

ATTRACTIVENESS OF THE POLISH ARMY AS AN EMPLOYER – RESULTS OF EMPIRICAL RESEARCH

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Purpose: The main objective of the research conducted was to determine the attractiveness of the Polish Army as an employer in Poland, to identify the independent variables determining the attractiveness of the military, and to identify what factors increase and decrease the attractiveness of the military as an employer.

Design/methodology/approach: In order to verify the set research hypotheses, an empirical study was conducted in December 2020 using a diagnostic survey method (CAWI technique) including a sample of 384 respondents – residents of Poland. The results of the survey were subjected to statistical analysis using the IBM SPSS Statistics 23 package. Kruskal-Wallis, U-Mann-Whitney and χ^2 tests were performed.

Findings: The result of the research was the identification of the attractiveness of the military as an employer, and to distinguish factors that increase and decrease attractiveness.

Research limitations/implications: The attractiveness of the military as an employer in the opinion of Poles (external attractiveness) was analysed, while the internal attractiveness of the military was not studied.

Practical implications: The results of the obtained research can be used by the military in campaigns promoting military service. They can also inspire a deeper analysis of the determinants of attractiveness, which will slowly lead to a more complete understanding of HR indicators.

Originality/value: The article presents the results of statistical analyses aimed at identifying static relationships. The presented results may inspire the implementation of research in an international environment, which would allow further exploration of factors determining the attractiveness of the military as an employer, not only in Poland.

Keywords: attractiveness, army, employer.

Category of the paper: research paper.

1. Introduction

Organisations around the world are not only beginning to implement employer branding activities, but are also increasingly creating an employer attractiveness strategy (EAS) (Bhattacharya, Sen, Korschun, 2008), the implementation of which requires a thorough study of both the market, potential and desired job candidates, as well as organisational capabilities. Introducing only the Employer Value Proposition (Zajac-Pałdyna, 2020; Wojtaszczyk, 2012) as a package of benefits offered to employees, unsupported by further activities in onboarding, developing employee competencies, creating employee experience solutions and taking care of the external image, in many cases does not make it possible to build the image of the organisation as an attractive employer, the so-called employer of choice. The desire to implement, as well as evaluate the effectiveness of employer branding solutions, involves the need to identify the factors that determine the attractiveness of a given organisation as an employer in the market. Knowledge of these factors allows us to understand HR indicators, better define strategic goals, or more easily identify potential areas of action, allowing us to support the organisation in achieving its goals, or in working out the desired image (Berthon, Ewing, Hah, 2005; Edwards, Edwards, 2013; Pingle, Sharma, 2013).

The author of this article, while conducting research, analysed the attractiveness of the military as an employer in the Polish labour market. The purpose of the research conducted was to identify the level of attractiveness of the Polish Army as an employer, including factors that increase and decrease this attractiveness. An answer was sought to the following three research problems: *What is the attractiveness of the Polish Army as an employer in Poland? What factors increase the attractiveness of the Polish Army as an employer? What factors decrease the attractiveness of the Polish Army as an employer?*

The survey, conducted in December 2020 using the CAWI technique, surveyed 384 respondents. The collected survey material was subjected to statistical analysis, which made it possible to assess the level of attractiveness of the military as an employer, including the identification of factors that increase and decrease this attractiveness. It should be noted that the subject of the study was only the external dimension of the attractiveness of the Polish Army as an employer.

2. Image vs. attractiveness of the organisation as an employer

Important factors influencing the choice of employer are the image and attractiveness of an organisation (Gatewood, Gowan, Lautenschlager, 1993). Most often, image is generally defined as a picture, portrait, likeness, or as an idea of someone or something. According to Budzyński,

it is what people think of a company (1998, p. 73). The image of an organisation is defined as the subjective image that arises in the minds of the public as a result of all types of transactions, as well as experiences related to the company (Skowronek, 2012). As Boulding points out, image is the result of past experiences (1956), which are formed from the perceived components of reality. Perception, on the other hand, is both a subjective and active process. Boorstin emphasises the ambiguity of this image oscillating between imagination and reason, expectations and reality (Boorstin, 1961). The image of the organisation is constantly changing, which is determined by the transformation of the environment, trends in the labour market, or changes in the hierarchy of employee needs. The lack of constancy in the quality of an organisation's image, on the one hand, shows its transience, and on the other hand, emphasizes the need for constant attention to how the organisation is perceived as an employer in the market.

Employer attractiveness is an issue that is subjected to detailed analysis by researchers, as well as a subject of interest to management practitioners, among whom are both representatives of the business community and public institutions, including the uniformed services. Employer attractiveness can be defined after Berthon, Ewing and Hah as the anticipated benefits an employee perceives from working for a particular organisation (2005). Jiang and Iles (2011), on the other hand, capture attractiveness as the degree to which potential candidates and current employees perceive the organisation positively. Similarly, attractiveness is defined by Ray (2006), indicating that it is the degree to which a potential candidate is interested in working for an organisation as a result of the expected benefits he or she will be able to reap by working for the organisation. Attractiveness can also be defined as the power an organisation has to motivate a candidate to consider a particular employer brand as an entity of value in the labour market (Bakanauskiene, Bendaravičienė, Barkauskė, 2017).

Researchers dealing with the issue of attractiveness of an organisation as an employer, consider attractiveness in relation to retention rates, turnover (Pavlović, 2018), career development opportunities, salary levels, organisational culture or even leadership effectiveness. Reis, Braga and Trullen analysed the impact of, among other things, an organisation's authenticity on its attractiveness (2017), while researchers such as Reis and Braga (2016) and Santago (2019) emphasise the importance of intergenerational differences in the way an organisation's attractiveness is assessed. Martins and Parsons (2007) emphasise the influence of professed values, Hinson, Agbleze and Kuada (2018) analysed corporate social responsibility, while Eger, Mičík, Gangur and Řehoř (2019) focused attention on factors of employer attractiveness in a multicultural environment.

Other researchers have also analysed such independent variables as gender (Terjesen, Vinnicombe, Freeman, 2007), race (Thomas, Wise, 1999), labour market status related to work experience (Alniascik, Alniascik, 2012), household income level (Newburry, Gardberg, Belkin, 2006), or education level (Arachchige, Robertson, 2013). In all of the indicated studies, one can also find insights into the importance of individual preferences and diverse needs as factors

determining the level of attractiveness of an organisation (Sivertzen, Nilsen, Olafsen, 2013). Opinions about an employer provided by both employees and, for example, those who participated in the recruitment process, can both increase and decrease the level of attractiveness, which shows how important it is to take care of what internal and external stakeholders say and think about the organisation (Kietzmann, Canhoto, 2013).

3. Employer attractiveness factors – a literary references review

A number of studies conducted by both academics and representatives of the business world have focused on determining the dimensions of employer attractiveness. A review of the results leads to the conviction that attributes are multidimensional. Despite the emergence of various classifications, one can find aspects on which researchers agree in terms of allocation. The main emphasis is on the importance of three types of benefits (originally identified by Ambler and Barrow in 1996), which include functional, economic and psychological aspects (Berthon, Ewing, Hah, 2005; Reis, Braga, Trullen, 2017). Researchers also present a division of factors into instrumental (salary, benefits, career development) and symbolic (Lievens, Highhouse, 2003), hard and soft (Baum, Kabst, 2013), and monetary and non-monetary (Ray, 2006). A more elaborate division presented by Jiang and Iles (2011), Alniacik and Alniacik (2012) and Thiranagam and Dileesh (2020), among others, includes, in turn, five categories of factors determining the attractiveness of an organisation, such as social, economic, developmental, application and attribute aspects.

Comparing the above divisions, it can be pointed out that functional and economic benefits are also called instrumental or hard, while psychological benefits are referred to as symbolic or soft. Instrumental benefits are also referred to by some researchers as objective, because they are easier to identify in an organisation and in many cases have a material dimension. Symbolic benefits, on the other hand, are called subjective because they refer to intangible aspects such as the image of the organisation (Lievens, 2007) or the prestige of the profession and are related to the needs of the individual translated into self-image as a person and an employee.

In conclusion, the variety of attributes of employer attractiveness reveals the complexity of the issue and, at the same time, the multidimensionality of possible analyses, which makes employer attractiveness and the factors determining it an object of constant, intensive research (Kalińska-Kula, Staniec, 2021; Kurek, 2019, 2021).

4. The Polish Army as an employer – statistical data

The Polish Army as an employer has for years enjoyed a good image, as evidenced, among other things, by the results of surveys on public trust (in 2019, trust in the military as an institution was manifested by 69% of respondents, in 2020 - 67.7%¹). The importance of the military as an employer can also be shown through the prism of personnel data in terms of employment structure.

According to the Central Statistical Office (CSO), as of 31 December 31 2020, there were 15,825.4 thousand employees in Poland, excluding budget units conducting activities in the field of national defence and public security. In turn, the military employed 156.7 thousand people, including 110.1 thousand soldiers and 46.6 thousand civilian employees (Table 1). Thus, it can be concluded that almost one person in 100 employed in Poland, refers to the Polish Army as an employer. Not included in these statistics are soldiers of the Territorial Defence Forces (about 32 thousand in 2022) (GUS, 2021).

The number of people with professional ties to the military is steadily increasing, as evidenced by the data in Table 1. In 2010, 143.7 thousand people found work in the military, which means that from 2010 to 2020, an additional 13 thousand people were employed in the military. It is worth noting that in the main the number of soldiers in the army is increasing, in turn, analysing the employment structure of civilian employees, comparing 2010 and 2020, one can see a decrease in employment by 1.5 thousand people.

Table 1.

Paid employees in the Polish army in 2010-2020

Specification	2010	2015	2019	2020
	in thousands			
Total	143,7a	141,7	153,5	156,7
of which women	22,7	24,2	28,3	29,7
Professional soldiers	95,4	96,2	107,7	110,1b
Civilian employees of the military	48,1	45,5	45,8	46.6c

a Including soldiers of extended mandatory military service not included in the division into professional soldiers and civilian employees. b, c Of which women: b – 8,3 thousand, c – 21,4 thousand.

Source: *Mały Rocznik Statystyczny Polski 2021*. Warsaw: GUS, p. 77.

Year after year, the percentage of women serving in the Polish Army is increasing, a phenomenon not only seen in Poland alone, as globally the percentage of women in the army oscillates from 0.3% in the Turkish army, to 20% in the Hungarian army (2019 data). In Poland, in 2019, 7% of women served in the army, in 2020 the percentage rose to 7.47%, and in 2021 to 8.25%. There is a growing interest among ladies in the Territorial Defence Forces in particular. In 2020, more than 27,000 soldiers served in the WOT, of which more than 16% of the soldiers were women (Women in the WOT...).

¹ IBRIS, research commissioned by the Onet.pl portal.

The importance of the military as an employer will grow, which is also related to plans to increase the size of the Polish army. The Law on Defence of the Fatherland, which has been implemented, envisages an increase in the number of professional soldiers to 250,000 and up to 50,000 soldiers of the Territorial Defence Forces. The increase in the number of soldiers is also likely to be associated with an increase in the number of civilian employees in the army.

5. The Polish Army as an employer – research results

5.1. Methodological assumptions of the research conducted and the structure of the research sample

The results of the research presented in this article are part of the research material obtained in connection with the implementation of a research task at the War Studies University on the topic: Employer Branding in the Polish Armed Forces. The research sought to answer three research problems: What is the attractiveness of the Polish Army as an employer in Poland? What factors increase the attractiveness of the Polish Army as an employer? What factors decrease the attractiveness of the Polish Army as an employer?

Adequately, three research hypotheses were adopted, which, for the sake of extensiveness, were written down in abbreviated form: H1. The attractiveness of the Polish Army as an employer is high. H2. Factors that increase the attractiveness of the military as an employer are those presented in Figure 1. H3. Factors decreasing the attractiveness of the military as an employer are those presented in Figure 2.

In order to provide answers to the indicated research problems, including verification of the adopted hypotheses, empirical research was carried out using the method of diagnostic survey carried out with the CAWI technique on a sample of 384 Poles – people of working age. Three criteria were taken into account when selecting the research sample: gender, generational affiliation and the voivodeship in which the respondents resided. The selection of the research sample was quota (non-probabilistic), while the structure of the population in Poland as of 31 December 2019 was used as a reference. The results of the study were subjected to statistical analysis using the IBM SPSS Statistics 23 package. The structure of the research sample is shown using Table 2.

Table 2.
Research sample structure

Voivodeship	Generation X (50-64 years)		Generation Y (35-49 years)		Generation X (18- 34 years)		Total
	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	
Lower Silesia	4	4	6	6	5	4	29
Kuyavian-Pomeranian	3	3	4	4	4	3	21
Lublin	3	3	4	4	4	3	21
Lubusz	1	1	2	2	2	2	10
Lodzkie	4	3	5	4	4	4	24
Lesser Poland	5	6	7	6	6	5	35
Masovian	8	7	11	10	9	8	53
Opole	2	1	2	2	2	1	10
Subcarpathian	4	3	4	4	4	3	22
Podlaskie	2	2	2	2	2	2	12
Pomeranian	4	3	5	4	4	3	23
Silesia	6	6	9	8	9	7	45
Holy Cross	2	1	3	2	2	2	12
Warmian-Masurian	3	2	3	2	3	2	15
Greater Poland	6	5	7	6	6	5	35
West Pomeranian	3	2	3	3	3	3	17
Total	112		146		126		384

Source: own research results.

A total of 53.6% men and 46.4% women participated in the study. The main respondents were those classified as Generation Y (38%), followed by Generation X (32.8%) and Generation Z (29.2%). Taking into account the size structure of the respondents, the largest number of people came from the Masovian Voivodeship (13.8%), while the smallest number of respondents resided in the Opole and Lubusz Voivodeships (2.6% of respondents each).

5.2. Survey results with analysis

The research first analysed the level of attractiveness of the Polish Army as an employer. Attractiveness at the level of very high and rather high was declared by 59.38% of respondents. 33.07% of respondents rated attractiveness at a medium level. Low and very low attractiveness was indicated by 7.55% of respondents. Thus, it can be concluded that the Polish Army enjoys high attractiveness as an employer in Poland. Taking into account the indicated survey results, H1 was verified positively.

Next, the factors that, according to the respondents, increase and decrease the attractiveness of the military as an employer were analysed. The factors were identified on the basis of, among others, research reports on the attractiveness of Polish employers and the results of the empirical research conducted by the author of the article on the image of the military as an employer among students of the War Studies University in 2019.

The opinions of the respondents regarding factors that increase the attractiveness of the military as an employer are presented in Figure 1.

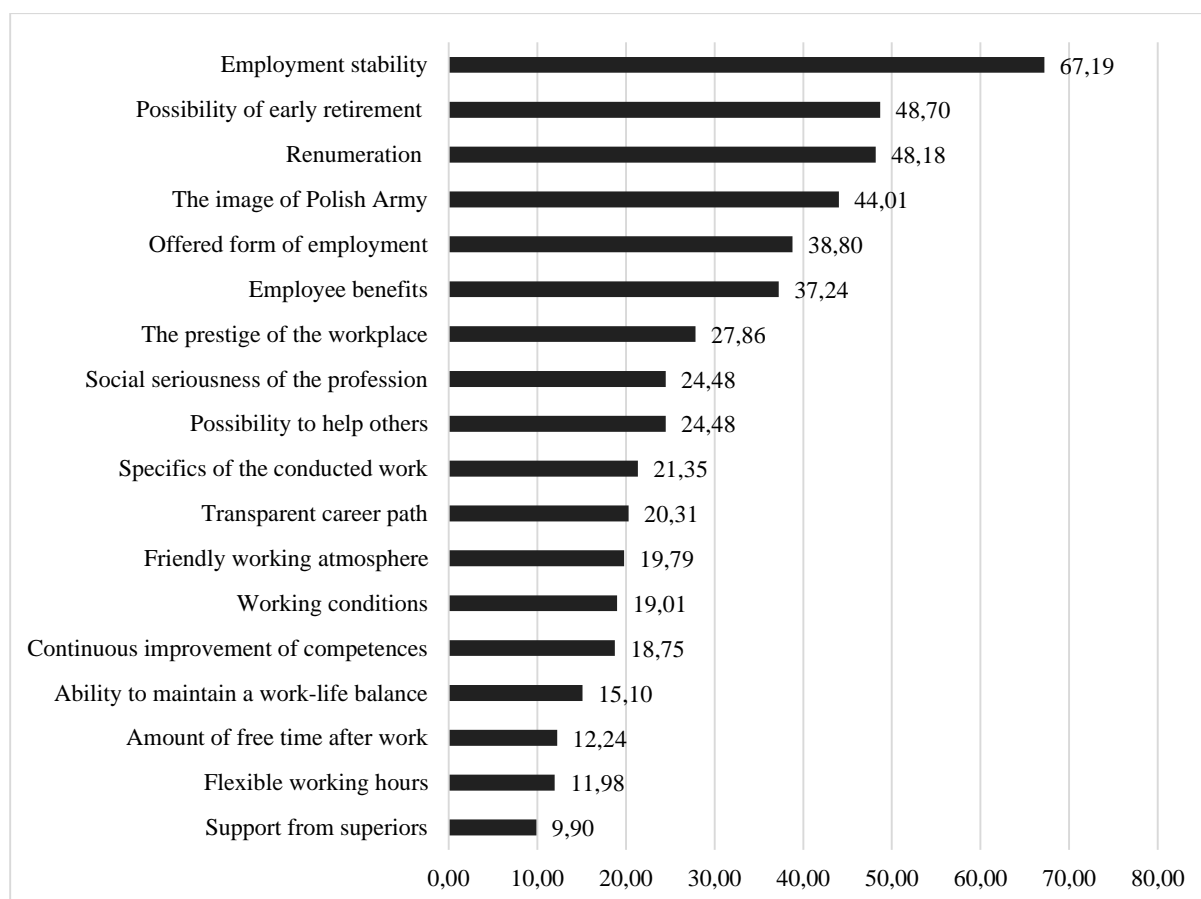


Figure 1. Factors that increase the attractiveness of the military as an employer (in %).

Source: own studies results.

According to the vast majority of respondents (67.19%), the main factor in the attractiveness of the military as an employer is stability of employment. The military, as a public institution, guarantees this stability, in addition, it is related to the military's very function as a security provider. Stability of employment is also partly due to the investment in the development of soldiers' competencies, which makes them valuable and unique employees. The second factor indicated by the largest group of respondents, was the possibility of early retirement (48.70%). According to the law, those who were called up for military service no later than 31 December 2012, will gain pension rights after 15 years of service, while those called up after that time will gain pension rights after 25 years (Article 18.a and b, Pension Provision Law...). However, given the situation in the civilian labour market, such entitlements are rare, which may have a significant impact on career choices.

Another important factor, according to respondents, was the amount of salaries offered in the military (48.18%), the general image of the military (44.01%), the form of employment (38.80%) and various employee benefits (37.24%). The salaries offered in the military may determine the attractiveness of this institution, especially when the public is informed of planned salary increases. In 2022, as a result of the increase in the multiplier of the base amount for soldiers from 3.81 to 4.23, there was an increase in salaries by an average of PLN 677 gross.

As a result, military salaries, without allowances, are within the ballpark of PLN 6,830 gross on average (Higher salaries for soldiers...).

According to less than 30% of respondents, an important factor determining the attractiveness of the military as an employer is also the prestige of the workplace, social respect for the profession, the opportunity to help others and the content of the work performed. The remaining respondents also pointed to a clear career path, a friendly working atmosphere, the conditions of the work performed, continuous improvement of competencies, the ability to maintain a balance between work and family life, the amount of free time, flexibility of working hours and support from superiors.

The respondents were also asked about factors that reduce the attractiveness of the military as an employer (Figure 2).

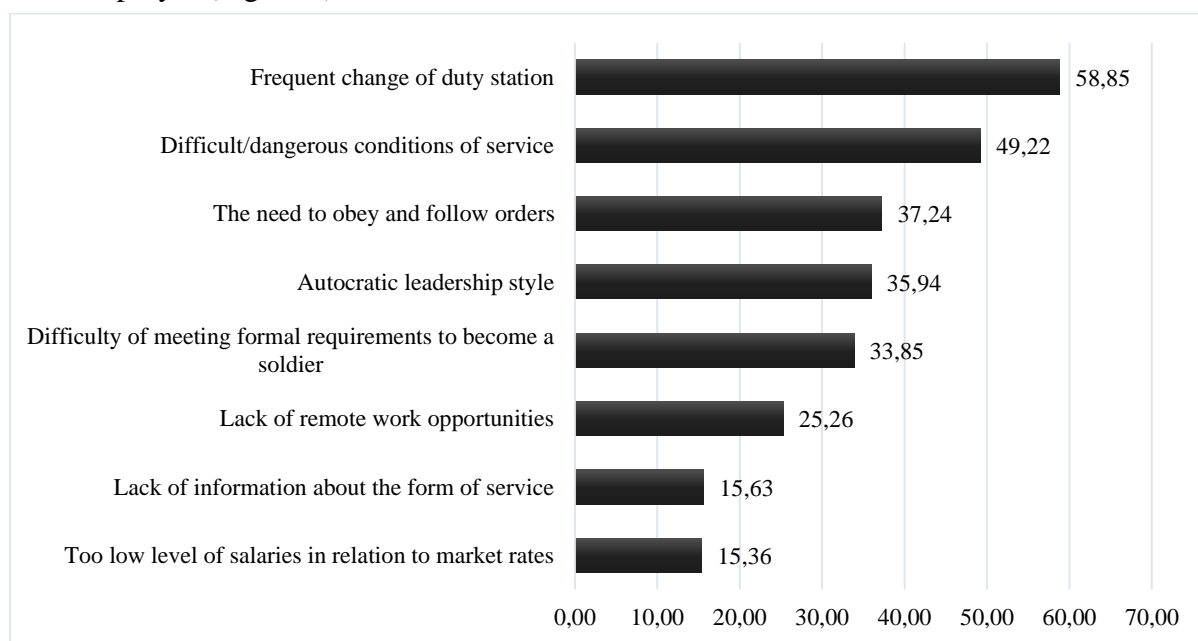


Figure 2. Factors that reduce the attractiveness of the military as an employer (in %).

Source: own studies results.

More than half of the respondents indicated that the main factor lowering the attractiveness of the military as an employer is the frequent change of duty station (58.85%). This was followed by respondents emphasising the importance of difficult/dangerous conditions of service (49.22%), the need to obey and follow orders (37.24%), an autocratic leadership style (35.94%), the difficulty of meeting formal requirements to become a soldier (33.85%) and the lack of remote work opportunities (25.26%). Fewer than 20% of respondents also cited a lack of information about the forms of service (15.63%) and the fact that salaries are too low in relation to market rates (15.36%).

5.3. Statistical relationships – survey results

In order to identify the relationship between the dependent variable (the level of attractiveness of the military) and the independent variables (factors that increase and decrease attractiveness), χ^2 tests were performed, supplemented by a Phi Yul calculations. A total of 26 tests were conducted. In carrying out the statistical analyses, 26 null hypotheses (statistical hypotheses) were accepted and, correspondingly, 26 alternative hypotheses. The null hypotheses (H01-18) indicated that the factors highlighted in H2 do not increase the attractiveness of the military as an employer, and the factors indicated in H3 do not decrease this attractiveness (H019-26)². With the help of Table 3, only statistically significant correlations revealed were shown, which allowed the rejection of 6 null hypotheses in favour of 6 alternative hypotheses, and thus the identification of factors that increase and decrease the attractiveness of the Polish Army as an employer.

Table 3.

Statistical relationships between image quality and individual attractiveness factors

Factors increasing attractiveness	Results of research
Employment stability	$\chi^2(4) = 57,42, p < 0,001, \text{Phi} = 0,38$
The image of the Polish Army	$\chi^2(4) = 19,99, p < 0,001, \text{Phi} = 0,22$
Remuneration	$\chi^2(4) = 33,72, p < 0,001, \text{Phi} = 0,29$
Offered form of employment	$\chi^2(4) = 26,68, p < 0,001, \text{Phi} = 0,26$
Factors reducing attractiveness	Results of research
Working conditions	$\chi^2(4) = 12,34, p < 0,005, \text{Phi} = 0,17$
Difficulty in meeting formal requirements	$\chi^2(4) = 11,01, p < 0,005, \text{Phi} = 0,16$

Source: own studies results.

The analysis shows that there are statistically significant correlations between the attractiveness of the Army as an employer and such factors as stability of employment, general image, salary, the form of employment offered, working conditions and the difficulty of meeting formal requirements in recruitment. The attractiveness of the Polish Army as an employer is increased by the stability of employment, general image, the amount of remuneration and the form of employment offered, while factors such as working conditions and the difficulty of meeting formal requirements reduce the attractiveness of this employer.

In conclusion, the result of the research was that H2 and H3 could be verified. Both hypotheses were verified negatively.

² The hypotheses were written in summary form.

6. Summary

The study of the attractiveness of the Polish Army as an employer is important from the perspective of not only the effectiveness of employer branding and HRM activities, because the attractiveness of the army corresponds to the quality of its image, which in turn determines the sense of security and, in part, the image of the country in the international arena. Taking into account the plans to increase the size of the Polish army, including the need to constantly fill emerging vacancies, an important activity is to identify not only the level of attractiveness of the army as an employer, but also to indicate what factors increase and decrease the level of this attractiveness.

The analysis of the survey shows that the attractiveness of the military as an employer is rated as very and rather high (59.38% of respondents) by Poles. Respondents included stability of employment, the possibility of early retirement, the amount of wages offered, the general image of the military, as well as a variety of employee benefits (answers indicated by at least 30% of respondents) among the key factors of attractiveness. According to Poles, the attractiveness of the military as an employer, on the other hand, is lowered by frequent changes in the place of service making stability difficult, difficult conditions of service, the need to obey and follow orders, an autocratic style of leadership and the difficulty of meeting formal requirements in the recruitment process.

The statistical analyses carried out sought to identify the determinants of the attractiveness of the military, as well as factors that reduce this attractiveness. Out of a group of 18 factors, the existence of statistically significant relationships between the attractiveness of the military as an employer and stability of employment, general image, salary levels and the form of employment offered was confirmed. On the other hand, turning our attention to attractiveness-reducing factors, a correlation was revealed between the attractiveness of the military as an employer and working conditions and the difficulty of meeting formal requirements. In terms of the remaining 6 factors, no correlation was detected.

The author of the article would like to point out that the research does not exhaust the analyzed issues, which prompts further activity and analysis, also conducted among civilian employees of the army and soldiers, to determine the internal attractiveness of the army as an employer.

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