

CAUSES OF TURNOVER OF PROFESSIONAL SOLDIERS OF THE SERBIAN ARMED FORCES*

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Since 1st January 2011, compulsory military service was abolished and transition was made to manning the units of the Serbian Armed Forces with professional members. This implies that the Serbian Armed Forces should attract, employ and retain professional soldiers within their units. Such scenario has created new challenges in human resource management within the Serbian Armed Forces. Having in mind that professional soldiers make a significant component that influences the state and operational capabilities of Serbian Armed Forces units, turnover represents a serious obstacle both in achieving and maintaining required level of their operational capability. Every organisation faces turnover. It is necessary for the management of the defence system to identify expectations and requirements of professional soldiers, which would contribute to the development of a strategic plan for the reduction of their turnover.

The goal of this paper is to identify the causes of the turnover of professional soldiers of the Serbian Armed Forces. Empirical research was carried out on a sample of 117 company/autonomous platoon commanders and 1213 professional soldiers of the Serbian Armed Forces. The causes of turnover were examined through a survey. Company/autonomous platoon commanders were asked to evaluate factors that encourage professional soldiers the most to leave the Serbian Armed Forces. Professional soldiers were asked to define actions that the defence system should take to reduce their outflow. Obtained results show that the turnover of professional soldiers is considerably influenced by job satisfaction and organisational support.

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Introduction

Turnover exists in all organisations and it can adversely affect their functioning. "However, the consequences of a major outflow of personnel could be dramatic for the Serbian Armed Forces, both in financial terms and in terms of performing assigned missions and tasks of the Serbian Armed Forces..." (Nikolić, 2023: 2). Organisational commitment and organisational identification of members of the Serbian Armed Forces can be undermined by uncontrolled fluctuation of its members, which can have tremendous consequences on the Serbian Armed Forces and the system of defence of the Republic of Serbia. Research carried out worldwide point to the fact that organisational identification, cohesion and motivation are in direct connection to combat performance and success in combat (Todorović, Čabarkapa, Tošić-Radev & Miladinović, 2017). "In order to timely undertake appropriate measures for the prevention or reduction of voluntary turnover of professional members of the Serbian Armed Forces, it is necessary to conduct a comprehensive analysis and determine elements that influence the behaviour that is represented by withdrawal (absenteeism and turnover) of professional members of the defence system..." (Nikolić, Stojković, Kovačević i Nikolić, 2022: 475).

Since 1st January 2011, the manning of the Serbian Armed Forces is done exclusively by professional members. That is why the number of professional members in their units has been increased (Petrović, 2007). The process itself multiply increased the number of contract soldiers - professional soldiers in units, which requires from the human resources management in the Serbian Armed Forces to conduct successful recruitment, or to attract young people to apply for voluntary military service, and then, during the training, to motivate them to get employment in the Serbian Armed Forces and retain them for a long time within the system of defence. However, the problem of recruitment and retention of professional members has been more and more pronounced in previous years (Đokić, Ignjatijević, 2020). Despite detailed and good-quality selection that results in choosing the best candidates, their long-term attachment to the Serbian Armed Forces is not guaranteed, hence, it happens that they leave the system of defence. Therefore, one of the roles of human resources management is to discover the causes of turnover and undertake measures to reduce the turnover rate among professional members to an acceptable level.

The standing corps of the Serbian Armed Forces, as an organised armed force responsible for the defence of the Republic of Serbia against external armed threats, include professional members of the armed forces (military and civilian personnel) and soldiers doing military service. Officers, non-commissioned officers and professional soldiers are the military personnel. This research included professional soldiers, as a response to the growing concern about their turnover, having in mind that they are the primary performers of soldiers' tasks and duties in the units and institutions of the military. On the other hand, they differ from other members of military personnel (officers and non-commissioned officers) in terms of the rights and obligations defined by legal acts and bylaws, that can have influence on their job (dis)satisfaction and

turnover. Firstly, unlike other military personnel, they are employed based on fixed time employment relationship (contracts that last up to three years), which affects exercising certain rights in civilian life (obtaining credits, loans and other). Secondly, they do not receive the assistance from the military organisation to solve their housing issues. Thirdly, in case of medical incapacity for military service, their employment relationship is terminated without right to a pension.

The goal of this paper is to identify the causes of the turnover of professional soldiers of the Serbian Armed Forces.

Results of Previous Research

Turnover represents permanent withdrawal from an organisation (Robbins & Judge, 2017). "Observed from the viewpoint of an individual, turnover is the result of frustration and dissatisfaction of an employee" (Franceško and Mirković, 2008:78).

Despite a long history of turnover research, there are still questions about relative contribution of different factors, probability and turnover time. From the organisational aspect, there are numerous influencing factors that cause employees to decide to leave their current organisation, and that intention certainly precedes the final decision and taking actions.

Bogićević-Milikić (2010) point to the necessity of continuous management of employee turnover, whereat it is stressed that voluntary employee turnover can, and most often does have extremely adverse consequences on the organisation. Mihajlov and Mihajlov (2020) state that "The question why employees leave their jobs represents an important organisational dilemma not only because of accounting calculations of costs incurred by employment and training of new people who sometimes can be even more competent than the ones who are leaving, but also because of continued dissatisfaction as a disturbing factor for the achievement of individual performance and overall organisational goals." (pg. 50).

Research carried out for the requirements of the study of the outflow of personnel performing EU/IPA, established several major aspects of dissatisfaction in civil servants who work on European integration jobs. These basic aspects are presented in the study of several organisational units, starting from the problem of salaries and other emoluments (for example daily allowances while on official travel or overtime pays), to failures to give rewards according to achieved results, inadequate or insufficient promotion, inadequate system and insufficient opportunities for professional development, to poor capacities, practices and skills of human resources management at systemic level (Lazarević, Kosmina and Bajić, 2017).

In his doctoral dissertation Kovačević (2021) underlines that job satisfaction has a strong impact on turnover. Živković (2020) also points to the significant role of job (dis)satisfaction on turnover. In his research, he determined that the majority of employees state job dissatisfaction as the main reason for leaving the job, as well as dissatisfaction with poor communication, bad relations with colleagues, and lack of trust. In her doctoral dissertation Živković (2019) established that job satisfaction has a direct negative effect of voluntary turnover in the form of satisfaction with salary and satisfaction with the degree of work load.

Group of authors (Jaganjac, Gavrić & Obhodaš, 2020) notes that the satisfaction of employees and exposure to stress are crucial for the withdrawal from an organisation, or the employee turnover. In the conclusion of their research, they state that the first step in management of employee turnover is to understand the employees' dissatisfaction and the reasons behind their intention to leave the organisation.

Ćorović and Kahrović (2020) state in their work that the most significant factors that encourage employees to leave their current organisation are: higher salary, employee insurance, and opportunities for promotion, followed by greater respect for employees' rights, possibility of solving housing issue and the vicinity of job. The least significant turnover factors are opportunities for professional development, possible existence of more creative, interesting and dynamic jobs, and participation in decision-making process of the organisation.

Today, a great deal of research is conducted that refer to voluntary turnover as a growing problem of all modern armed forces. Österberg and Life (2018) conducted research on mutual relations between job satisfaction and work motivation and turnover intentions in the Swedish Armed Forces. Godlewski and Kline (2012) presented a model of early voluntary withdrawal from Canadian Armed Forces, as a response to a growing concern about voluntary outflow, and they researched the influence of normative and affective commitment on voluntary turnover. In their study Lytell and Drasgow (2009) estimated several event history models for predicting voluntary turnover in the U.S. military. Turnover predictors included background variables, job satisfaction, organizational commitment, withdrawal intentions, absenteeism, and comparisons of military and civilian work and lifestyles. Results showed that turnover intentions, absenteeism, organizational commitment, and military tenure consistently predicted voluntary turnover. Inconsistent findings for job satisfaction and comparisons of military and civilian work and lifestyles raise questions as to their roles as predictors of voluntary turnover.

In the Serbian Armed Forces direct research of turnover has not been conducted, but there are some indirect indicators of professional members attitudes to the withdrawal from the system of defence and the significance of analysis of organisational behaviour in that system (Đokić, Ignjatijević, 2020). In his doctoral dissertation, Kovačević (2021) analysed the influence of job satisfaction on work performance, and the influence of motivation on job satisfaction. In his conclusion he states that motivation has a positive impact on turnover reduction, and that elements of work motivation and job satisfaction partially coincide.

The analysis of results of 22 pieces of turnover research, carried out between 2020 and 2022, identified 38 used expressions for turnover causes (Table 1). Table 1 shows that the most often researched causes of turnover were: job satisfaction, stress on the job and organisational commitment.

Table 1
 Causes of turnover in different pieces of research from 2020 to 2022.
 (Produced by the author)

ИЗБОР НЕЗАВИСНЕ ВАРИЈАБЛЕ		АУТОР -																						
		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	
1	Humorous Leadership Шљивљиво лидерство																							1
2	Job satisfaction Задовољство послом		+	+			+		+	+								+			+			9
3	Likeness to job Љубав - привлачност посла												+											1
4	Satisfaction with promotion opportunities Job embeddedness Приврженост послу								+	+														2
6	Organizational identification Организациона идентификација													+										1
7	Pay satisfaction Задовољство платом												+											1
8	Career plateau Каријерни плато									+														1
9	Work engagement Радно ангажовање									+														1
10	Skill development opportunities Можљивостима развоја вештина												+											1
11	Job Stress Стрес на послу		+							+			+										+	4
12	Burnout Сагоревање									+														1
13	Emotional exhaustion Емоционална исцрпљеност									+														1
																								Број јалова
																								22

	ИЗВОР																					
	АУТОР - НЕЗАВИСНЕ ВАРИЈАБЛЕ																					
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22
13	Emotional exhaustion Емоционална исцрпљеност							+														1
14	Psychological contract violation Нарушавање психолошке добробити																	+				1
15	Person-organizational fit Усклађеност појединца са организацијом							+														1
16	Involvement in decisions Укљученост у процесу доношења											+										1
17	Career commitment Посвећеност каријери							+														1
18	Workplace Incivility Неудљудност на радном месту																	+				1
19	Workplace bullying Малтретирање на послу						+		+													2
20	Employee Cynicism Цинизам запослених										+											1
21	Job Performance Перформансе посла																			+		1
22	Job characteristics Карактеристика посла														+							1
23	Organizational trust Организационо поверење				+																	2
24	Perceived organizational support Уочена организациона подршка				+																	2
25	Organizational-based self-esteem Самопоштовање засновано на												+									1
26	Social support Социјална подршка										+											1
27	Organizational Justice Организацијска правда																+					1
28	Organizational commitment Организациона посвећеност		+			+		+							+							4
29	Affective organizational commitment Афективну организациону посвећеност					+									+							2
30	Calculative organizational commitment Нормативна организациона посвећеност					+									+							2
31	Loyalty Лојалност												+									1
32	Employee perceived loyalty Лојалност запослених																			+		1
33	Hardiness Издржљивост								+													1
34	Accomplishment Достигнуће												+									1
35	Different age groups Различите старосне групе			+																		1
36	Organizational tenure Радни стаж у организацији											+										1
37	Absenteeism Апсентизам	+																				1

Број редова

When we speak about job satisfaction, we usually refer to employees' attitudes. According to Robbins and Judge (2017), job satisfaction is "a positive feeling about one's job resulting from the evaluation of its characteristics" (pg. 119). They state the following as reasons that influence job satisfaction: working conditions, personality, salary and corporate social responsibility. Also, they underline that social support, interaction with colleagues outside the workplace and managers play an important role in the creation of attitude regarding job satisfaction.

Today, there are many definitions of stress. While some emphasise causes of stress, others place focus on the way of reacting. Still, observed broadly stress is "unpleasant psychological process that occurs in response to environmental pressures" (Robbins & Judge, 2017: 665). Franceško and Marković (2008) note that stress includes three factors: objective circumstances or conditions where too great demands are imposed on an employee - stressors; personal characteristics of an individual that mediate the way of reacting, and reaction or and adaptive response to the stressor. According to Bauer and Erdogan (2010) "stressors are events or contexts that cause a stress reaction by elevating levels of adrenaline and forcing a physical or mental response" (pg. 138). Robbins and Judge (2017) divide stressors into: *challenge stressors* or stressors associated with workload, pressure to complete tasks on time, and time urgency, and *hindrance stressors* or stressors that keep an employee from reaching his/her goals. Bauer and Erdogan (2010) show that stress is related to higher turnover, worse job attitudes, and that stressed individuals have lower organizational commitment.

"Organisational commitment represents a degree of identification with the organisation" (Župljanjin, 2016: 404). According to Župljanjin (2016), organisational support, belief that the organisation takes care of its employees, and that it values and appreciates their contribution is closely related to organisational commitment. Franceško and Marković (2008) believe that organisational commitment is one of the two main factors that influence making the decision to leave an organisation. Organisational commitment is characterised by: strong belief in goals and values of the organisation, readiness to make great efforts for the benefit of the organisation, and a desire to keep the membership of the organisation (Franceško and Marković 2008).

The analysis of literature and available papers show that, despite long history of research done on this matter, one question always reemerges - what are all the factors that influence the turnover of members of an organisation. Additional motive for this research, apart from the specificities of the workplace of professional soldiers, is the specific situation our state has been in for a long time: the abolition of mandatory conscription, continuous tensions in the southern province, accelerated armament and equipment of the states in the region, and the existence of war hotspots in the world.

Data Gathering and Processing Operation

Scientific identification of causes of the turnover of professional soldiers of the Serbian Armed Forces was carried out through the survey of 117 company/autonomous platoon commanders (hereinafter referred to as: "commanders") and 1213 professional soldiers, in the period from 1st March to 1st April 2024.

The commanders and professional soldiers of Serbian Armed Forces units responded to the survey on the premises of their units during their working hours, and the survey was administered in paper format. The survey was conducted in groups from 3 to 11 survey respondents. The number of survey respondents by groups, and the interval between the surveys entirely depended on assigned tasks and the availability of personnel.

The question asked in the survey for company commanders was: "Which factors, in your opinion, influence professional soldiers the most to decide to leave the Serbian Armed Forces?". The commanders responded to the combined question by choosing 5 out of 12 offered causes with the possibility to add (write in) their own proposals. The list of the offered causes was compiled by analysing the content of literature and research results given in Table 1.

The survey of professional soldiers was carried out by means of a constructed questionnaire to determine the influence of job satisfaction factors on turnover. In the very questionnaire, they were given an opportunity to state their position in the framework of an open question: "What measures, according to your opinion, could the system of defence undertake to increase the retention of professional soldiers in service?"

The statistical data analysis employed the content analysis and descriptive statistical analysis. The results were presented as frequency and percentage. To conduct data analysis, programme packages SPSS (version 26) and Excel (version 2002) were used.

Research results

According to commanders' opinions, presented in Figure 1, the greatest influence on the turnover of professional soldiers is exercised by *job satisfaction* (74%) and *workload* (66%), while the least frequency is showed by: *interpersonal relations* (15%), *behaviour of superior officer* (19%), *conditions of working environment* (23%) and *conflict between family and job* (24%).

The commanders recognised the following causes of the turnover of professional soldiers: absence from home (3%), immaturity and lack of interest (3%), and unplanned engagement on tasks that are not defined for their assigned position (3%).

Out of the entire number of professional soldiers who responded to the survey, 857 (70,65%) professional soldiers stated their opinion about the measures that the system of defence could take to increase the retention of professional soldiers in service, while 121 proposal was articulated. Essentially, it is important to note that very causes of turnover lay behind the proposals. Based on the analysis and classification of responses by affinity and meaning (by integrating expressions that have the same or similar meaning), and taking into account the proposals with the greatest frequency, a list of identified causes of turnover was generated.

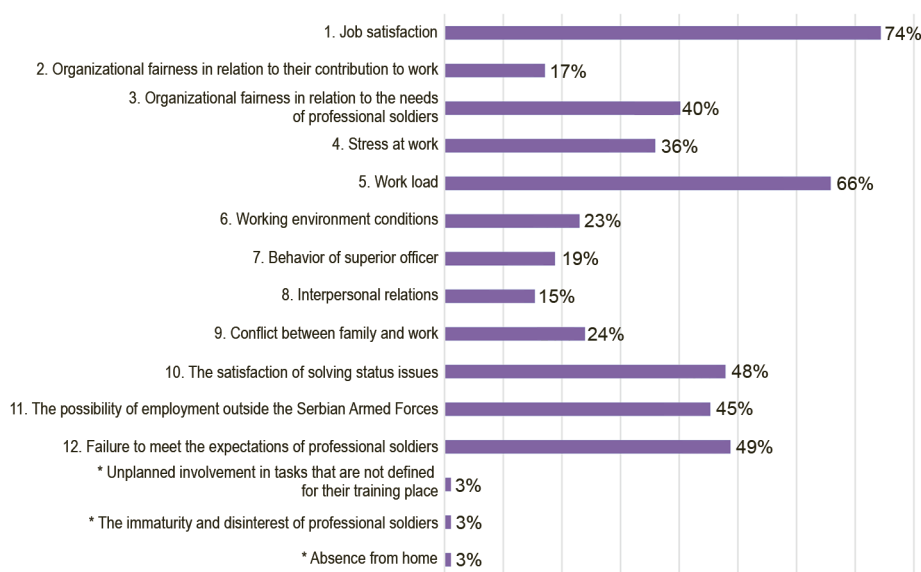


Figure 1: *Opinions of the commanders regarding the causes of the turnover of professional soldiers*

A comparative analysis of data presented in Figure 1 and those given in Table 2 singled out *job satisfaction and satisfaction with resolving status issues* as potential causes of turnover, which was recognised by both commanders and professional soldiers. However, the analysis of answers obtained from professional soldiers (see Table 2) points to the existence of significant interconnection between turnover and certain dimensions of job satisfaction (salaries - 38.83%; reconciling family obligations and job - 6.18%; conditions of the working environment - 4.53%).

There are significant incongruities in terms of the evaluation of the influence of workload and conditions of working environment on turnover. Commanders believe that the workload, after job satisfaction, rather strongly influences the turnover of professional soldiers (66%). And yet, only 26 professional soldiers (2.14%) believe that workload influences their decision to leave the system of defence. Also, their evaluations differ in terms of the influence of conditions of working environment on the turnover of professional soldiers (company commanders - 23%; professional soldiers 4.53%).

Table 2
Presentation of identified causes of turnover on the basis of survey of professional soldiers

No.	Cause of turnover		Proposed action to reduce outflow	Number of soldiers who gave proposals	% Out of 857 soldiers	% Out of 1213 soldiers
1	Job satisfaction	Organisational factors	Increasing salaries of professional soldiers	471	54.96	38.83
2			Increasing the amount of daily allowances	130	15.17	10.72
3			Introduction of meal allowance	31	3.62	2.56
4			Increasing the amount of travel expenses	16	1.87	1.32
5			Payment of annual bonus	15	1.75	1.24
6		Satisfaction with work environment conditions	Improvement of living and working conditions	55	6.42	4.53
7		Satisfaction with workload	Reducing workload	26	3.03	2.14
8		Satisfaction with superior officer	Better behaviour of superior officer toward the employees	15	1.75	1.24
9	Personal factors	Reconciling family obligations and job	Reducing the absence from family because of the engagement in the field	75	8.75	6.18
10	Organisational support	by the organisation	Regulating the status of professional soldiers	456	53.21	37.59
11			Solving housing issue	31	3.62	2.56

Discussion

The goal of this paper is to identify the causes of the turnover of professional soldiers in the Serbian Armed Forces, since the prediction of employee turnover is an integral part of work plans of all non-profit-making organisations (Cohen, Blake & Goodman, 2015). The primary interest of the research and identification of causes of the turnover of professional soldiers in the Serbian Armed Forces is reflected in the reduction of their outflow, and the enhancement of job satisfaction, and consequently the enhancement of the effects of their work, and lower absence from work. In addition, the identification of important causes of turnover is significant because of the possibility, on the basis of research results, to influence the change and improvement of organisational structure if needed, to enable a higher level of job satisfaction, thus reducing the outflow. Moreover, a satisfied member of the Serbian Armed Forces will be a positive example in his environment, and make a strong and favourable impact on the promotion of military profession and influx of new personnel.

The research showed that job satisfaction strongly influences the turnover of professional soldiers (recognised in 74% of surveyed commanders, and 38.83% of professional soldiers) which is the result confirmed by a great deal of research (Ali & Anwar, 2021; Griffeth, Hom & Gaertner, 2000). However, the obtained results bring into question the manner of measuring job satisfaction. Should it be done using one global indicator or is it necessary to derive a composite measurement of satisfaction with key aspects of work from various factors (Carvajal and Popovici, 2018; Robbins and Judge, 2017)? Obtained results point to a considerable influence of certain aspects of job satisfaction on the turnover of professional soldiers (salaries - 38.83 %, reconciling family obligations and job - 6.18%). However, no significant influence of superior officers was identified (recognised by 1.24% of professional soldiers) and of some other dimensions of job satisfaction (interpersonal relations - 0.66%, possibility of promotion - 0.66%, possibility of professional development - 0.08%) on the turnover of professional soldiers. That points to a conclusion that we would get suitable data merely by measuring job satisfaction dimensions, and those data would enable us to define appropriate measures aimed at creating a good plan for the management of organisational behaviour of professional soldiers (turnover, absenteeism) (Barbu, 2020; Robbins and Judge, 2017).

A descriptive analysis of the data, also established that the status of professional soldiers within organisational support (37.5% of professional soldiers and 48.8% of commanders) considerably influences the turnover of professional soldiers. A great deal of research has confirmed a negative effect of organisational support on employee turnover (Allen, Shore & Griffeth, 2003; Al-Suraihi, Yusuf & Al-Suraihi, 2020; Flint, Haley & McNally, 2012).

Attention must be drawn to the fact that commanders, apart from suggested causes of turnover, recognised the immaturity and lack of interest (3%) as a potential cause of the turnover of professional soldiers. In their research Ford, Gibson, DeCesare, Marsh, & Griepentrog, (2013) state that immaturity and lack of interest of armed forces members have a predicting capacity of their turnover. On the basis of previously stated, additional research on the influence of lack of interest and immaturity on

the turnover of professional soldiers in the Serbian Armed Forces is necessary and justified.

As regards the future directions of research in the field of the turnover of professional soldiers, the results of this research suggest several key topics: research on the causes and course of professional soldiers' decision-making process to leave units of the Serbian Armed Forces, and research into the connection between the turnover of professional soldiers and certain dimensions of job satisfaction.

Conclusion

The results of the conducted survey unequivocally confirmed the presence of danger from turnover within the system of defence. Such conclusion is suggested by the feedback of professional soldiers (70.65%) when asked to give their proposals during the survey, as well as the frequency of some of their proposals as to how to resolve the problem of personnel outflow. Also, both respondent populations recognised the potential causes of turnover.

The survey results both in case of soldiers and commanders identified the influence of job satisfaction and organisational support (defining status and solving housing issue) on the turnover of professional soldiers.

The identified existing influence of job satisfaction and organisational support on the turnover of professional soldiers has rather important implications for administrative authorities of the Serbian Armed Forces. They must be aware that this problem exists in order to "take appropriate measures and create a good plan for the management of the organisational behaviour of professional soldiers, and among other, their turnover.

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S u m m a r y

In 2011, the armed forces of Serbia carried out a transition of the manning system from recruitment system to manning the forces by fully professional personnel. This implies that the Serbian Armed Forces should attract, employ and retain professional soldiers within their units. Such scenario has created new challenges in human resource management within the Serbian Armed Forces.

Having in mind that professional soldiers make a significant component that influences the state and operational capabilities of units of the Serbian Armed Forces, it can be said that knowledge on the turnover of professional soldiers and factors that contribute it, can be the key for daily guidance of their behaviour on their workplaces, and from a long-term perspective, it enables maintaining the Serbian Armed Forces in the framework of the strategic plan.

The purpose of this paper was to analyse and identify the causes of the turnover of professional soldiers of the Serbian Armed Forces. The interests of the research into the causes of turnover are multiple. The primary interest is reflected in the reduction of their outflow, and the enhancement of job satisfaction, and consequently the enhancement of the effects of their work, and lower absence from work. In addition, the identification of important causes of turnover is significant because of the possibility, on the basis of research results, to influence the change and improvement of organisational structure if needed, to enable a higher level of job satisfaction, thus reducing the outflow. Moreover, a satisfied member of the Serbian Armed Forces will be a positive example in his environment, and make a strong and favourable impact on the promotion of military profession and influx of new personnel.

Empirical research was carried out on a sample of 117 company/autonomous platoon commanders and 1213 professional soldiers of the Serbian Armed Forces. The causes of fluctuation were examined through a survey. Company/autonomous platoon commanders were asked to evaluate factors that encourage professional soldiers the most to leave the Serbian Armed Forces, while professional soldiers were to define actions that the defence system should take to reduce their outflow.

This research points out that job satisfaction and organisational support strongly influence the turnover of professional soldiers. However, the obtained results bring into question the manner of measuring job satisfaction. Should it be done using one global indicator or is it necessary to derive a composite measurement of satisfaction

with key aspects of work from various factors? Obtained results show a considerable influence of certain aspects of job satisfaction on the turnover of professional soldiers.

The identified existing influence of job satisfaction and organisational support on the turnover of professional soldiers has rather important implications for administrative authorities of the Serbian Armed Forces. For the purpose of taking timely and appropriate measures to prevent or reduce voluntary turnover of professional soldiers in the Serbian Armed Forces, it is necessary for the administrative authorities to carry out a comprehensive analysis and determine factors that influence the behaviour that results in the turnover of professional soldiers of the system of defence.

Key words: human resources, turnover, job satisfaction, stress, organisational support.

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