

Beyond the Call of Duty: Exploring the Motivations, Challenges and Contributions of Aging Volunteers in Military Reserves

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.47175/rielsj.v4i4.860>

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ABSTRACT

Military reservists play a vital role in defense, often balancing their civilian and military responsibilities. This study aimed to investigate the motivations, challenges, and contributions of aging reservists, assessing the impact of their service on personal development and military efficacy. The research sought to identify support factors and strategies for better integration into the military reserves. Utilizing a descriptive qualitative research design, the study collected data through in-depth interviews, providing insights into the motivations and challenges faced by aging reservists. Based on the findings, these individuals are primarily driven by personal satisfaction, a sense of duty, and continuous professional growth. Despite physical challenges and the need to balance various commitments, they demonstrate resilience and contribute significantly through knowledge transfer and mentorship. Moreover, aging reservists are crucial for military effectiveness, benefiting from and necessitating strong support systems for their continued service. It was recommended to establish health and wellness programs, mentorship initiatives, improved access to medical care, enhanced legislative policies, and recognition programs. Additionally, vocational training relevant to military and civilian roles and community-based integration programs are advised to maintain an effective reserve force and support national defense readiness.

KEYWORDS

military reservists; aging volunteers; motivations; challenges; personal development; curriculum and instruction designs; descriptive qualitative research; Philippines

INTRODUCTION

Military reservists play a pivotal role in the defense infrastructure, often balancing civilian life with military training and deployment demands. As reservists age, their continued contribution poses unique challenges and opportunities for military organizations and society (Elran & Sheffer, 2016). While the intersection of aging and active military service has been explored to some extent, the specific experiences of aging reservist volunteers during training periods remain under investigation (Wilmoth & London, 2016).

Long-term outcomes of military service in aging and life course development suggest a complex interplay of factors that influence the well-being of servicemen and women as they age (Aldwin et al., 2018). Reservists, who oscillate between civilian roles and military obligations, often engage in short-term military training and missions, presenting a unique subset of the military populace whose aging process may be distinct from their active-duty and veteran counterparts (Cohen, 2019).

Research on aging military veterans has highlighted the significance of social relationships and connectedness for older adult veterans (Olson, 2020). However, these frameworks may not fully encapsulate the experiences of reservists who are not fully immersed in military culture nor utterly detached from it, indicating a gap in the current understanding (Walker, 2015). Furthermore, the psychological adjustment of aging veterans, particularly the role of social support systems, may provide insights into the potential psychosocial dynamics among aging reservists in training (Elnitsky, 2017).

The aging veteran population is rapidly growing, with significant portions having served in major conflicts like the Vietnam War and, more recently, the Gulf, Afghanistan, and Iraq Wars (Bilmes, 2021). This demographic shift calls for a renewed focus on the implications of military service on health and well-being, aspects often overlooked in the study of aging (Elder & Johnson, 2018). This investigation aims to understand aging reservist volunteers' motivations, challenges, and contributions, employing qualitative methods to assess their ongoing engagement. This study seeks to highlight the strategic importance of these individuals and provide insights into policies that can enhance their integration and effectiveness within the Army Reserve Family Programs.

Philosophical underpinnings

The study was supported by the Life Course Theory of Elder 1974 . This multidisciplinary theory provides a robust framework for understanding the long-term impacts of life events and historical and social contexts on individuals' lives. Life Course Theory emphasizes the timing of life events and the interconnectedness of individual life trajectories with broader social trends. It can be particularly revealing in a military context, where reservists' life courses are influenced by the interplay between their civilian roles and military duties, societal perceptions of aging, and their service's historical and cultural backdrop. This approach can help examine how military service during various conflicts, such as Vietnam, the Gulf War, and the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, influences aging, health, and well-being. It also considers the significance of social relationships and support systems, which are critical for understanding the integration and effectiveness of aging reservists.

By applying Life Course Theory, the study can explore the motivations behind aging reservists' continued service, their challenges, and the impacts of their unique position as they navigate the intersection of aging, military service, and societal change. This theory allows for an appreciation of the dynamic and evolving nature of aging within the military structure, and it can inform policies aimed at enhancing the contribution and well-being of aging reservist volunteers.

Objective of the Study

The primary purpose of the study was to explore the motivations, challenges, and contributions of aging volunteers in the military reserves, examining how their extended service influences both personal development and military effectiveness, with a focus on identifying factors that support their continued service and proposing strategies to enhance their integration and utilization within the military reserve framework.

RESEARCH METHODS

Research design

The study utilized a descriptive qualitative research design and collected data through in-depth interviews. The semi-structured interviews allowed aging reservists to elaborate on their motivations and perceived challenges. According to Creswell (2012), descriptive

qualitative research explores and understands the meanings individuals or groups ascribe to a social human problem. The study explored and understood the personal meanings and significance that aging reservists attached to their continuous service, perceived contributions, and challenges. It provided insight into the social and human aspects of being an aging volunteer in the military reserve, thereby addressing the complex interplay between individual experiences and broader organizational structures.

Furthermore, Lincoln and Guba's (1985) descriptive qualitative research design framework emphasized naturalistic inquiry, where the goal was to understand phenomena in context-specific settings, such as real-world settings where the researcher did not attempt to manipulate the phenomenon of interest. Their approach to qualitative research focused on the study's credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability, which collectively ensured the trustworthiness and rigor of the research findings.

Sample and Setting

The sample for the study consisted of a purposive cohort of aging military reservists from Agusan del Norte, Philippines, who were actively engaged in ongoing training programs. Utilizing a purposive sampling technique, the study selected 20 individuals who precisely embodied the characteristics of interest relevant to the research questions, such as age range, years of service, and types of training undertaken.

Following the sample selection, the research was situated in Agusan del Norte's military reserve training facilities and related administrative centers. This locale offered a dynamic backdrop for observing the reservists in their authentic training environments and provided the contextual richness necessary for qualitative inquiry. The setting was significant for understanding the geographical and cultural factors that may influence the reservists' experiences and interpretations of their service.

Research Instrument

The instrument used was a semi-structured interview guide. These guides were designed to elicit detailed responses about personal motivations, challenges faced, and contributions to the military reserves. The instrument was carefully crafted to ensure it was culturally sensitive and appropriate for the aging military reservist population in Agusan del Norte, Philippines.

Data Gathering Procedure

The data-gathering procedure for the study was initiated by submitting a formal request letter to the military reserve authorities in Agusan del Norte seeking permission to conduct research within their facilities. Upon receiving approval, informed consent forms were distributed to potential participants, providing a comprehensive explanation of the study's purpose, procedures, potential risks, benefits, and voluntary participation.

Once informed consent was secured, interview sessions were scheduled at times convenient for the participants. These sessions were recorded for accuracy, with the assurance of confidentiality and the right to withdraw from the study at any point without penalty. Data were then systematically collected, documented, and stored securely, with access limited to the research team, to maintain the participants' privacy.

Data Analysis

The data analysis for the study involved transcribing the recorded interviews and categorizing the content into emerging themes. Thematic analysis was conducted by reading through the transcripts multiple times to identify patterns related to the aging military

reservists' motivations, challenges, and contributions. Coding was iterative, allowing for the refinement of categories as more data was analyzed. Techniques such as member checking, where participants reviewed the accuracy of the findings, and triangulation using multiple data sources were employed to enhance the trustworthiness of the findings. The analysis culminated in a rich, detailed, and nuanced understanding of the lived experiences of aging reservists in training.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

What intrinsic and extrinsic motivations drive aging military reservists to continue their service beyond the traditional retirement age?

In exploring the motivations that drive aging military reservists to continue their service beyond the traditional retirement age, thematic analysis of interview data revealed a complex interplay of intrinsic and extrinsic factors. The themes extracted from the interviews with reservists illuminate the profoundly personal and multifaceted reasons that underpin their decision to extend their service.

Personal Satisfaction and Fulfillment

The personal satisfaction and fulfillment that many reservists derive from their service go beyond mere duty, encompassing a profound sense of purpose and joy in contributing to the greater good. This sense of duty is often described as a "*calling*," offering a unique chance to defend the nation and impact the community positively. Participants articulate this sentiment, noting that service is not only "*delightful*" but also "*fulfilling*," highlighting the deep personal gratification that comes from being part of a collective force dedicated to the safety and welfare of others. This fulfillment is rooted in the military's altruistic ethos, which celebrates the act of giving as much as the act of protecting, underscoring a commitment that is as personal as patriotism.

Research on the well-being of senior volunteers indicates that volunteering positively impacts their health and happiness. It is argued that voluntary work benefits the community and enhances the volunteer's sense of purpose and satisfaction. The activity allows older adults to continue contributing to society, which may offset potential declines in physical activity and social interaction that can come with aging. Moreover, volunteering is linked to improved self-reported health, even for older adults with chronic diseases, highlighting the profound effect that feeling useful and connected can have on personal satisfaction (Gil-Lacruz et al., 2019).

Professional and Personal Growth

Ongoing training and development in the reserves are seen by aging members not just as role requirements but as opportunities for lifelong growth and adaptation, often leading to new roles and greater responsibilities. This growth is personally rewarding and aligns with a commitment to personal excellence and the evolving demands of military service. The environment of support and fair treatment by leaders and seniors is crucial for this development, as it fosters an equitable and respectful space for knowledge and skill acquisition. Furthermore, this commitment to growth within the reserves embodies a broader sense of citizenship and duty. One reservist states "*I am just doing my part*," reflecting a shared belief that service goes beyond occupation to contribute to national defense. This sense of duty is intertwined with an intrinsic motivation for personal and professional fulfillment, merging individual aspirations with collective duties.

This indicates that ongoing training and development in the military reserves enables aging members to improve and adapt continually and fosters a culture of growth. This culture

of growth is seen as vital for organizational success throughout the Army. It involves creating environments where development and emotional intelligence are everyday activities, thus allowing individuals to build trust, support, and encouragement to grow. Such an environment is also crucial for developing leaders and dynamic soldiers ready for any challenge (Byrnes, 2022).

Community Service and Contribution

Community service is a cornerstone of the reservist experience, often serving as an extension of the military's ethos of service and sacrifice. For reservists, the opportunity to engage in such activities is not just a duty but a privilege that resonates deeply with their altruistic values. One reservist aptly said, *"I find purpose in giving extension service to the community."* This sense of purpose is further enriched through the camaraderie that develops when reservists come together to serve the nation and give back to the community. The ability to *"connect to fellow reservists and share to the communities"* is a testament to the collective spirit that drives the military reserve community, showcasing a commitment to service that transcends the battlefield and enriches the lives of the less fortunate in society. Engagement in the reserves often includes community service, resonating with reservists' altruistic values and enabling them to impact others' lives positively. This aligns with research indicating that prosocial motivation—acting to benefit others—can enhance the sense of meaningfulness in military service for reservists. Such motivation, coupled with the belief in one's abilities (self-efficacy) and a supportive socio-moral climate within the military organization, can make service both personally fulfilling and societally beneficial. The reservists' commitment to community service reflects a broader desire to serve and contribute meaningfully to society, reinforcing their roles as citizens and soldiers (Perez, 2015).

Leadership Skills Enhancement

Reservists value developing leadership skills gained through their service, recognizing the benefits they bring to their military roles and civilian and professional areas. The skills honed in the reserves often serve as a benchmark for leadership in various contexts. Embodying the ethos of *"being a role model,"* reservists take pride in their ability to guide and influence others by example. This is exemplified in their dedication to teaching ROTC cadets *"with the best of my abilities and training,"* indicating a commitment to passing on their knowledge and experience. Additionally, the significance of a supportive environment is underscored by the belief that a *"support system is very important,"* emphasizing the role of peers and commanding officers in fostering these leadership qualities. The enhancement of such skills is a testament to the reserves' role in shaping well-rounded leaders equipped for multifaceted challenges in and out of uniform.

According to Tactacon et al. (2023), the ROTC programs focus on leadership, critical thinking, and military values to cultivate better citizens and individuals. Despite the many benefits, becoming an advanced officer through ROTC can bring financial burdens, requiring cadets to manage necessary uniforms and equipment expenses independently. However, the challenges of balancing ROTC's physical and mental demands with academic responsibilities are significant. Balancing both aspects is crucial in a field where optimal physical and mental health is necessary. The rigorous training can strain students, necessitating planning and behavioral adjustments to maintain stability in both areas.

Volunteerism and Altruism

The ethos of volunteerism and altruism within the reserve forces is deeply rooted in the notion of service beyond self, where serving is its own reward. This commitment is echoed in the reservists' expressions of fulfillment and satisfaction. Statements like "*Very satisfactory*" and "*Serving the people, especially the poor and the needy, are very fulfilling*" captures the essence of this sentiment. Furthermore, the profound sense of fulfillment is articulated by those who serve "*without expecting anything in Return,*" highlighting the pure intent behind their actions.

This altruistic approach is a defining characteristic of the reserve force, underscoring the importance of contributing to the greater good and the personal gratification that comes from making a difference in the lives of others, particularly those most in need of support. This selfless service contributes significantly to their identity and provides personal satisfaction beyond conventional military duties (Taylor, 2018).

Family and Community Recognition

Recognition from family and the wider community reinforces reservists' social identity and status, providing a motivational backdrop for their continued service. As one reservist puts it, such acknowledgment "*motivates me to pursue serving my country,*" highlighting the importance of support in sustaining their commitment. The influence of "*External factors*" that lead to remaining in service due to recognition underlines the value of societal appreciation in fostering a reservist's determination to continue their duty. The familial support, encapsulated by the statement, "*My family have no problem for me to participate in military activities and programs,*" is indicative of the personal backing that reservists receive, which not only allows but encourages their participation and further contribution to the military and, by extension, their country.

A strong support system at home is known to directly affect a soldier's focus and performance during deployment, with family health and happiness creating a more prepared soldier. Military families contribute directly to the readiness of the total Army force, with the success of each family member playing a pivotal role. Army leaders recognize this interconnection and focus on connecting families to available services and community networks (Le Menestrel & Kizer, 2018).

Financial Benefits

Financial benefits in the context of reserve service are often seen not as the primary motivator but as a pragmatic incentive that can alleviate some personal costs incurred through service. Reservists may refer to "*Inner motivation*" as the key driver of their commitment, suggesting that the satisfaction and pride derived from service outweigh material compensation. Yet, the reality of sacrifice is acknowledged by those who mention the struggle and time away from family, with some even noting, "*It's a struggle, time for family is sometimes sacrificed, financial benefits if I can recall I haven't received any benefits.*" Despite the lack of financial gain for some, the support from their network, encapsulated in the simple affirmation "*They are supportive,*" indicates a recognition of the broader, non-monetary support system that values and sustains their service.

These financial incentives are designed to recruit individuals into the reserve and retain their valuable expertise and commitment. Recognizing the importance of these incentives is part of a broader understanding within the military that support systems, whether financial, educational, or health-related, are crucial for the overall readiness and effectiveness of the force (Lasconjarias, 2013).

Duty and Patriotism

A profound sense of duty and a patriotic desire to serve the nation continue to inspire aging reservists, reflecting an enduring commitment to national defense.

The sentiments of duty and patriotism run deep among aging reservists, who often cite these as foundational to their service. This enduring sense of commitment to national defense is vividly expressed when reservists affirm, *"It is every citizen's duty to defend the country. I'm just doing my part."* Such a statement reflects a personal alignment with the larger national ethos and a willing acceptance of their role in safeguarding their homeland. The satisfaction derived from this service is echoed in their personal assessments, with statements like *"I am satisfied with the services given"* and *"Very satisfied,"* suggesting that their fulfillment is closely tied to the honor of fulfilling their patriotic duty. This blend of personal satisfaction and a sense of obligation underscores the deep-seated values that motivate reservists to continue serving with pride and dedication.

Camaraderie and Peer Support

The military reserves often foster a unique bond among members, creating a sense of camaraderie that becomes a significant source of support and motivation. In the military reserves, camaraderie and peer support are pillars of the service experience, fostering deep bonds and friendships that enhance unit cohesion and provide personal motivation. This unique camaraderie is aptly described by members who value *"The bond and friendship within the group, the passion and commitment to serve the people."* The respect received from peers and leaders within the military is also a driving force; one member states, *"When they handle us with respect, it motivates me to continue this patriotism,"* highlighting the role of mutual respect in sustaining their dedication to service. Additionally, the heartfelt commitment to their duties is encapsulated in the phrase *"Serving people by heart,"* which reflects the genuine emotional investment and the sense of fulfillment derived from serving others within the military community.

The camaraderie within military reserves is critical to members' sense of community and belonging. It supports motivation by providing a network of trust and mutual respect based on shared experiences. This bond is vital during service and helps transition to civilian life after service, as many veterans find camaraderie to be a source of purpose and support that they miss post-military life (Angel et al., 2018).

Dream and Aspiration Fulfillment

For many reservists, military service is the culmination of a lifelong dream, offering a chance to fulfill aspirations that may have been unattainable earlier in their lives. For many individuals, joining the military reserves is realizing long-held dreams and aspirations, providing an avenue to achieve what once might have seemed beyond reach. This sense of achievement is encapsulated by the sentiment, *"It was my dream to join the military, and I am happy that I can still be involved even if I did not make it to the academy."* Such statements reflect a profound personal victory and a fulfillment of ambitions, whether through reaching milestones like completing the *"Cadet Officer's Qualifying Course"* or personal contributions like implementing *"certain initiatives and innovations in the reserve force."* The realization of these dreams within the reserves not only satisfies personal goals but also contributes to the larger structure and mission of the military, highlighting the significance of individual roles in the collective defense fabric.

The military environment can offer unique personal and professional development opportunities not commonly found in civilian life. Serving in the military allows individuals to be part of a mission larger than themselves, contributing to the greater good and national security, which can be a profound personal goal (Halvorson, 2010).

What unique challenges do aging reservists face in military training and operational deployment, and how do they impact their service experience and personal life?

The interviews with aging military reservists have highlighted their challenges during training and operational deployments and how they affect their service and personal lives. The extracted themes delve into the realities of aging within a military context, including the physical and psychological adaptations necessary to meet the demands of service and the impact of continued service on family life and personal well-being.

Physical Fitness and Endurance Challenges

Aging reservists often confront physical fitness and endurance challenges as decreased stamina, strength, and agility impact their performance in physically demanding tasks. Despite these challenges, their commitment remains unwavering, as one reservist highlighted, *"Lack of strength, but throughout the training, I did not surrender."* This determination is further exemplified by tackling low endurance with precision and consistency: *"Low endurance during exercises, just perform them accurately until you get used and eventually improve."* Reservists recognize the inevitable effects of aging and note, *"Age. Stamina, agility, and physical strength are affected by age,"* acknowledging the physical realities they face while striving for their personal best within the reserves.

While physical capabilities may decline with age, the commitment and experience of aging reservists remain invaluable assets. Their wisdom and learned efficient training and recovery methods can contribute to a richer, more informed approach to fitness and health within military organizations (Mcnab, 2015).

Health Management and Resilience

Health-related issues become more prevalent with age, requiring reservists to adopt proactive strategies for managing their health and maintaining resilience. As age brings an increased likelihood of health-related challenges, reservists emphasize the importance of proactive health management and resilience. One notes that they adopt regular exercise strategies: *"The field training exercise, although preparation can be made before the activity such as having exercise on a daily basis, eating healthy foods, and mind setting."* This indicates a holistic approach to readiness, encompassing physical and mental preparation. The recognition that each physical challenge during training has a purpose is captured by the remark, *"I encounter lots of physical challenges during my training days, but I always keep in mind that there is always a reason behind the said physical things."* Furthermore, adaptability in training to meet the capabilities of individuals is reflected in the observation that *"Training is being suited to our power of executions,"* acknowledging the adjustments made to accommodate varying levels of physical ability and to ensure that all members can continue to perform effectively.

Aging military reservists must manage increasing health-related challenges and maintain resilience. Strategies include adapting training for their evolving physical capacities and focusing on recovery techniques (Spiro et al., 2015).

Adjustments to Training Regimens

Aging reservists may need to adjust their training regimens to align with their current physical capabilities while still meeting the demands of military training. Aging reservists often find it necessary to tailor their training regimens to maintain efficiency while accommodating the changing capacities of their bodies. These adjustments are crucial to enhance and develop resilience, as encapsulated by the insight that *"CADTT training enhances/develops your whole being."* This holistic approach to training ensures that aging members remain operationally effective. Practical strategies for maintaining alertness and combating fatigue, such as *"I just wash my face with water or take sleep about 3-5 minutes when I feel sleepy,"* show the small but significant modifications they make in their routines. The acknowledgment *"Mostly on a physical aspect we are weaker this time compared during our younger days"* reflects an awareness of their limitations and a determination to continue serving by adapting their physical activities to their current abilities.

Adjusting training regimens for aging reservists involves tailoring physical activities to suit their current capabilities while achieving military fitness requirements. This necessitates a careful balance between ensuring readiness and preventing injury. Integrating exercises that maintain or improve strength, endurance, and flexibility is essential, potentially incorporating low-impact activities and recovery strategies. Regular assessment and modification of these regimens are crucial as physical abilities evolve with age (Mcnab, 2015).

Prioritizing Personal Well-being

As reservists continue to serve into their later years, the importance of prioritizing personal well-being becomes ever more paramount, requiring a balance between the strenuous demands of military service and their own mental and emotional health. Some reservists find rejuvenation in their duties, with one stating, *"I consider military activities as my escape space for having a renewed physical strength."* This suggests that engaging in military activities can be a form of self-care, providing a break from routine and a way to restore energy. Moreover, self-awareness is vital, as encapsulated by the advice, *"By acknowledging our limitations and our capabilities. Every reservist should realize his/her roles and manage all the mental and emotional demands."* Recognizing one's limits and capabilities allows for better management of the multifaceted pressures faced. The straightforward guidance, *"As a reservist or volunteer, prioritize personal well-being,"* underscores the concept that personal health is foundational to performing one's duties effectively and sustainably.

According to Hall and Moore (2016), prioritizing the personal well-being of aging reservists is crucial. As they serve longer, there must be a concerted effort to meet their physical and mental health needs, balancing the rigorous demands of military service with adequate support for their well-being. This includes access to mental health resources and stress management programs and ensuring that the culture within military service acknowledges and supports the importance of psychological health.

Balancing Service with Personal Priorities

Aging reservists face the complex task of juggling their service commitments with the demands of personal life, family duties, and civilian jobs. This balancing act is described by one reservist who states, *"As an adult, there are a lot of priorities to manage, but since I am called to serve and help this nation great, I myself will comply,"* reflecting a strong sense of duty that persists despite the complexity of adult life. Financial constraints are another concern, as noted: *"Financial problem is the problem that differed to me right now in continuing my support now,"* suggesting that economic factors can impact the ability to serve. Moreover, the intersection of aging, family obligations, and work is acknowledged as

a significant influence, with the realization that *"The reality of getting older or in the process of aging may truly affect our service. Families and work could really affect our services as a military reserve,"* highlighting the challenges that reservists must navigate to maintain their commitment to service.

Adapting to Operational Deployment Demands

Aging reservists embarking on operational deployments must navigate different challenges than their younger peers, often requiring tailored physical and mental adjustments to meet service demands. One reservist notes that the commitment to serve persists despite these challenges: *"In the older age, I feel tired but still motivated to serve the people in our community."* This determination is coupled with a realistic acknowledgment of changing capabilities: *"There is a difference in stamina and agility, but I can still keep up."* As they adapt to these changes, aging reservists may shift their roles, with one explaining, *"The willingness and desire for deployment is still as enthusiastic and exciting as before, but physique is for major consideration. I need to take less strenuous responsibilities and engage more in supervisory work,"* indicating a strategic reallocation of duties that leverages experience while accommodating the inevitable changes that come with age.

Aging reservists face unique challenges when deployed, differing from their younger counterparts. This requires adjustments in physical training to prevent injuries and ensure peak performance, as well as mental health support to handle stressors related to operational duties. Tailoring physical conditioning and mental health resources to their specific needs helps maintain operational effectiveness and overall well-being (Redmond et al., 2015).

How do aging reservists perceive their contributions to military effectiveness, and what factors do they identify as critical in supporting their continued service and successful integration into the reserve framework?

Several themes are based on how aging reservists perceive their contributions to military effectiveness and the factors they identify as critical in supporting their continued service and successful integration into the reserve framework.

Knowledge Transfer and Mentorship

Knowledge transfer and mentorship play pivotal roles in the context of aging reservists in the military. These individuals often see themselves as vital conduits for passing down essential skills, wisdom, and values to younger service members, reinforcing the reserve force's overall effectiveness and cohesion. One reservist emphasized the impact of this process, stating, *"Being trained well by my mentors and my ability to teach my fellow comrades and the people,"* highlighting the cyclical nature of learning and teaching within the military structure. Another reservist underscored the practical need for experienced personnel in educational roles: *"Able to teach since we need lecturers for implementing the ROTC."* This reflects an understanding that seasoned reservists are repositories of tactical and technical knowledge and invaluable resources for structured training programs. Beyond transmitting technical skills, these veterans recognize the importance of fostering intangible qualities. As one reservist aptly put it, *"The only thing I can share in a unit that improves the effectiveness of the military is unity, respect, and love for each other."* This statement encapsulates the broader vision of mentorship to cultivate a supportive, respectful, and cohesive military culture essential for operational success and personal development within the armed forces.

Knowledge transfer and mentorship are critical in the military, especially among aging reservists. They leverage their experience to guide younger personnel, ensuring the continuity of expertise, military tactics, and culture. This mentorship enriches the service with their historical knowledge and personal insights, which are invaluable for maintaining the effectiveness and unity of the reserve force (Grüßhaber, 2018).

Skills and Expertise

Reservists carry a unique blend of expertise and skills forged through diverse experiences in both military and civilian realms, which they believe are instrumental to the functional prowess of their units. This amalgamation of skills transcends mere vocational competence, as highlighted by one reservist who confidently identified as an *"IT expert,"* suggesting that technical know-how is just one facet of the broader spectrum of abilities reservists bring to the table. Another reserve member articulated the value of their training, reflecting a pragmatic view: *"Skills that I acquire from the training and little knowledge as being part of the reserve are useful."* This acknowledges that even the foundational knowledge gained through service can be leveraged effectively. Moreover, the intrinsic motivation and personal achievements of reservists, encapsulated in the declaration *"My achievements and willingness to serve,"* underscore a deep-seated commitment that extends beyond skill—it's the readiness to apply these skills altruistically for the greater good of their units and the missions they undertake. This sense of duty, coupled with the multifaceted expertise of reservists, is a cornerstone of the strength and adaptability of military reserve units.

Reservists' dual experiences in civilian life and military service equip them with a broad skill set that enhances their unit's functionality. This diverse background allows them to introduce unique perspectives and approaches to problem-solving, leadership, and tactical operations, enriching the military's operational capacity (Meyer & Wynn, 2018).

Leadership and Management

Within the hierarchical structure of the military, seasoned reservists frequently ascend into roles that demand adept leadership and management skills, a transition they often view as integral to the unit's success and unity. This progression is not merely a function of age but the culmination of experience, with one reservist encapsulating this with the succinct phrase *"Leadership skills,"* which implies a broad and adaptable skill set vital for guiding others. Another reservist takes pride in their role, *"Being Senior Officer that leads,"* which denotes a position of authority and a responsibility to steer and inspire their subordinates. The technical aspect of leadership is also embraced, as indicated by the self-assessment *"Management and being computer savvy,"* recognizing that contemporary military leadership also requires a firm grasp of technology and organizational skills. This combination of traditional leadership acumen and modern technical proficiency underlines the dual capacity in which modern reservists contribute to their units, ensuring they remain effective and cohesive in both the analog and digital arenas of military operations.

According to Taylor (2018) experienced reservists often rise to leadership roles in the military's structured environment, necessitating strong management and leadership abilities. This advancement is seen by many as vital for maintaining the effectiveness and coherence of their units, allowing them to apply their seasoned skills in guiding and uniting their teams.

Commitment and Dedication

The ethos of commitment and dedication among reservists is often seen as a beacon, guiding and motivating the younger members of the military community. This stalwart dedication is perceived in the fulfillment of duties and the selfless nature of their service. One reservist

encapsulates this spirit by stating, *"My most important contribution as a reservist as of now is being sincere to service and not expecting anything in return,"* which underscores a pure and altruistic commitment to duty. Another adds depth to this dedication through their proactive stance, *"Of all my experiences as an active reservist, now I think my significant contribution is my ability to perform all tasks that I encounter,"* highlighting a readiness and versatility that is as inspiring as it is valuable. The simple yet profound declaration, *"Always participate in the activities,"* further illustrates a consistent and active engagement, reinforcing a culture of loyalty and service. The embodiment of these values by seasoned reservists not only enriches their own roles but also instills a legacy of dedication in the fabric of military service.

The commitment and dedication displayed by reservists serve as a powerful example for the younger military community members. This strong sense of duty fosters discipline and resilience and inspires and energizes less experienced members, creating a robust and dedicated force (Ellerman, 2016).

Adaptability and Flexibility

Adaptability and flexibility are the hallmarks of seasoned reservists, who often pride themselves on being highly responsive and progressive despite the challenges of an ever-evolving military landscape. Their readiness to respond and adapt is not just a theoretical stance but a lived experience, as one reservist puts it: *"I played a vital role since I am part of the first category, which is the first to respond in any situation."* This illustrates a proactive approach to service, where being first in line is both a duty and a testament to their flexibility. The willingness to *"share my experiences and learnings"* speaks to a mindset focused on continuous growth and the betterment of others, a key trait of adaptable leaders. Furthering their tangible impact, another reservist notes the provision of *"training tools for small unit tactics, marksmanship training tools, comms, data collection tools that will make printing of certifications fast for participants."* This contribution reflects an understanding that adaptability also means improving the system for others—streamlining processes and enabling efficiency, which are essential for the swift adaptation of the military force to new demands and technologies.

Adaptability and flexibility define seasoned reservists' approach to service. They are known for their ability to stay agile and evolve strategically in response to the dynamic demands of military operations, often leading the way in adopting new tactics and technologies. This adaptability is crucial in maintaining operational effectiveness and can significantly contribute to the success of military endeavors (Marcus, 2018).

Support Systems and Resources

Reservists' effectiveness is significantly bolstered by robust support systems and resources, crucial for maintaining these citizen soldiers' operational readiness and personal welfare. The reservists themselves highlight this support as a cornerstone of their capacity to serve, with one individual emphasizing the comprehensive nature of this backing: *"The support of our unit and or the government officials to us."* This broad stroke of recognition captures the multifaceted nature of support that spans from the immediate unit to the broader governmental structure. Another reservist points out the practical elements that underpin their daily operations and training: *"Logistics and financial aspects."* These components are the bedrock of sustained military engagement and the ability to respond effectively to various demands. The single word *"Financial"* further distills the essence of this support, acknowledging that monetary resources are fundamental to the preparedness and long-term sustainability of the reservists' service. Together, these statements reflect a keen awareness

among reservists of the intricate network of support that enables them to fulfill their roles efficiently and thoughtfully.

The effectiveness of reservists is greatly enhanced by comprehensive support systems and resources. These tools are essential for ensuring that reservists, who often balance civilian and military roles, remain ready for deployment and maintain their well-being. This support encompasses a range of services, from logistical and family care assistance to counseling and career development opportunities, all designed to support the unique needs of these part-time service members (Mann & Brinkley, 2021).

Policy and Program Facilitation

The strategic implementation of policies and programs is pivotal for the active engagement of aging reservists, ensuring they remain integrated within the military framework while contributing to the community and broader societal goals. These programs often include a spectrum of *"Community services (feeding, tree planting, bloodletting, clean up drive, etc.)"*, serving the public and providing a sense of purpose and connectedness for the reservists. Specific training programs like *"The ongoing training of WASART in our unit as of now"* underscores a commitment to continual skill development, keeping reservists at the forefront of tactical and rescue operations, which may refer to Water Search and Rescue Team (WASART) training. Moreover, the initiative *"By creating more community base activities by the reservists"* highlights a proactive approach to civic involvement, reinforcing the dual role of reservists as both defenders and enhancers of their communities. These policy and program facilitation facets are critical for aging reservists' relevance, readiness, and morale, fostering a dynamic where their military role and community service reinforce each other.

The strategic implementation of policies and programs is vital to ensuring the active participation of aging reservists. Such measures help them stay integrated within the military system and allow them to continue making valuable contributions to the community and achieving broader societal objectives. This integration supports their roles as military personnel and as active, engaged members of society (Kelley et al., 2023).

CONCLUSIONS

Based on the findings of the study, the servicemen and women are motivated by profound personal satisfaction, a sense of fulfillment, and a desire for ongoing professional growth. They are driven by deep-seated duty and patriotism, coupled with a commitment to community service and the realization of lifelong aspirations.

In addition, despite challenges like diminishing physical capabilities and the need to balance military commitments with personal life, aging reservists display remarkable resilience. They adapt their training, prioritize their well-being, and leverage their rich experience to contribute effectively to their roles within the military reserves.

Moreover, aging reservists perceive their contributions as crucial to military effectiveness, particularly in their roles in knowledge transfer, leadership, and mentorship. They recognize the importance of support systems and resources in enabling their continued service and successful integration into the reserve framework. The study highlights the invaluable role of aging reservists in maintaining a robust and capable military reserve force.

RECOMMENDATIONS

A multi-faceted approach is necessary to bolster the capabilities and integration of aging reservists within the Philippines. The Department of National Defense should introduce a specialized Health and Wellness Program to ensure that aging reservists stay fit and healthy, thus maintaining their readiness for service. Parallel to this, the Armed Forces of the

Philippines Reserve Command must implement a mentorship program that facilitates the transfer of invaluable knowledge from experienced to younger reservists.

The Philippine Veterans Affairs Office is tasked with partnering with healthcare providers to ensure that aging reservists can access necessary medical care. Legislative advocacy by the National Defense Committees in Congress is crucial to secure enhanced policies and incentives that acknowledge and reward the contributions of aging reservists.

In addition, the Philippine Army's Human Resource Management Center needs to establish recognition programs that honor the commitment and service of these individuals. Such initiatives are integral to maintaining a resilient and proficient reserve force, vital for the country's defense readiness.

Furthermore, the Technical Education and Skills Development Authority (TESDA) should collaborate on creating vocational training programs, curriculum, and instruction designs that allow aging reservists to acquire new skills relevant to military service and applicable to civilian employment opportunities, and the Local Government Units (LGUs) must support community-based programs that integrate the skills and services of aging reservists in community development projects, disaster response, and local civic initiatives.

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