

## OČEKÁVÁNÍ A REALITA NOVODOBÝCH ČESKÝCH VÁLEČNÝCH VETERÁNŮ Relativní deprivace jako možné riziko

### THE DEALS AND THE REALITY OF CZECH POSTMODERN WAR VETERANS Relative Deprivation as a Possible Risk

*Jitka Laštovková<sup>a</sup>, Peter Brnula<sup>b</sup>, Lukáš Novotný<sup>c</sup>*

#### Abstrakt

Příspěvek se zabývá tématem vnímání péče a pozornosti, kterou stát věnuje postmoderním válečným veteránům. Analýza je založena na kvalitativním paradigmatu a autoři pracují s polostrukturovanými rozhovory s 12 veterány, kteří byli v mezinárodních vojenských operacích a kteří již nejsou v aktivní službě. V souvislosti s teorií relativní deprivace se příspěvek přesouvá od tématu vlastního vnímání identity ve srovnání s ostatními veterány k přehodnocení minulosti a souvisejícímu dopadu. Na konci příspěvku se autoři zaměřují na nutnost lepší péče o tuto skupinu.

#### Abstract

The paper broaches the topic of the perception of the care and attention that the state affords to postmodern war veterans. The analysis is based on a qualitative paradigm and the authors work with semi-structured interviews with 12 veterans who were in international military operations and who are no longer on active duty. In the context of the relative deprivation theory, the paper shifts from the topic of one's own perception of identity in comparison to other veterans to the reassessment of the past and the related impact. At the end of the paper, the authors focus the discussion on the need for better care to be taken of this group.

#### Klíčová slova

Postmoderní válečný veterán; relativní deprivace; Armáda České republiky; sociální péče.

#### Keywords

Postmodern War Veteran; Relative Deprivation; Army of the Czech Republic; Social Care.

---

<sup>a</sup> Department of Social Work, Faculty of Social and Economic studies, J. E. Purkyně University. Ústí nad Labem, the Czech republic. Email: [jitka.lastovkova@ujep.cz](mailto:jitka.lastovkova@ujep.cz).

<sup>b</sup> Department of Social Work, Faculty of Social and Economic studies, J. E. Purkyně University. Ústí nad Labem, the Czech republic. Email: [peter.brnula@ujep.cz](mailto:peter.brnula@ujep.cz).

<sup>c</sup> Department of Political Sciences and Philosophy, Faculty of Arts, J. E. Purkyně University. Ústí nad Labem, the Czech republic. Email: [lukas.novotny@ujep.cz](mailto:lukas.novotny@ujep.cz).

## INTRODUCTION

The goal of the paper is to use qualitative data to determine the structure and context of how veterans perceive their needs in the context of their identity and to identify eventual risks related to the insufficient attention paid to this topic.

Members of modern armies of an expedition nature, including the Army of the Czech Republic, participate in many dangerous operations all around the world, risk their lives for a safer world, and often return home harmed, having sustained trauma and injuries. Society should be able to help them with their problems. This is acknowledged by science literature, which states that both the armies and services of relevant civilian institutions (primarily labour offices, job agencies and social service providers) have problems with securing such care. This very clearly indicates the specifics of this target group.<sup>4</sup> Despite that, social care is a current problem in the army. However, sufficient attention is not paid to it. In real politics, it is necessary to achieve a good level of cooperation between the army and social policy institutions. It is not possible to determine targets or efficient tools, nor aid to those needing it, without such cooperation.<sup>5</sup> It is possible to see several risks that need to be reflected upon. The first one is, for instance, a failure in the transition from the military to civilian life and employment, which might be exacerbated by the war trauma experienced by veterans. This has been shown to be true also by foreign experience.<sup>6</sup> This is something for which the relevant Czech institutions focused on social policy and social administrations are not sufficiently prepared.

The eventual failure in civilian life causes a veteran to return to their previous strategies, and their “civilian mission” could turn into a “fight for survival”, figuratively speaking. This might take multiple forms, including the case where a veteran, thanks to their specific knowledge and skills, becomes the subject of interest for criminal groups, mafias or semi-legal contractor groups. It also might lead to different addictions, mental health

---

<sup>4</sup> BLOESER, Katharine - RAY, Kathleen. Contemporary Social Work Practice with Veterans: An Introduction to the Special Issue. *Clinical Social Work Journal* [online]. 2018, p. 69-73 [cit. 2019-08-22]. Available from: <https://1url.cz/1MS94>; ADAMS, Richard E - UROSEVICH, Thomas - HOFFMAN, Stuart N. et al. Social and Psychological Risk and Protective Factors for Veteran Well-Being: The Role of Veteran Identity and Its Implications for Intervention. *Military Behavioral Health* [online]. 2019, p. 304-314 [cit. 2019-08-22]. Available from: <https://1url.cz/UMS9h>; FRASER, Edward. Military veterans' experiences of NHS mental health services. *Journal of Public Mental Health* [online]. 2017, p. 21-27 [cit. 2019-08-22]. ISSN 1746-5729. Available from: <https://1url.cz/hMS9Z>; BEDER, Joan - POSTIGLIONE Paul. Social Work in the Veterans Health Administration (VA) System: Rewards, Challenges, Roles and Interventions. *Social Work in Health Care* [online]. 2013, p. 421-433 [cit. 2019-08-22]. Available from: <https://1url.cz/3MS9U>

<sup>5</sup> BRNŮLA, Peter - LAŠTOVKOVÁ, Jitka - KUCLER, Pavel. 100 let ve službách republiky - sociální péče o válečné veterány v České republice. *Fórum sociální politiky*. 2019, pp. 13-16.

<sup>6</sup> KEELING, Mary - KINTZLE, Sara - CASTRO, Carl a. Exploring U.S. Veterans' post-service employment experiences. *Military Psychology (American Psychological Association)* [online]. 2018, p. 63-69 [cit. 2019-08-07]. ISSN 08995605; DEREFINKO, Karen J., - HALLSELL, Troy A. - ISAACS, Matthew B. - COLVIN, Lauren W. - SALGADO GARCIA, Francisco I. - BURSAC., Zoran A. Perceived Needs of Veterans Transitioning from the Military to Civilian Life. *Journal of Behavioral Health Services* [online]. 2019, p. 384-398 [cit. 2019-08-07]. ISSN 10943412.

problems, etc.<sup>7</sup> This means that it is necessary to point to the necessity of quality, targeted work with this group whose members have often adapted to a specific world very distant from “civilian” problems. For instance, to consequential “long-distance” relationships, as veterans’ separation from families can lead to the dissolution or significant destabilisation of their families, etc.<sup>8</sup> Risks appearing due to the absence of such measures are not only of a social nature, but also of a security nature.

## THEORETICAL AND SITUATIONAL GROUND

In terms of theory, this study is based on the concept of relative deprivation originally determined by Samuel Stouffer in his study, *The American Soldier* from 1949.<sup>9</sup> Stouffer’s book is currently considered a classic sociology book researching the difference of soldiers’ satisfaction with their lives between when they were in the US Army during World War II and after leaving the army.<sup>10</sup> Relative deprivation would be related to a specific part of a professional soldier’s identity, the postmodern veteran identity, which is conditioned by the job in the military, which is an important, but not universal, part of this identity.<sup>11</sup> The research of job assignment as the key part of personal identity in current society<sup>12</sup> could be, in the case of the military job, connected with the identification referred to by Moskos (1992)<sup>13</sup> as institutional identity, i.e. with the perception of this job as a mission in life (in contrast to the concept of employment, de facto the market). Targeting the research on postmodern off-duty veterans makes it possible to use the example of the transition from the military to civilian life to reveal the social risks related to the uncertainties of (post) modern society.<sup>14</sup>

Science literature pays a lot of attention to the problem of the transition from the military to civilian life, concerning medical aspects (physical and mental health), social aspects

---

<sup>7</sup> ATKIN-PLUNK, Cassandra A. - SLOAS, Lincoln B. Support for Balanced Justice and Rehabilitation for Justice-Involved Veterans. *Criminal Justice Review (Sage Publications)* [online]. 2019, Vol. 44, No. 2, p. 165-182 [cit. 2019-08-07]. ISSN 07340168.; TRACY, Robert G. et al. *A Study of the Relationship between Military Service in the Armed Forces and Criminality. Criminal Justice Monograph Vol. III, No. 1* [online]. 1971 [cit. 2019-08-08]. ISSN ERICIEO. Available from: <https://1url.cz/FMS9f>

<sup>8</sup> BALLOVÁ, Nataša - HODNÝ, Jiří - SALIGER, Radomír - PAVLÁT, Jiří. Zahraniční vojenské mise a partnerské soužití (Poznatky z armádního sociologického výzkumu). *Vojenské rozhledy* [online]. 2009, Vol. 18(50), No. 4, p. 154-167 [cit. 2019-08-22]. ISSN 1210-3292. Available from: <https://1url.cz/VMS9g>

<sup>9</sup> STOUFFER, Samuel A. - SUCHMAN, Edward A. *The American soldier. Vol. 1: Adjustment during army life*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1949.

<sup>10</sup> JERÁBEK, Hynek. In: Recenze. Jiří Šubrt. „JERÁBEK, Hynek. Historicko-sociologické reflexe: Slavné sociologické výzkumy. Karolinum, 2018, pp. 18-22. ISBN 978-80-246-4027-3.”

<sup>11</sup> LAŠTOVKOVÁ, Jitka - BERNARDOVÁ, Kateřina. Proč Afghánistán? Profesionalita, peníze, nebo ideály? *Vojenské rozhledy* [online]. 2014, Vol. 23(55), No. 4, p. 40-50 [cit. 2019-08-22]. ISSN 2336-2995. Available from: <https://1url.cz/qMS9n>

<sup>12</sup> GIDDENS, Anthony. *Sociologie*. Prague: Argo, 2013. ISBN 978-80-257-0807-1.

<sup>13</sup> MOSKOS, Charles, C. Institucionální a zaměstnanecké trendy v ozbrojených silách. In: *Ozbrojené síly a společnost*. Prague: MO ČR, 1992, pp. 6-15, ISBN 8024787040.

<sup>14</sup> BECK, Ulrich. *Riziková společnost: na cestě k jiné moderně*. Prague: SLON, 2004. ISBN 80-86429-32-6.

(employment, risky behaviour), and economical aspects.<sup>15</sup> However, they do not cover the situation in the Czech Republic.

Relative deprivation theory is the key theoretical ground for the interpretation of the interviews conducted for the purpose of this paper. The theory is based on the feelings of disadvantageousness and frustration in relation to the broader society or a different group with similar characteristics. Relative deprivation is a state, in which an individual experiences feelings of deficiency, harm or hardship emerging from comparison with other individuals and groups or from comparing the current situation with a situation in the past.<sup>16</sup> This concept, introduced by Samuel A. Stouffer,<sup>17</sup> was developed also by sociologist Robert K. Merton, who elaborated on it to form the theory of reference group behaviour.<sup>18</sup> Contrary to Stouffer, Merton chose an approach by monitoring not only the phenomenon of relative deprivation, but also the causes that bring a man to such a state. The theory of reference group behaviour shows how membership in a social group brings, under normal circumstances, certain cognitive commitments.<sup>19</sup> Once a man joins a certain group, he “knows” that the world works like this and that. After changing such a group for a different one, the “knows” that he had to be mistaken. By choosing certain people, a man chooses a certain world he wants to live in.

---

<sup>15</sup> MOBBS, Meaghan C. - BONANNO George A. Beyond war and PTSD: The crucial role of transition stress in the lives of military veterans. *Clinical Psychology Review* [online]. 2018, Vol. 59, No. 1, p. 137-144 [cit. 2019-08-07]. ISSN 02727358.; GATI, Itamar - RYZHIK, Tehila - VERTSBERGER, Dana. Preparing young veterans for civilian life: The effects of a workshop on careem decision-making difficulties and self-efficacy. *Journal of Vocational Behavior* [online]. 2013, Vol. 83, No. 3, p. 373-385 [cit. 2019-08-07]. ISSN 00018791.; RAY, S.I. - HEASLIP K. Canadian military transitioning to civilian life: A discussionpaper. *Journal of Psychiatric and Mental Health Nursing* [online]. 2011, Vol. 18, No. 3, p. 198-204 [cit. 2019-08-07]. ISSN 13510126.; KEELING, Mary - KINTZLE, Sara - CASTRO, Carl A. Exploring U.S. Veterans' post-service employment experiences. *Military Psychology (American Psychological Association)* [online]. 2018, Vol. 30, No. 1, p. 63-69 [cit. 2019-08-07]. ISSN 08995605.; DEREFINKO, Karen J. - HALLSELL, Troy A. - HALLSELL, Matthew B. - ISAACS, Lauren W. - COLVIN, Francisco I. - SALGADO Garcia - BURSAC, Zoran. Perceived Needs of Veterans Transitioning from the Military to Civilian Life. *Journal of Behavioral Health Services* [online]. 2019, Vol. 24, No. 5, p. 384-398 [cit. 2019-08-07]. ISSN 10943412.

<sup>16</sup> CROSBY, Faye J. *Relative deprivation and working women*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1982. ISBN 0195031474.; ABELES, Ronald P. Relative Deprivation, Rising Expectations, and Black Militancy. *Journal of Social Issues* [online]. 1976, Vol. 32, No. 2, p. 119-137 [cit. 2019-08-22].

Available from: <https://1url.cz/nMS9X>

<sup>17</sup> PETTIGREW, Thomas F. Samuel Stouffer and Relative Deprivation. *Social Psychology Quarterly* [online]. 2015, p. 7-24 [cit. 2019-08-22]. Available from: <https://1url.cz/rMS9O>; STOUFFER, Samuel A. Intervening Opportunities: A Theory Relating Mobility and Distance. *American Sociological Review* [online]. American Sociological Association, 1940, Vol. 5, p. 845-867 [cit. 2019-08-22]. Available from: <https://1url.cz/1MS95>; STOUFFER, Samuel A. - SUCHMAN, Edward A. *The American soldier. Vol. 1: Adjustment during army life*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1949.; STOUFFER, Samuel A. *Social Research to Test Ideas*. New York: Free Press.1962.

<sup>18</sup> MERTON, Robert K. *Contributions to the theory of reference group behavior*. 1968. In: MERTON, Robert K. - LAZARSELD, Paul F. (eds.). *Continuities in social research. Studies in the cope and method of "The American Soldier"*. New York, NY, US: Free Press, 1950.

<sup>19</sup> HYMAN, Herbert H. Reference Groups. In: SILLS, David L. *International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences*. 13. New York: The Macmillan Company: The Free Press, 1968.; MOGHADDAM, Fathali M. A Psychological Exploration: A Psychological Exploration. *American Psychologist* [online]. 2005, Vol. 60, No. 1, p. 161-169 [cit. 2019-08-22]. Available from: <https://1url.cz/RMS9b>

The concept of relative deprivation explains that the feeling of dissatisfaction is based not on objective deficiency and comparison with the absolute standard, but on the feeling of injustice in relation to a reference group or through comparison to social surroundings.<sup>20</sup> The theory is used to identify the motives of social behaviour participants and finds its source in role theory.<sup>21</sup> One then speaks about reference groups used by individuals to assess their position. If people lack sources available to their reference group, deprivation could result. Other authors mention that several conditions must be fulfilled, such as the perception of one's own position as disadvantaged, and the disadvantage itself as unfair.<sup>22</sup> As mentioned by Pettigrew (2015)<sup>23</sup>, such a situation could be in the impulse for rebellion or social action/political protest under certain circumstances, even though such a correlation is not necessarily straightforward.<sup>24</sup> When social reality can be perceived in the intentions behind emotions and subjectivity, irrationality plays a role.

### The Care of War Veterans After 1989

The social care of war veterans in the Czechoslovak/Czech army has changed in its shape, legislative rules and terminology<sup>25</sup> several times since 1918. However, we focus on veterans' care after the year 1989. The segment of social care has gradually refocused on so-called WWII veterans. It was particularly necessary to remove the current political view, which denied any possibility to segments of the veterans, such as WWII veterans, RAF pilots and other soldiers fighting primarily at Western frontlines. It was necessary to work not only with the veterans themselves and to right all the wrongs caused by the denial of social care for the veterans by the communist regime, but it was also necessary to redefine some of the terms related to social care.

The first more-or-less comprehensive effort of the Ministry of Defence of the Czech Republic is represented by the issue of the "White Book of the Defence of the State" in 1995. The documents communicate the necessity to create a so-called social climate in the army based on the social policy of the state.<sup>26</sup> This would form the basis of addressing the needs of war veterans and the social care provided them. The social care in the army was naturally related to significant milestones the army passed after the transition of the country to a democratic system of ruling. Without any doubt,

---

<sup>20</sup> MASTERS, John C. - SMITH, William P. *Social Comparison, Social Justice, and Relative Deprivation: Theoretical, Empirical, and Policy Perspectives*. Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum, 1987. ISBN 9780898596328.

<sup>21</sup> LINTON, Ralph. *The Study of Man. An Introduction*. New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, Int., 1936.

<sup>22</sup> SMITH, Heather J. - PETTIGREW, Thomas F. - PIPPIN, Gina M. - BIALOSIEWICZ Silvana. Relative Deprivation: A Theoretical and Meta-Analytic Review. *Personality and Social Psychology Review* [online]. 2012, Vol. 16, No. 1, p. 203-232 [cit. 2019-08-22]. Available from: <https://1url.cz/LMS9x>  
<sup>23</sup> Ibid.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>24</sup> SMITH, Heather J. - PETTIGREW, Thomas F. Advances in Relative Deprivation Theory and Research. *Social Justice Research* [online]. 2015, Vol. 28, No. 1, p. 1-6 [cit. 2019-08-22]. Available from: <https://1url.cz/QMS9m>

<sup>25</sup> Ref. 2

<sup>26</sup> Ministry of Defence of the Czech Republic. *Bílá kniha o obraně České republiky* [online]. Ministry of Defence of the Czech Republic, 1995 [cit. 2019-08-22]. Available from: <https://1url.cz/vMS9y>

the accession of the Czech Republic to NATO and the subsequent professionalization of the army were catalysts of change and modernisation. 2002 is the first year when we can really monitor the topic of so-called postmodern war veterans in the Czech defence policy. It took more than three years to prepare the Act 170/2002 Coll., on war veterans. This Act, which for the first time legislatively determined the term “war veteran”, would replace the older terms “person damaged by war” and “participant in national resistance,” formerly used in applicable laws.

The latest legislative amendment in the concept of the social care of veterans was the amendment of the War Veterans Act from 2014. The amendment specifies the term “war veteran” and adjusts conditions for the awarding of the status.

The act serves as a basis for the mid-term concept of the care of war veterans, adjusting its idea of the focus of the aid for this target group. The latest version is “The Concept of the Care of War Veterans in the Years 2017-2021”. The concept reacts to some newly adopted laws or their amendments<sup>27</sup> and strives for maintaining the current system of care of WWII veterans, adjusting it to the needs of modern war veterans at pension age and developing the system of care reacting to the needs of postmodern war veterans and to different changes. It states: “The segment of the care of war veterans is perceived as a matter of nation-wide importance and a natural form of awarding men and women voluntarily choosing the responsibility to protect their country even by risking their lives and health.”<sup>28</sup>

### **The Current Situation in Care of War Veterans**

The current care of war veterans is based on legislative changes having occurred primarily in 2016, particularly several key amendments including the amendment to the Defence Act. This indicated a certain legislative urgency to solve problems generally related to the armed forces. It is necessary to see that also in the context of the political demand shared by the media for topics related generally to the feeling of a threat to the country and an emphasis on the topics of foreign defence in the framework of political campaigns and other discourses.<sup>29</sup> The above-mentioned laws also solve the problem of the social care of postmodern war veterans.

The current system of care is really shifting to the postmodern war veterans at a rather quick pace. There are currently less than 400 WWII veterans, as it is visible in data provided by the army - a total of 366 veterans were registered as of August 2019.<sup>30</sup> It is due to the fact that the WWII veterans are passing away, even though it is necessary to emphasize that the care is still also focused on those elderly veterans. On the other hand, institutional “care of war veterans” is centralised at the level of the state administration at the Ministry of Defence of the Czech Republic’s War Veterans

---

<sup>27</sup> Act no. 47/2016 Coll., which amends the act no. 585/2004 Coll., on defence duty and its securing (Defence Act) in sense of later regulations and other related laws; act no. 46/2016 Coll., which amends the act no. 219/1999 Coll., on Armed Forces of the Czech Republic in sense of later regulations; act no. 45/2016 Coll., on service of reserve soldiers.

<sup>28</sup> Concept of Care of War Veterans in Years 2017–2021. 2017. Prague: Ministry of Defence of the Czech Republic.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Ministry of Defence of the Czech Republic,, 2019 [online]. MO ČR. [2019-08-08]. Available from: <https://www.army.cz/>

Department. The department cooperates with relevant non-profit organisations, such as the Czechoslovakian Union of Legionaries, as well as with social care bodies and institutions of the state administration and local municipalities.<sup>31</sup>

The newly approved Concept of Care of War Veterans in the Years 2017–2021 differentiates among four categories of modern war veterans, i.e. those in active duty, those in active duty before the end of active duty, those off duty in productive age and off duty ones at pension age. In terms of the care, the focus will be on some key segments determined by the concept. This involves, firstly, the social segment with an emphasis on the support of employment, requalification, education, community care, work with families of war veterans, and beneficial programmes for war veterans, secondly, the segment of health and psychological care, and then thirdly and fourthly, the segments of media and promotion.

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research survey was focused on postmodern off-duty war veterans. The chosen qualitative paradigm has offered great potential for more sensitive work with a closed target group, which is very hard to access.<sup>32</sup> In terms of this target group, foreign studies also massively use the qualitative approach in problems of risky behaviour, health and care as well as, for instance, employment.<sup>33</sup>

The goal of the research was to use the specific technique of narrative interview, so-called oral history, in combination with the study of the personal text and image files that one of the research participants was willing to provide. It was, however, clear after the first few interviews that the participation in a mission would not be shared or verbalised by the informants in a way that makes it possible to work within the framework of the narrative paradigm. It would be possible to label the majority of the interviews as semi-structured oral-historical interviews.<sup>34</sup>

The interviews were primarily focused on the participation in foreign missions and the subsequent impacts. Each interview was initiated by the question: *What are your memories about your first mission?* The next questions were focused on what the participation brought or changed, how the narrators perceived the mission's impact on the professional, personal and family levels and the appreciation of the society. The interviews focused also on the respondents' perception of needs and deficiencies in these segments.

---

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> SILVERMAN, David. *Interpreting Qualitative Data*. Sage Publ., 2015. ISBN 1446295435

<sup>33</sup> E.g. HARROD, Molly - MILLER Erin M. - HENRY, Jennifer - ZIVIN, Kara. "I've never been able to stay in a job": A qualitative study of Veterans' experiences of maintaining employment. *Work* [online]. 2017, Vol. 57(2), p. 259-268 [cit. 2019-08-08]. ISSN 10519815.; MARTINEZ, Michelle E. - KEARNEY, David J. - SIMPSON, Tracy - FELLEMAN, Benjamin I. - BERNARDI, Nicole - SAYRE, George. Challenges to Enrollment and Participation in Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction Among Veterans: A Qualitative Study. *Journal of Alternative* [online]. 2015, Vol. 21(7), p. 409-421 [cit. 2019-08-08]. ISSN 10755535.

<sup>34</sup> VANĚK, Miroslav - MÜCKE, Pavel. *Třetí strana trojúhelníku: teorie a praxe orální historie*. Prague: Karolinum, 2015. ISBN 978-80-246-2931-5.

The research includes 12 semi-structured interviews with people participating as professional soldiers in any kind of a foreign operation conducted by the Army of the Czech Republic. They were not on active duty during the period of the realization of the research. The research was limited also in terms of region, as all respondents live in the Ústí Region. The selection of the narrators was intentional without any claim for being representative. The researchers used their own social networks in combination with the snowball technique. Some respondents are members of some of the veteran organisations (the Association of War Veterans of the Czech Republic, the Czechoslovakian Union of Legionaries). With regard to the chosen topic, the specificity of the social environment and the character of information that was acquired, the interviews are completely anonymised in the following part, and the researchers mention only general information about the sample. The group of respondents consists of 11 men and 1 woman<sup>35</sup>, it represents all ranks with the exception of general and represents all kinds of foreign operations - peace, combat, monitoring and humanitarian operations. The number of finished missions among respondents ranged from one to three. When reading the results, it is possible to cope with a limitation in the fact that the sample does not include anyone with experience from a large ISAF operation in Afghanistan, which, to a large extent, forms the current veteran experience. The veterans live in the region of north-western Bohemia; however, they served with different kinds of units all around the Czech Republic during their military careers.

The data collection took place in May and June<sup>36</sup>. The interviews were managed based on the choice and wishes of the respondents at public places or at the research workstation. Three interviews took place in informants' homes. The interviews took from 30 to 90 minutes and one interview was divided into two parts. All research participants signed an informed consent with the interview, its recording and using it for scientific purposes. Full anonymity was guaranteed to all respondents. The interviews were transcribed; the transcriptions were coded and divided into categories listing the experience of particular respondents to a more general scheme. The method of working with the data is in accordance with the grounded theory, which is, with regard to the thematic selection of categories, limited to the level of opened and axial coding.<sup>37</sup>

## RESEARCH RESULTS

In terms of the content, the respondents covered in their interviews four dominant areas, which can be identified as central thematic categories:

- service in the Army of the Czech Republic
- participation in a mission
- civil life
- military veteran identity

---

<sup>35</sup> All statements are transcribed as gender neutral as it is not possible to monitor gender differences.

<sup>36</sup> It was executed before the effect of the new Concept of Care of War Veterans from the year 2017.

<sup>37</sup> STRAUSS, Anselm - CORBINOVÁ, Juliet. *Základy kvalitativního výzkumu: Postupy a techniky metody zakotvené teorie*. Boskovice: Albert, 1999. ISBN 80-85834-60-X

With regard to its goal, the following text works only with selected topics. It introduces the categories of respondents' statements related to the perception of the state care of this group, satisfaction with the care, eventual proposals and the overall assessment of relations and attitudes of the Czech general public. Each category forms a sub-chapter of the following text.

### **Identity of Postmodern Veteran as a "Scale of Credit"**

In the historic context, it is necessary to say that, with no exception, the narrators reflected the fact that they were "different" veterans compared to those from WWI and WWII and perceived the difference mainly in terms of motivation and the values related to motivation. They used the same way to compare themselves to those soldiers being exposed, in their opinion, to a higher level of danger or combat situation.

*... For example for me those WWII veterans, I mean they are the real veterans, like those from Vietnam or some other wars...it is because of the conviction they went to the war for. And they really went to the war to fight for their country... And here in terms of the postmodern ones because we do not fight for ourselves, we fight for something relatively imaginary, for some Europe, NATO or something like this. So it is more difficult, I think, to identify oneself with that fact that it is really for the Czech Republic.*

The relativism or ambivalent attitude to one's own heroism did not lead to the denial of veteran identity, which was still perceived as an important part of the professional military identity. Rather, it was a relative delimitation in the context of the period. I.e. as measured by the present *I did more than the majority of the population*, when measured by history *I did less than the "real" war veterans*, i.e. veterans from both world wars.

*I am proud in a way. I am convinced that I have done some kind of job, and the pride has remained.*

A different perception of those different categories of veterans also impacts a different perception of the credit, primarily in the measure of public acknowledgement, respect and admiration. This does not involve benefits, as will be seen later.

*The generation of, in my opinion, deserving veterans, it is being finished. They leave, because it has been years since the war. And they deserve that.*

*If I should compare myself with people, who really fought somewhere and bled, I think that they are the real war veterans. For instance, our soldiers serving in Afghanistan. So, they deserve it probably more than we serving in peace missions do.*

The absence of a moral criterion in the decision to participate in a foreign mission lead also to an explicate denial of special credit.

*I think that a man should prove they are valuable and good by their whole life and not only by an involvement, for instance, in those missions. Many not very quality people made it to the missions and now generally give me credit. I do not think it works this way.*

*Being a veteran is not something someone should be credited for... it is a piece of the past. I do not know what I should be proud of. I am proud of being able to complete all the tasks we were assigned to. It means that I was able to fulfil all that was expected from me by my employer.*

In terms of self-classification, it seems that the social reality is a matter of the measure of moral credit for postmodern veterans. Even though they are veterans, they do not consider themselves heroes, as the participation in a mission itself is not enough for that. On the other hand, the missions represent, without any doubt, a value for them. In this context, the respondents compared themselves with world war veterans, who differed from them in terms of the motive of the protection of the country, and participants in real combat, including making decisions in crisis situations. Our narrators have not had such experience. This “civilian” approach reflects the attitude of the Czech general public and the social-cultural context offered to the group by Czech society.

#### **Deficiencies in Care - What and for Whom?**

The assessment of the current state of the care of war veterans is related with the feeling of credit or the right to some advantages. The respondents, most likely due to the above-mentioned reason, were combining the perspective of a war veteran and that of a professional soldier. They clearly stated that the care was insufficient, however mentioned that the insufficiency did not apply only to veterans, i.e. participants in foreign missions, but to the entire specific group of professional soldiers. In this sense, in the majority of cases, they considered the service of a professional soldier itself a credit underpinning the claim to a specific treatment.

*I do not know if it is specifically veterans who would need special treatment. I am not sure if there is a significant difference between those who were on missions and who were not.*

The respondents were negative not only about the offer of the care and advantages, but also about the organisation of the system. They talked primarily about the absence of both. They often mentioned a frustration caused by the lack of possibilities and the bad targeting of the current possibilities and advantages as they still address only the target group of WWII veterans.

*There is no drive in there; however, it is caused by the laws. I, as a veteran, can ask for preventive rehabilitation once in three years after leaving the army... and an examination in the military hospital with a priority right. So I think that this is very meagre from the state or the army. I think that what we need is direct aid for those leaving the army.*

*I know that veterans have significant problems with looking for jobs and they are offered the opportunity to buy a car with a discount of several percent...They never use such benefits. They are looking for jobs. They are seeking medical aid. They have problems in their families. They do not care about discounts... For instance the care of families is very poor.*

Proposals to changes are only logically focused on segments related to postmodern veterans' life cycle needs and change in relation to them.

*Primarily in terms of those older people or when they are left alone. I think they deserve the state to take care of them and not to let them die somewhere like a stray dog... of course I am talking from my position of an already older man, however, there are many young or modern veterans, who left the army for some reason, and they need something completely different. They need help integrating into society.*

The respondents said it was crucial, completely in accordance with the key importance of labour in modern society<sup>38</sup>, to be able to find a job after leaving the Army of the Czech Republic.

*It would be good if the people were able to find a job in the region. Because he leaves and he has no skills from the army, he only knows how to obey orders, generally speaking...*

They often mentioned their negative experience with looking for a job in this area:

*I was surprised that they told me they wanted no soldier or policeman and showed that ostentatiously in front of the applicants.*

*When a professional soldier comes to the labour office... they treat you with contempt and say We do not have anything for you, because you are a professional soldier, a very specific group not usable on the job market.*

Besides the aid in seeking a job and the development of competencies related to the labour market, the respondents also mentioned psychology and social support including veterans' families. They also talked about elder care and healthcare.

There was a part of the shared experience forming a boundary between foreign operations veterans and other professional soldiers and the general public in terms of ideas about the possibilities and ways to care for postmodern veterans. A veteran experience meant an important prerequisite qualification for working with veterans as a target group for any kind of aid in both direct contact and on the strategic level.

---

<sup>38</sup> GIDDENS, Anthony. *Sociologie*. Prague: Argo, 2013. ISBN 978-80-257-0807-1.

*Veteran centres should serve when you need it. I need aid right now and go to cry on my friends' shoulder... The people serving at (veteran) centres, this must be someone trustworthy for them. They need space and a man they trust...*

*At the ministry, people who were on those missions should deal with that. They would be primarily assigned to those positions to know what it is about.*

Some respondents' professional experience from abroad or involvement in professional organisations led to the fact that the situation in the Czech Republic was very often compared with some other western armies and their possibilities.

*"It is determined in foreign companies. They know that soldiers maintain a certain regime of life and that they are reliable. There are companies not hiring people without any experience in the army, it is quite common in the USA. In the UK, professional soldiers are hired preferentially, because their employers can get some support from the state, a tax relief or some other relief, but they know that such a person is reliable."*

*There should be a position near a minister, which is currently in the German, Dutch, US or British army and any professional one, such authorised person or adviser for war veterans.*

Even though the respondents focused rather on aid to the entire group of soldiers and did not emphasize any special demands of veterans in terms of seeking desirable ways of support, the topic of the group identity and shared experience proved also to be important for them in the same context. Professional soldiers as a group should be entitled to aid in key life situations, however, the possibility of a specific approach and sharing experience should be provided exclusively to veterans.

### **For Whom Will We do Good?**

The view abroad, the feeling of insufficient prestige and respect for the army in general, and the veteran status, all combined, bring this group the risk of relative deprivation in the sense described by Stouffer<sup>39</sup>, i.e. a feeling of certain lack of appreciation and frustration due to a subjectively perceived lack or injustice in comparison with other groups or individuals.

*The society feels it this way that the army was fed here for years and was not able to act in 1939 or 1968, so it is in fact useless. I think that this perception still remains among people...*

*I have a colleague, who has returned to brick laying or an army engineer works as a bricklayer. As I said, an engineering degree, an army engineer, he could have been*

---

<sup>39</sup> PETTIGREW, Thomas F. Samuel Stouffer and Relative Deprivation. *Social Psychology Quarterly* [online]. 2015, Vol. 78(1), p. 7-24 [cit. 2019-08-22]. Available from: <https://1url.cz/rMS90>

*promoted to the position of general and drives a truck in a company. It is very hard, it seems to me like a disparagement.*

These feelings are illustrated also by a change in the ideological conviction expressed by the respondents after leaving the army. It is proof of disappearing identification with and loyalty to dominant political opinions. Their political integration might pose a problem for their incorporation into society.

*Now I am not very related with the policy of NATO and I am not sure if I would go to a mission with NATO. It seems to me like an aggressive policy. If they said lets go protect the Czech Republic.... You will protect the borders... I would go right now. However, if somebody said you would go back to Iraq or somewhere, I would not go. I have changed a bit.*

*I have to say that I have changed my opinion a lot in view of the world. After nearly 20 years, a man says I have fought for something not being my concern. Now, more information emerges that Saddam owned no chemical weapons at that time, so why did we go to fight there, for whom? Of course, now I know why we went there and for what...*

Possible impacts of this process are expressed not only by the above mentioned Stouffer's theory, which identifies relative deprivation as a possible impulse for the radicalisation of the conviction of deprived groups or individuals<sup>40</sup>, but also by one of the respondents based on their experience:

*As the problems in the world are growing, there are more and more soldiers serving in foreign missions. It will be a rather large group of inhabitants in the future, and this might bring certain social problems... for instance the radicalisation of those reserve soldiers, because they might say I have served this state, and this state is not able to take care of me, it is not able to find me a job. And I know from my perspective and from contact with former colleagues that their opinions are very radical in some ways.*

The respondent's words very precisely describe the risks emerging from the rest of the interviews.

## DISCUSSION

The veterans' statements are built on two kinds of foundations, which are, however, closely interconnected - values the veterans see as the ground for their view of the world and practical demands that they have. The postmodern veterans are well aware of the comparison to veterans from both world wars, and they are aware of the fact that the general public sees them differently from the veterans of both world wars. This applies also to the context of their contribution within the homeland and its statehood. Despite that, they talk about a certain social debt, which is not necessarily related only to the

---

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

group of participants in foreign missions, but generally to professional soldiers as a professional group, who should deserve, in their opinion, a specific kind of treatment, due to their service and the limitations connected with the service. A comparison to the situation abroad, particularly NATO member states, is very important to the respondents. The tasks of the care of the veterans are the same abroad, however, the benefits are certainly not the same. They feel relatively deprived in comparison to the foreign practice and the position of veterans in Western European countries they learn about to a different extent. They also feel relatively deprived as a marginalised, and to some extent, also stigmatised, group in the framework of the Czech general public. This stigmatisation and primarily its psychological aspects are something that further research should focus on.

Topics, which were not emphasized, included primarily job counselling and the care of families, i.e. topics significantly connected with everyday problems or eventually with social work and not with psychological or health problems. At the same time, the respondents also emphasized the problem of the position of postmodern veterans in the eyes of the general public and the necessity of an attendance paid to a targeted development of their positive media coverage and public image.

The interviews, in a context different from the researched one, confirm that the experience of veterans de facto strengthens the professional identity of a soldier. It confirms and supplements it. By the reflection of their professional identity, including the denial of heroism, the soldiers unknowingly set the basic question of all social systems: Do we have to help those who deserve it or those who need it? The acknowledgement of a lower rate of credit did not lead to the resignation of claims or the satisfaction of needs.

Values played an important role in the interviews, primarily in relation to the dissatisfaction and deficits on the level of needs. The respondents talked about the review of values, which was a rather understandable and expected result of participation in a mission, however, here the context was set, besides all other things, as the impact of social floundering after leaving the army. The explicitly reflected on reassessment of the past mentioned in the interviews is a clear signal of how serious an issue this fact could become in the future.

## CONCLUSIONS

Reflection of the identity within the context of historical events as seen via the eyes of the participants is a crucial part of the complex interpretation of modern history. Subjective perspective and evaluation is perceived here both as a value and determination that is to be taken into account here as well.

With regard to the fact that the respondents commented on the situation before the effect of new concept documents focused on the care of the postmodern war veterans, we can only hope that the risk arising from the above-mentioned interviews will be averted by systematic work with this group. It will also be focused on both veterans on active duty as well as soldiers leaving the army because the end of active duty is a turning point defining the social vulnerability of this group. At the moment, we can say that the most acute problems are determined in the form of binding documents, in the logic and structure of them, which more or less reflects actual experience. It will be possible to assess the implementation on the horizon in several years, which might be too

late for part of the group of the postmodern veterans. Particularly for those fighting in former Yugoslavia in the 1990's. They form the least researched and "treated" group of veterans.

At this moment it is possible to say that the topics emphasized are reflected in the current concept documents, however, the practical fulfilment of the defined tasks is still an unanswered question. Politicians have already posed the question of expanding the basic veteran status to all professional soldiers, which is a system applied, for instance, by the United Kingdom for its armed forces. Even though the actual definition of such legal measure is years ahead of us, a dynamic shift in the problem of the care of the modern veterans is an optimistic sign.

We perceive soldiers as those risking their lives or health in foreign missions and activities in the "rear" in the Czech Republic. They deserve aid from the society for which they were willing to sacrifice something. This should not be a positive discrimination of war veterans in the sense of preferring them to other citizens; however, we should make it possible for them to get services from society with regard to tasks they fulfilled for the benefit of that society.

Systematic attention and care can then prevent significant problems of an individual nature (a drop in the social net due to certain professional or group characteristics) and can prevent such impacts as disillusion and frustration, due to shifts in values and ideals.

