

# ENTREPRENEURIAL ASPIRATIONS AND EXPECTATIONS OF SRI LANKA MILITARY VETERANS

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**Abstract**-In Sri Lanka Army, there are soldiers retiring in the active age group of 40-45 and most of them are with lots of experience, skills, knowledge and potentials which could be utilized to enhance the country's economy whilst providing them with meaningful employment opportunities or converting them as successful entrepreneurs. However, there is no realistic and scientifically drawn up mechanism in Sri Lanka to properly absorb them into the active labour force with maximum utilization. In this backdrop, their skills, knowledge and potentials will be underutilized and it will be a loss for the country's economy in the long-run.

Unlike in developed countries, in Sri Lanka, this issue of veterans' transition into successful civilian life has not yet been addressed by both researchers and policy makers. Moreover, many researches undertaken by defence establishments rarely come into public domain. This paper examines the entrepreneurial aspirations and the expectations of retired military personnel of the Sri Lanka Army in successful transition from military life to civilian life and preparing them for entrepreneurship as a post military career choice.

**Keywords:** Aspirations, Expectations, Transition, Entrepreneurship, Post Military Career

## I. BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

Sri Lanka Army being the oldest and largest of the Sri Lankan armed forces is comprised of Regular Force, Regular Reserve, Volunteer Force and Volunteer Reserve responsible primarily for military and humanitarian operations in the country. In addition, the Sri Lanka Army has also responded to disasters and emergency situations such as natural disasters (e.g. Tsunami, Landslides, floods and forest fire) and resettlement of Internally Displaced People (IDP).

According to Directorate of Pay and Records of the Sri Lanka Army, by the end of 2016, approximately 9,500 officers and 180,000 other rankers (Directorate of Pay &

Records of the Sri Lanka Army) were on active service. Other rankers of Regular Force retire upon completion of 22 years in the case of men and 15 years in the case of women whilst Volunteer Force other rankers can serve till 55 years of age. Options are available for soldiers to retire once they complete 5 or 12 years of service as well, but such retirees are not entitled for pension, except those who are medically categorised within 12 years of service.

It is mandatory that all other rankers undergo basic military training for 4 to 6 months and while on active service, they go through various combat and non-combat training courses both locally and abroad that are designed to develop their skills and knowledge. On average, a soldier receives a total of 2 years of training during the 22 year service in the Army. As per the records of Directorate of Pay & Record of the Army, approximately 4 percent of the service personnel of average age between 40 to 45 years retire from service annually. From 2010 to 2015, approximately 25,000 soldiers have retired. A majority of the other rankers leave the Army after 22 years of service are still in productive age with considerable experience and skills (Directorate of Pay & Records of the Sri Lanka Army). Average age of retiring soldier is 40 years. However, many of these capable and dedicated veterans have less or no opportunities to use their skills and experience and become economically successful people. They leave civilian life and make a transition to the community of the military while being trained in its ways and follow its culture. However, when servicemen or servicewomen leave the armed forces for varied reasons, they necessarily make a transition back to civilian life and this can be challenging for veterans.

It is important to note that a vast majority of these soldiers are employable as they retire with lots of experience, skills and knowledge that can be easily transferable to civilian careers. Although, there are no reliable statistics on post retirement employment of veterans, formal and informal data available with respective regiments suggest that a vast majority of them engage in some form of a waged or self-employment. However, there is a widely held notion

that retired soldiers are ill prepared for the retirement life and thus end up in jobs that do not fit with their skills and experience. The security sector is the hope for many retired soldiers while some end up in transport sector. It is pretty obvious that there should be a mechanism to identify this target group and implement an appropriate intervention to encourage them to engage in self or paid employment so that they can become successful economic actors. If such a system exists, these personnel can easily integrate into the labour market and thus contribute to the economy in an effective way.

Returning to civilian life presents new opportunities and challenges for Veterans. Many veterans look forward to life after the military because they can spend more time with family and friends and they no longer have to worry about military structure or deployment. At the same time, transitioning out of the military may raise a lot of questions. They may wonder what they are going to do with this new phase of their lives or whether they will be able to find suitable jobs. They may think about going back to school but do not know where to start; or they may miss the order and discipline of military life compared with civilian life and wonder if they will be able to adjust.

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

The expected post military retirement life of veterans was not clear. It may be positive or perhaps negative; or else may be successful and discontinuous (Mongia, 2013). However, as McDermott (2007) indicates, the effects of military service for the majority of those who have completed a full military career can be both positive and beneficial. The Army veterans generally maintain a disciplined approach to life and a strong work ethic. Most will reject any notion that they are not fully 'civilized'. It is clear that full disengagement from military society is only ever partially achieved. The veteran remains different in the way that he or she associates with others in civilian society. Whilst then young soldiers become old soldiers, their return and adjustment to becoming civilians are never complete (McDermott, 2007).

As London and Wilmoth (2012) indicate the consequences of transitioning to civilian life during the period will vary across many factors. Some are heterogeneity among veterans, economic pressures, veteran's socio-economic problems etc. In case of heterogeneity among recently transitioning veterans, their experiences over time by examining how employment, school enrollment, earnings and poverty vary in the pre-recession and post-recession periods by sex, age, race/ethnicity, citizenship and status. Furthermore, educational attainment, marital status, disability status, non- metropolitan residence and region etc. have made a tremendous effect (Furstenberg *et al.*,

2010). Settersten and Ray (2010) indicate that veteran status and heterogeneity among veterans affect the initial transition from military to civilian adulthood. It is during a period of war, economic recession and substantial change in the norms surrounding the transition to adulthood. Settersten and Ray (2010) concern, how the economic pressures influence on post military employment applies to males and females are different. The study affirms that the economic pressures reduce the post-military employment is greater for male veterans than for female veterans. The main reason for such deviation makes due to male and female motivation; internal motivation and external motivation. A person's internal motivation is one of the biggest factors that makes an impact towards results of employability (Smaliukenė, 2014). Further, taking a classical approach towards boundary fewer careers, the retired officers have to take responsibility for their own future career. However, Dandeker *et al* (2003) is in different opinion as they are not being able to settle in civilian life. Further, he states after becoming socialized (or institutionalized) into the highly structured, disciplined and somewhat sheltered life of the military. They are motivated into employment.

The study done by McDermott (2007), accepts that some ex service personnel do experience difficulty in civilian society. When examines closely the notion that the majority of those leaving the armed forces 'do well' as civilians. Further, it is generally held in the literature that some ex-service men and women suffer as a result of their military service. The greater majorities do not and leave the armed forces to lead successful civilian lives. However, it is among this sector of the ex-service population that veterans who have been successful in civilian life can be found (McDermott, 2007). This problem cannot be left alone, as such; need an acceptable solution. Different authors who are interested in, proposed different strategies based on different career factors and non-career factors. As proposed by McDermott (2007), such factors do exist and military service provides positively for a successful transition to civilian life. Military provides veterans with a satisfying career with recognized qualifications. It also provides a set of high moral values and high work ethic, a positive self-image and positive attitudes to health and diet. Therefore, they need to be well prepared before they were discharged (McDermott, 2007). Numerous problems arise in their mind even after several years of life as civilians. Several of the veterans indicate to differences. They still feel between those like themselves who have experienced military service and those who have not McDermott (2007). Further the factors such as disengagement, total denial or total forgetting or turning their backs on their military past have not been seen well (McDermott, 2007).

Smulders and Jagoda (2011) in their research on military entrepreneurship in Canada have highlighted that the stress of adjusting to civilian life and choosing a new career were priorities for most of those retired from Armed Services. It has also been highlighted that providing opportunity for veterans to use their leadership, organization and team building skills allow them to determine their own course of action for re-entering workforce.

According to Morin (2011) practicing military service is more difficult, demanding and dangerous. Similarly returning to civilian life also will be difficult where military veterans who were commissioned officers and graduated from colleges are more likely to readjust to civil life than high school graduates (Morin, 2011). The analysis has found that exposure to emotionally traumatic events and serious injuries are common in the military and those who experience the same find it difficult to re-enter the civilian life.

Angulo (2015) states many soldiers do not start planning for civilian life until close to their date of retirement or separation. "Meaningful employment/ entrepreneur in the civilian world enables our soldiers, veterans and their families to remain strong even after transition and to serve as leaders and as contributing members of their communities". Veterans present a significant subject for study in their own right and were of great interest because they constituted a substantial segment of the national labour force.

#### *A. Objective of the Study*

The objective of this paper is to explore and analyse the entrepreneurial aspirations and the expectations of retired military personnel of the Sri Lanka Army in successful transition from military life to civilian life and preparing them for entrepreneurship as a post military career choice.

### III.METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY

As the study is with an observable reality, its results can be generalized. This is similar to those produced by other studies. Therefore, this study is based on positivism by research philosophy. As the study aims to work objectively, with little or no personal interpretation of the data, a structured methodology is used to gain quantitative data. These data are replicable and can be analyzed using relevant statistical methods. Overall, this process was aimed to treat this study as a study in positivism.

In this paper aspirations and expectations of the veterans have been examined. They are analyses using qualitative empirical case studies method. For primary data

collection, disproportionate stratified random sampling method was used for selection of survey respondents. Disproportionate sampling decisions are made either when some stratum or strata are too small or too large, or when there is more variability suspected within a particular stratum (Sekaran and Bougie, 2014). Sample element of the study is the soldiers. Sampling population is 1300 and sampling number is 520 which consist of veterans retired between 2014-2016. The sampling procedure is done in a systematic way as shown in the following briefings.

Sample size approximately represents following population where sampling frame is based on retired veterans. The Sri Lanka Army comprised of 24 Regiments of which the entire population belong to. There are four different types of regiments; fighting, combat support, combat service support, and fighting & clerical. There are nine fighting regiments in the Army representing the largest segment of the total population and their roles and tasks are similar in nature. Although, they represent the largest segment of the total population, only 300 numbers were selected as samples, because their roles and tasks are similar in nature and 300 numbers are adequate to represent the total fighting population. Out of 300 samples selected, they will represent 100 each from three different fighting regiments, mainly to avoid geographical influences and possible biasness towards the researcher as the researcher too is representing a fighting regiment.

There are five combat support regiments and their roles and tasks are not similar. Therefore, 250 numbers (50 from each combat support regiments) were selected as samples and they can effectively represent all combat support regiments.

There are nine service support regiments and their roles and tasks are not similar. As they perform different roles and tasks, one or two regiments cannot represent the nine service support regiments. Therefore, 75 samples from each regiment were selected making a total of 675 numbers to represent the service support regiments enabling to obtain more valuable and differentiated information with respect to each group.

There is only one Women Corps regiment in the Army and the population comprised of female. Therefore, 75 samples were selected to represent female and it will adequately represent the female population. However, the element of the sample is veterans while sample unit is the Army veterans. Sampling frame was taken from the information available in the Ministry of Defence. For the quantitative data analysis, semi-structured questionnaire method is widely used. The questionnaire comprises of the components of Post Military Career Choice, Aspirations,

Expectations of Retiring Veterans, Capabilities, Potentials, Motivational and Non-Motivational Factors, Career Opportunities, Entrepreneurial Possibilities, Economic Development, Post Military Life, Bottlenecks, Capabilities and Personal Details.

Case studies method is used for the qualitative data analysis. An attempt is made to explain aspirations and expectations of the veterans qualitatively in this paper. For quantitative data analysis and representation, Microsoft Excel 2007 was used. It was used to analyze the descriptive statistics and the reliability of this study.

*B. Results of the Study*

- Survey Data

The Table 1 illustrates the gender of the veterans in the study sample of 533 veterans.

Table 1: Gender Comparison

Gender	Frequency	Percent
Female	42	7.9
Male	491	92.1
<b>Total</b>	<b>533</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Source: Survey Data (2016)

As per the Table, 491 were male and 42 were female whose percentages are 92.1 percent and 7.9 percent respectively. The military organization of the country is formed with the composition of majority of male members. Female soldiers in the Army will have to serve a minimum of 15 years of military service to entitle pension benefits enjoyed by the male counterpart who completes 22 years in the Army.

The above mentioned military veterans tend to do a second career due to their economic hardships. Table 2 depicts their responses:

Table 2: Economic Hardships lead to Post Military (Retirement Employment

	Frequency	Percent
Strongly Agree	200	37.5
Agree	116	21.8
Neutral	148	27.8
Disagree	51	9.6
Strongly Disagree	18	3.4
<b>Total</b>	<b>533</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Source: Survey Data (2016)

Majority of veterans being 316 (59.3 percentage) agrees that they need a second career due to the pension income

is not adequate and a considerable amount being 27.8 percentage remain neutral. Only 13 percent disagree and indicates that they need a second career not due to economic hardships. However, it could be the reason for a balanced retired life as indicated in Table 3.

Table 3: Employment for Balanced Life

	Frequency	Percent
Strongly Agree	162	30.4
Agree	160	30.0
Neutral	114	21.4
Disagree	58	10.9
Strongly Disagree	39	7.3
<b>Total</b>	<b>533</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Source: Survey Data (2016)

The veterans who aspire a balanced retired life make up 322 and its percentage is 60.4 percent. However, 114 remain neutral and the percentage of the neutral responses makes 21.4 percent.

Military veterans, who have not been leading a satisfactory life due to their non-fulfillment of career expectations while being in the military, attempt to seek possible ways to fulfill their aspirations in the prospective second career. Table 4 shows their responses:

Table 4: Seeking Ways for Fulfilment of Aspirations

	Frequency	Percent
Strongly Agree	126	23.6
Agree	177	33.2
Neutral	95	17.8
Disagree	77	14.4
Strongly Disagree	58	10.9
<b>Total</b>	<b>533</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Source: Survey Data (2016)

Out of the veterans of 533 study sample, 303 agree that they seek avenues to fulfill their career expectations in the probable second career. It represents 56.8 percent from which 23.6 percentage of veterans strongly agree (126 veterans). 17.8 percent remains neutral. Only 25.3 percent disagrees the statement. Therefore, it is viewed that the opportunity of the second career of the military veterans to be facilitated to realize their unfulfilled aspirations in life.

	Frequency	Percent
Strongly Agree	200	37.5
Agree	116	21.8
Neutral	148	27.8
Disagree	51	9.6
Strongly Disagree	18	3.4
<b>Total</b>	<b>533</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Furthermore, Due to the fact that the majority of veterans need to fulfil aspirations of their family members, they opted for a second career. The responses of veterans who tend to engage in a second career due to fulfilment of family expectations are depicted in the Table 5.

Table 5: Fulfilment of Family Expectations

	Frequency	Percent
Strongly Agree	121	22.7
Agree	111	20.8
Neutral	192	36.0
Disagree	68	12.8
Strongly Disagree	41	7.7
<b>Total</b>	<b>533</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Source: Survey Data (2016)

As per the Table, majority of veterans being 232 (43.5 percent) agrees that they need a second career due to family expectations and a considerable amount being 36 percentage remain neutral. Only 20.5 percent disagrees the statement. As well, the duty fulfilments upon retirement prompt a section of veterans to engage in second career.

Table 6: Duty Fulfilment upon Retirement

	Frequency	Percent
Strongly Agree	239	44.8
Agree	172	32.3
Neutral	77	14.4
Disagree	30	5.6
Strongly Disagree	15	2.8
<b>Total</b>	<b>533</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Source: Survey Data (2016)

As per the table 6, veterans numbering 411 representing 77.1 percent have agreed on duty fulfilment upon retirement. 77 veterans which is 14.4 percent remain neutral whereas only 45 veterans which represent 8.4 percent disagree the above statement. However, veterans

in the study sample are in a view that they enable to fulfil the aspirations of their children would in their second career. Responses of the veterans who hold such stances are depicted in the table 7.

Table 7: My Possibility in Fulfilment of Children's Aspirations

	Frequency	Percent
Strongly Agree	202	37.9
Agree	192	36.0
Neutral	107	20.1
Disagree	23	4.3
Strongly Disagree	9	1.7
<b>Total</b>	<b>533</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Source: Survey Data (2016)

According to the Table 7, there were 394 veterans who agreed that they would fulfill the aspirations of their children during their retirement. Its percentage is 73.9 percent. However, the table illustrates that 32 veterans being disagree indicating a total of 6 percent is yet to fulfill aspiration of their children. Yet, the response of 107 veterans (20.1 percent) which is a considerable number who remains neutral has to be addressed.

Conversely, veterans who retire the Army possess various expectations to be fulfilled during the retirement as illustrated in the following tables.

Table 8: Adequate Military Experience to Fulfil Social Expectations

	Frequency	Percent
Strongly Agree	250	46.9
Agree	202	37.9
Neutral	49	9.2
Disagree	23	4.3
Strongly Disagree	9	1.7
<b>Total</b>	<b>533</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Source: Survey Data (2016)

As per the responses in the Table 8, the majority of the veterans being 84.8 percent shows agreement that they possess adequate military experience to fulfil social expectations. Consequently, only six percent being 32 veterans do not agree that they possess adequate military experience to fulfil social expectations whereas 49 veterans (9.2 percent) remain neutral.

The study focused on whether the veterans receive adequate pension to fulfil family or personal economic expectations as show by Table 9.

Table 9: Adequate Pension to Fulfil Family / Personal Economic Expectations

	Frequency	Percent
Strongly Agree	19	3.6
Agree	28	5.3
Neutral	139	26.1
Disagree	162	30.4
Strongly Disagree	185	34.7
<b>Total</b>	<b>533</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Source: Survey Data (2016)

A striking feature of the majority of the veterans is their disagreement to the statement of adequate pension to fulfil economic expectations. The number of such veterans is 347 and its percentage is 65.1 percent. Only 8.9 percent agrees and 26.1 percent remain neutral.

However, the Table 10 below shows that the veterans need an additional income. 419 veterans, the percentage of which is 78.6 maintained that they have dire need of extra income. Hence, they tend to engage in a second career.

Table 10: Dire Need of Extra Income

	Frequency	Percent
Strongly Agree	260	48.8
Agree	159	29.8
Neutral	77	14.4
Disagree	23	4.3
Strongly Disagree	14	2.6
<b>Total</b>	<b>533</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Source: Survey Data (2016)

According to the findings as depicted in the tables above, the military veterans who are retiring from the military have a strong requirement of having a second career which allows them to fulfill the post-military career expectations while earning an extra income that enables them to achieve financial security and achieve better life.

- Case Study

The veteran of this case is a Warrant Officer Class One of Sri Lanka Army National Guard. He had served the Army for 22 years and upon retirement he has started hardware trading shop business investing Rs. 300,000.00 from his savings. He gradually developed it and presently there are six employees serving under him.

During his military career, he had set a few goals to be achieved before his retirement. He had his school education up to G.C.E. (O/L) examination and wanted to study more. However, as a son of a rural farming family,

he had to give up his studies because of economic difficulties of his family. Therefore, he joined the Army. After the basic military training, he was posted to a fighting unit and took part in military operations. Although, he had wanted to follow vocational training course, his Commanding Officer had rejected his application due to his engagement in military operations.

Meantime, he could not save much as he had to allocate some money to redeem the ancestral home which had been mortgaged prior to his sister's marriage. His aim was to repair and re modifies the house. He was able to reconstruct a part of the house but failed to complete the repair. After his marriage and his family become large with three children, house construction work totally paralysed due to increasing family financial commitments.

When he retired from the Army after 22 years of service at his age of 40 years, he had unfulfilled aspirations and expectations. His children were schooling and needs a lot of money to fulfil such aspirations and expectations of his wife and children on their higher studies, marriages a family vehicle etc. His pension was inadequate and he thought that mere employment would not help him to overcome his problems.

The total savings at the retirement was only Rs. 1.5 million. So he decided to utilize Rs. 300,000.00 to start the business. He worked hard, his wife and her brothers supported to develop it and saw a gradual improvement in his business. During five years of his business, he could gradually restart his partially constructed house while paying attention to his children's education.

This case study illustrates that veterans struggle to fulfil their military and civil life expectations and aspirations. He was not able to continue his school education due to economic hardships that is very common in the agricultural families in rural sector. This is one of the reasons rural youths to join the Army and trying to achieve life aspirations. The veteran aspired a better life, develop his vocational training knowledge base, and construct a new house and have a better life. During his military life spanning 22 years he failed to completely fulfil his aspirations and expectations. Yet, he had obtained a good training for his life, expertise knowledge and experience whilst being in the Army. Such have been a valuable resource for him which is useful even after his retirement.

Having explored various avenues to fulfil his unfulfilled aspirations, he decided to invest a portion of his savings to start a business and saw possibility to expand his business with the support of his family. Since he enabled to successfully apply the resources that he collected from the Army, he gradually developed his entrepreneurial activity

achieving his goals and gradually fulfilling his aspirations and expectations of his loved ones.

This case study shows that success of the post military career is mainly due to the training and other attributes gained during his military service. They are of highly influential in the military veteran's transitioning from the military career into successful entrepreneur.

As per the results of the study, it has been revealed that the majority of the retired military veterans aspire to fulfil the expectations that had not been achieved during their military life. Table 7 depicts that majority aspires to fulfil aspirations of their children while Table 9 depicts a strong requirement to fulfil economic expectations of the veteran. Therefore, they wish to engage in a secondary career to fulfil the aspirations of the veteran as well as their family members. In addition, they wish to achieve family expectations and societal expectations.

The case that briefly explained above as well indicates that he had unfulfilled aspirations and expectations during the military career due to his inadequate financial capital. He had his worries with respect to construction of his house, children's education, their marriage as well as a family car etc. Therefore, he aspired to achieve his unfulfilled aspirations and expectations in the potential entrepreneurial activity upon retirement. He succeeded in them successfully upon his retirement with his engaging in an entrepreneurial activity and achieve the aim of a better life for his family.

The main focus in this paper is the post military career choice of veterans who retire from the military after serving in the military for 22 years. During the long years, they enable to accumulate an array of experience, knowledge and entrepreneurial skills and qualities which are highly resourceful in their second career. It further discusses on how they perceive their post military life and how they want to spend their post retirement life.

Under normal circumstances, majority of the service personnel have young families and their commitment and responsibilities towards the families are challenging for them. Accordingly, the decisions of the veteran at their post military lives are mostly dependent on family responsibilities and financial stability. It is a fact that the personnel who join the Army at their prime youth serve the Army and the average age at their retirement is 40 years. The vigorous active and healthy military life of the veteran permits them to restart a post military career which primarily serves them both with additional income and fulfillment of diverse career expectations.

In the survey conducted using the retiring veterans, the respondents were asked to indicate the selection of their post military career. The analysis described in the section under results of the study in this paper reveals that the majority of the veterans prefer to engage in a second career mainly due to one or more of the reasons of economic nature, fulfillment of their aspirations and expectations of the retiring veterans.

#### IV. CONCLUSION

This paper deals with entrepreneurial aspirations and expectations of Sri Lanka military veterans. One of the main aspirations is fulfilment of personal and children's aspirations. Further, they aspire to fulfil family as well as societal expectations while they expect to overcome economic hardships as the pension income does not adequately facilitate to overcome their economic hardship. Therefore, they expect a second career to fulfil the post-military career expectations and to achieve financial security for improved living.

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