under analysis and proceeding to a multiple correspondence analysis (MCA) as an exploratory method (Carvalho, 2017), it was possible to materialize the construction of distinct profiles of recruits. Graph 2 shows the representation of the exploratory profiles, supported by a preliminary analysis. The expressed results identify two dimensions that relate the history of school repetition and the area of residence, with the reasons for admission and perceptions about the institution. The first dimension was called “Area of residence and history of school repetition” and allows us to visualize the differences between schooling, academic success and willingness to continue studies among individuals in the north of the country and the autonomous regions. The second dimension was designated as “reasons for entry and perceptions about the institution” which demonstrates the perception of the graduates in relation to the salary they will obtain, the conditions offered, the main reason for entry, their perception of the information they have about the Army and if they intend to apply for a higher category.

Figure 2 – Profiles of reasons for joining



Source: Portuguese Army

The analysis of the first dimension allows identifying different profiles that suggest interesting reflections which discriminating variables are related to the area of residence and school course. Thus, we find the group of subjects who lived in the north and who had associated the attributes of 12th grade of schooling, a school course without failures and without the desire to continue their studies. On the other hand, on the same axis, there is the group of individuals with basic education, resident in the autonomous regions, with a history of school failure and with a desire to continue their studies.

Taking into account the second dimension, a group of recruits is observed, whose main reason for joining was “to serve the motherland and defend the country”. These individuals demonstrated an intention to compete for a higher category, felt very informed about the EP at the time of incorporation, considered the military profession well paid and with better conditions compared to other jobs. In contrast, there is also a group of young people who did not intend to apply for a higher category, felt little informed about the institution and perceived unfavorable conditions and opportunities compared to alternatives in the market.

4. CONCLUSION

Knowing the young recruit is essential to rethink the intended candidate profile and outline recruitment strategies aimed at the target audience. The relevance of this theme is unquestionable in view of the HR needs registered in recent years that can compromise the response to institutional missions.

In order to analyze the profiles of young people incorporated into the category of Private of the EP, a sample of 2,082 respondents obtained through a questionnaire applied at the time of incorporation was used. The data analysis made it possible to identify a set of characteristics of the new graduates, namely the prevalence of young men, unemployed and with a history of failing school education. It was found that the vast majority of military personnel have higher qualifications than necessary for entry into the Private rank, a situation that is inseparable from their intention to compete for a higher rank, and the importance of promoting HR management capable of predicting upward movements within the Organization. Different profile patterns were observed, depending on the area of residence, school characteristics and professional perspectives. From a recruitment and dissemination perspective, it should be noted that institutional values remain a main attraction factor for young Portuguese people. The importance of improving information about the institution, the target audience and their influencers was identified. In the patterns identified, it was observed that graduates from the northern region have a successful school career contrary to those from the autonomous regions, who enter less qualified, but with the intention of continuing their studies. In this case, the school and academic incentives of the Armed Forces should play an important role in attracting young islands residents to the EP.

Thus, the data obtained are still in line with other studies that point to a change in the patterns of interests of the new generations and for which there should be great attention, to highlight in young Portuguese the value associated with the military Institution and that should be enhanced and explored.

Finally, this study shows that, given the dimensions raised, there are different profiles of candidates at the level of the country's areas, so this factor can also be taken into account in the dissemination and recruitment strategies of HR.

The continuity of the monitoring implemented by the EP may stimulate studies capable of obtaining new measures to respond to the problem of recruiting young people to the military Institution.

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