

Results from a work-life balance survey –  
A comparative study in Denmark, Finland, Norway, and Sweden

Emma Oskarsson  
Emil Lundell  
Johan Österberg

# Introduction

Work-life balance is a well-established concept that has been studied comprehensively in previous research. Overall, work-life balance considerations help to explain how well employees feel that they manage to combine their work and non-work roles (Casper et al., 2018). The perception of balance is based on a subjective experience, which means that individuals' commitment to each role must be proportional to how they value these roles. In contrast, work-life conflict emerges when role expectations between work life and non-work life are incompatible in some respect (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985). The conflict can be bidirectional, which means that work life can interfere with non-work life and life outside work can interfere with work life.

In recent years, interest in the different ways in which military employment affects individuals' work-life balance has grown. Military personnel face unique challenges in balancing their military commitments and home-related responsibilities, and sometimes have to act in demanding and stressful situations with little or no advance notice. Finding an appropriate balance between work and non-work is particularly complex during military training and deployments that require lengthy periods away from home. Throughout their career, military personnel are likely to face repeated separation from home, family, and friends while participating in training and deployments. Furthermore, military personnel's perceptions of work-life balance are likely to influence their job satisfaction and future career intentions (Sachau et al., 2012). Research shows that after serving abroad, personnel report lower satisfaction with their personal relationships and an increased desire to leave the armed forces (Andres et al., 2012). However, the offer of organizational support, and thus being better equipped to handle the conflicting demands from work and non-work life, has a positive impact on work-life balance (Anderson & Goldenberg, 2019; Sachau et al., 2018).

## Study aim

The aim of this study is to investigate how work-life balance and different work-related demands and resources affect well-being, job satisfaction, commitment to the organization, and willingness to remain in the organization among military personnel in Denmark, Finland, Norway and Sweden.

## **Method**

This study used a comparative approach. A questionnaire measuring different aspects of work-life balance and outcomes was developed and distributed in Sweden, Finland, Norway, and Denmark. The questionnaire was translated into each country's native language; Denmark used an English version. Measures were created to examine work-life balance, work-family conflict, family-work conflict, job characteristics, recognition, coping, supervisor support, organizational support, support from friends or family, future career intentions, job satisfaction, commitment to the organization, well-being at work, and well-being at home. Survey questions included both newly developed items, based on constructs of interest and previously validated measures.

The data collection took place between 25 April and 30 May 2022. The officer unions in each country distributed a survey link to their members by email. Participation was voluntary, and survey instructions indicated that the data would be handled confidentially. The response numbers were 474 Danish officers, 983 Norwegian officers, 849 Finnish officers (11 of whom spoke Finnish-Swedish) and 1002 Swedish officers.

# Results

## Background variables

Table 1 contains descriptive statistics regarding age, gender, and military service. In general, Denmark has the oldest respondents and Norway has the youngest. Overall, Finland has the most male-dominated sample and Norway has the best representation of females. As far as military service is concerned, the majority of respondents belong to the army.

Table 1. Frequencies and valid percentages for background variables divided by country ( $N = 3308$ )

Variable	Denmark	Finland	Norway	Sweden	<i>n</i>
<i>Age categories</i>					3297
18-19 years	0 (0)	0 (0)	2 (0.2)	0 (0)	2
20-29 years	32 (6.8)	109 (12.9)	211 (21.5)	163 (16.4)	515
30-39 years	89 (18.9)	205 (24.2)	229 (23.3)	341 (34.2)	864
40-49 years	140 (29.7)	303 (35.8)	236 (24)	207 (20.8)	886
50-59 years	185 (39.2)	230 (27.2)	298 (30.3)	239 (24)	952
60-68 years	26 (5.5)	0 (0)	6 (0.6)	46 (4.6)	78
<i>Gender</i>					3299
Male	441 (93.4)	811 (95.6)	857 (87.5)	900 (90)	3009
Female	31 (6.5)	32 (3.8)	120 (12.3)	95 (9.5)	278
Prefer not to answer	2 (0.2)	5 (0.6)	2 (0.2)	3 (0.3)	10
<i>Military service</i>					3297
Army	224 (47.3)	395 (46.6)	477 (49)	400 (40)	1496
Navy	91 (19.2)	80 (9.4)	199 (20.4)	221 (22.1)	591
Air Force	130 (27.4)	104 (12.3)	298 (30.6)	217 (21.7)	749
Other	29 (6.1)	269 (31.7)	0 (0)	163 (16.3)	461

## Work hours and work location

Table 2 depicts the expected and usual working hours per week, and percentage of time working from home per week. Finland stands out with a high proportion of the sample expected to work less than 37 hours per week, and a small percentage expected to work over 115 hours per week. In Denmark, Finland and Norway the majority are expected to work 37-39 hours, while in Sweden less than 5 percent are expected to work anything other than 40-49 hours per week.

When it comes to usual working hours, Norway stands out with almost a seventh of the sample working over 59 hours per week. In Denmark, Norway and Sweden, the absolute majority usually work either 40-49 hours or 50-59 hours per week, and in Finland the absolute majority work either 37-39 or 40-49 hours per week. Thus, by comparing expected working hours per week with usual working hours per week, it is clear that a majority of the respondents work more than their contracts state.

In Norway and Sweden, the majority work less than 5 percent from home. In Denmark it is most common to work 10-29 percent from home, and in Finland it is most common to work less than 5 percent from home, and then 10-29 percent from home.

Table 2. Expected and usual working hours and time working from home ( $N = 3308$ )

Variable	Denmark	Finland	Norway	Sweden	<i>n</i>
<i>Expected working hours per week</i>					3210
<37 hours	3 (0.6)	241 (29.4)	17 (1.8)	38 (3.9)	299
37-39 hours	445 (95.7)	494 (60.2)	832 (86.8)	6 (0.6)	1777
40-49 hours	17 (3.7)	58 (7.1)	106 (11.1)	921 (95.3)	1102
50-59 hours	0 (0)	0 (0)	2 (0.2)	1 (0.1)	3
60-99 hours	0 (0)	1 (0.1)	2 (0.2)	0 (0)	3
100-115 hours	0 (0)	26 (3.2)	0 (0)	0 (0)	26
<i>Usual working hours per week</i>					3260
<37 hours	8 (1.7)	84 (10.1)	24 (2.5)	53 (5.4)	169
37-39 hours	84 (17.9)	229 (27.5)	83 (8.6)	10 (1)	406
40-49 hours	263 (56)	435 (52.2)	460 (47.4)	741 (75.2)	1899
50-59 hours	89 (18.9)	58 (7)	265 (27.3)	141 (14.3)	553
60-99 hours	26 (5.5)	12 (1.4)	132 (13.6)	38 (3.9)	208
100-168 hours	0 (0)	16 (1.9)	6 (0.6)	3 (0.3)	25
<i>Percentage of time working from home</i>					3242
<5 %	137 (29)	347 (41.2)	692 (74.2)	787 (79.2)	1963
5-9 %	65 (13.7)	63 (7.5)	53 (5.7)	59 (5.9)	240
10-29 %	203 (42.9)	266 (31.6)	102 (10.9)	109 (11)	680
30-74 %	59 (12.5)	148 (17.6)	24 (2.6)	21 (2.1)	252
75-100 %	9 (1.9)	19 (2.3)	61 (6.5)	18 (1.8)	107

In table 3 the frequencies and valid percentages for the option to decide when and where to work, and preferred work location are shown. In Denmark and Finland a majority can often or sometimes decide when to work, while in Norway and Sweden a majority can rarely or sometimes decide when to work. In Sweden, a higher proportion than in the other countries do not have the option to decide. In Denmark and Finland, a majority can often or sometimes decide where work is performed, while in Norway and Sweden a majority can rarely decide or do not have the option.

Regarding preferred work location after the pandemic, in Denmark and Finland an absolute majority would prefer the usual work location most of the time, or splitting the time equally between the usual work location and home. In Norway and Sweden, an absolute majority would prefer working from the usual work location all the time or most of the time.

Table 3. Option to decide when and where to work and preferred work location ( $N = 3308$ )

Variable	Denmark	Finland	Norway	Sweden	<i>n</i>
<i>Can decide when to work</i>					
Never	25 (5.3)	42 (5)	86 (8.8)	136 (13.6)	289
Rarely	85 (17.9)	214 (25.3)	309 (31.5)	301 (30.1)	909
Sometimes	174 (36.7)	225 (26.6)	335 (34.1)	311 (31.1)	1045
Often	174 (36.7)	337 (39.8)	223 (22.7)	236 (23.6)	970
Always	16 (3.4)	29 (3.4)	29 (3)	16 (1.6)	90
<i>Can decide where to work</i>					
Never	34 (7.2)	50 (5.9)	282 (28.9)	291 (29.7)	657
Rarely	89 (19)	234 (27.6)	401 (41)	388 (39.6)	1112
Sometimes	175 (37.3)	256 (30.2)	181 (18.5)	209 (21.3)	821
Often	159 (33.9)	288 (34)	99 (10.1)	83 (8.5)	629
Always	12 (2.6)	20 (2.4)	14 (1.4)	10 (1)	56
<i>Preferred work location after the pandemic</i>					
Usual work location all the time	55 (11.6)	56 (6.6)	320 (32.6)	297 (29.7)	728
Usual work location most of the time	237 (50)	340 (40)	420 (42.8)	480 (48)	1477
Equal time at usual work location and equal time from home	148 (31.2)	344 (40.5)	195 (19.9)	159 (15.9)	846
From home most of the time	24 (5.1)	84 (0.9)	22 (2.2)	39 (3.9)	169
From home all the time	0 (0)	7 (0.8)	8 (0.8)	6 (0.6)	21
Other preferences than those mentioned above	10 (2.1)	18 (2.1)	16 (1.6)	18 (1.8)	62

## Influences of work versus family life and work-life balance

Table 4 contains the mean and standard deviation for each of the items regarding the influence of work life on family life and the influence of family life on work life.

Table 4. Mean and standard deviation for the influence of work life on family life and vice versa ( $N = 3308$ )

Variable	Denmark	Finland	Norway	Sweden	<i>n</i>
<i>Influence of work life on family life</i>					
1. The demands of my work interfere with my home and family life.	3.82 (1.11)	3.63 (1.15)	3,39 (1.24)	3.44 (1.27)	3296
2. The amount of time my job takes up makes it difficult to fulfill family responsibilities.	3.19 (1.15)	3.44 (1.22)	3,11 (1.31)	2.96 (1.33)	3286
3. Things I want to do at home are not done because of demands my job puts on me.	3.20 (1.22)	3.59 (1.23)	3,23 (1.27)	3.04 (1.31)	3285
4. My job produces strain that makes it difficult to fulfill my family duties.	3.00 (1.22)	3.55 (1.23)	3,05 (1.28)	2.87 (1.37)	3285
5. Due to work-related duties, I have to make changes to my plans for family activities.	3.53 (1.16)	3.40 (1.24)	3,44 (1.23)	3.36 (1.29)	3293
Mean value index (item 1 to 5)	3.34 (1.01)	3.52 (1.06)	3,25 (1.10)	3.13 (1.13)	3299
<i>Influence of family life on work life</i>					
1. The demands of my family or spouse / partner interfere with work-related activities.	2.55 (1.16)	1.99 (1.06)	2,18 (1.18)	2.06 (1.23)	3297
2. I have to put off doing things at work because of demands on my time at home.	2.18 (1.11)	1.60 (0.87)	2,03 (1.14)	1.76 (1.12)	3294
3. Things I want to do at work don't get done because of the demands of my family or spouse / partner.	1.90 (1.02)	1.51 (0.84)	1,81 (1.07)	1.67 (1.10)	3279
4. My home life interferes with my responsibilities at work such as getting to	1.96 (1.09)	1.79 (1.05)	2,05 (1.22)	1.81 (1.20)	3290

work on time, accomplishing daily tasks, and working overtime.

5. Family-related strain interferes with my ability to perform job-related duties.	1.94 (1.03)	1.87 (1.07)	1,88 (1.14)	1.76 (1.14)	3279
Mean value index (item 1 to 5)	2.11 (0.89)	1.75 (0.80)	1,99 (0.98)	1.81 (0.97)	3299

Note. For F17\_1 to F17\_5 and F18\_1 to F18\_5 1 = Completely disagree, 2 = Somewhat disagree, 3 = Neither agree nor disagree, 4 = Somewhat agree, 5 = Completely agree, and  $n$  = number of responses.

A Kruskal-Wallis test indicated that the country that the respondent lived in had a small but significant effect on the influence of work life on family life,  $H(3) = 50.67, p < .001, \eta^2 = .02$ . Pairwise comparisons, based on mean ranks, showed that work life had the highest influence on family life in Finland ( $Mn\ rank = 1848$ ) and that the influence was second highest in Denmark, but still significantly lower than in Finland ( $Mn\ rank = 1665, z_{kw} = 3.35, p < .01$ ). In Norway, the influence was even lower than in Denmark, but the difference was not significant ( $Mn\ rank = 1607, z_{kw} = -1.09, p > .05$ ). In turn, the lowest influence of work life on family life was in Sweden and the level was significantly lower than in Norway ( $Mn\ rank = 1516, z_{kw} = -2.13, p < .05$ ).

According to the mean values, the highest influence of family life on work life was in Denmark, the second highest in Norway, the second lowest in Sweden, and the lowest in Finland. Respondents' country of residence had a small but significant effect on the influence of family life on work life,  $H(3) = 80.29, p < .001, \eta^2 = .02$ . Pairwise comparisons, based on mean ranks, revealed another order of the countries. The highest influence of family life on work life ( $Mn\ rank = 1924$ ) was in Denmark, and the influence was second highest in Norway, but still significantly lower than in Denmark ( $Mn\ rank = 1742, z_{kw} = -3.46, p < .01$ ). The influence was second lowest in Finland and, in turn, significantly lower than in Norway ( $Mn\ rank = 1554, z_{kw} = -4.26, p > .001$ ). In Sweden the influence of family life on work life was lowest, and significantly lower than in Norway ( $Mn\ rank = 1510, z_{kw} = -5.47, p < .001$ ).

Table 5. Percentages for level of balance between work life and non-work life ( $N = 3308$ )

Category	Denmark	Finland	Norway	Sweden
Leaning towards poor (0-3)	41.2	29.3	43.6	49.8
Neutral middle (4-6)	28.6	31.3	30.6	25.3
Leaning towards excellent (7-10)	30.3	39.3	25.8	24.9
Mean value and standard deviation	4.68 (2.57)	5.34 (2.50)	4.51 (2.53)	4.29 (2.53)

Regarding the overall level of balance between work and non-work life in table 5, the highest proportions in Denmark, Norway and Sweden lean towards poor, while the highest proportion in Finland leans towards excellent. A Kruskal-Wallis test indicated that the country that the

respondent lived in had a small but significant effect on the level of balance between work life and non-work life,  $H(3) = 90.86, p < .001, \eta^2 = .03$ . Pairwise comparisons, based on mean ranks, gave another order of the countries. The lowest balance was in Sweden ( $Mn\ rank = 1499$ ); in Norway the balance was significantly higher than in Sweden ( $Mn\ rank = 1589, z_{kw} = -2.13, p < .05$ ), and in Denmark the balance was even higher, but the difference from Norway was not significant ( $Mn\ rank = 1654, z_{kw} = -1.23, p > .05$ ). The highest balance was in Finland, and was significantly different from that of Denmark ( $Mn\ rank = 1904, z_{kw} = 4.61, p < .001$ ).

### Job characteristics, job satisfaction and recognition

Table 6 contains the mean and standard deviation for each of the items regarding job characteristics, job satisfaction, and recognition.

Table 6. Mean and standard deviation for job characteristics, job satisfaction and recognition ( $N = 3308$ )

Variable	Denmark	Finland	Norway	Sweden	<i>n</i>
<i>Job characteristics</i>					
1. I feel I have more to do than I can comfortably handle.	3.24 (0.94)	3.46 (0.95)	3.32 (0.94)	3.29 (0.98)	3303
2. I work under tight deadlines.	3.37 (0.84)	3.68 (0.73)	3.58 (0.80)	3.53 (0.85)	3300
3. My job requires me to work on several equally important tasks at once.	3.91 (0.80)	4.11 (0.72)	3.86 (0.78)	3.88 (0.85)	3296
4. The priorities of my work are clear to me.	3.58 (0.89)	3.26 (0.86)	3.41 (0.82)	3.22 (0.94)	3299
5. My work fits my interests and skills.	3.84 (0.74)	3.61 (0.83)	3.84 (0.74)	3.76 (0.77)	3299
6. My competences are being used in my work.	3.87 (0.81)	3.69 (0.77)	3.94 (0.83)	3.77 (0.93)	3301
Mean value index (item 1 to 6)*	3.13 (0.50)	2.88 (0.49)	3.07 (0.47)	3.01 (0.52)	3305
<i>Job satisfaction</i>					
3. The fairness of the career system.	2.56 (1.07)	3.15 (1.23)	2.51 (0.99)	2.58 (1.10)	3291
5. Your opportunities for promotion.	2.91 (1.17)	3.47 (1.23)	2.79 (1.03)	2.90 (1.17)	3292
8. Your rate of pay.	2.92 (1.16)	3.67 (1.11)	2.63 (1.10)	2.58 (1.21)	3300
9. Amount of leave.	3.58 (0.99)	3.29 (1.09)	2.93 (0.99)	3.70 (0.96)	3288
10. Overall pay and benefits.	3.01 (1.10)	3.37 (1.08)	2.19 (0.99)	2.73 (1.15)	3300
Mean value index (item 3, 5, 8, 9 and 10)	3.00 (0.78)	3.39 (0.84)	2.61 (0.73)	2.90 (0.81)	3305
<i>Recognition</i>					
1. When I do a good job, I receive the recognition for it that I should receive.	3.34 (1.10)	3.04 (1.14)	3.42 (1.07)	3.40 (1.12)	3298
2. I do not feel that the work I do is appreciated.	2.53 (1.18)	2.49 (1.17)	2.69 (1.15)	2.61 (1.27)	3301
Mean value index (item 1 and 2)*	3.40 (1.01)	3.28 (1.05)	3.37 (0.99)	3.39 (1.04)	3304

Note. For F20\_1 to F20\_6 1 = Never, 2 = Rarely, 3 = Sometimes, 4 = Often, 5 = Always. For F21\_1 to F21\_9 and F22\_1 to F22\_2 1 = Completely disagree, 2 = Somewhat disagree, 3 = Neither agree nor disagree, 4 = Somewhat agree, 5 = Completely agree, and *n* = number of responses.

\* For job characteristics, item 1, 2 and 3 are reversed. For recognition, item 2 is reversed

A Kruskal-Wallis test indicated that the country that the respondent lived in had a small but significant effect on the level of satisfaction with job characteristics,  $H(3) = 93.39, p < .001$ ,

$\eta^2 = .03$ . Pairwise comparisons, based on mean ranks, revealed that the highest satisfaction with job characteristics was in Denmark (*Mn rank* = 1888), that the second highest satisfaction was in Norway, but significantly lower than in Denmark (*Mn rank* = 1761,  $z_{kw} = -2.39, p < .05$ ). Satisfaction in Sweden was second lowest and in turn significantly lower than in Norway (*Mn rank* = 1633,  $z_{kw} = -3.00, p > .01$ ). Finally, the lowest satisfaction with job characteristics was in Finland, which was significantly lower than the satisfaction in Sweden (*Mn rank* = 1420,  $z_{kw} = -4.82, p < .001$ ).

Regarding the level of job satisfaction, a Kruskal-Wallis test indicated that the country the respondent lived in had a moderate but significant effect,  $H(3) = 386.93, p < .001, \eta^2 = .12$ . Pairwise comparisons, based on mean ranks revealed that the highest job satisfaction was in Finland (*Mn rank* = 2137) and that the second highest job satisfaction was in Denmark, albeit significantly lower than in Finland (*Mn rank* = 1710,  $z_{kw} = 7.82, p < .001$ ). In turn, the second lowest job satisfaction was in Sweden and was significantly lower than in Denmark (*Mn rank* = 1594,  $z_{kw} = -2.19, p > .05$ ). Finally, the lowest job satisfaction was in Norway, and was significantly lower than the satisfaction in Sweden (*Mn rank* = 1267,  $z_{kw} = 7.64, p < .001$ ).

Regarding recognition, the lowest value was in Finland, the second lowest in Norway, the second highest in Sweden, and the highest value was in Denmark. However, the Kruskal-Wallis test was non-significant,  $H(3) = 6.01, p > .05, \eta^2 = .001$ , and the differences can be disregarded.

## Support from supervisor, armed forces and friends/family

In table 7, the mean and standard deviation for each of the items regarding supervisor support, organizational support and support from friends or family are shown.

Table 7. Mean and standard deviation for support from supervisor, armed forces and friends/family ( $N = 3308$ )

Variable	Denmark	Finland	Norway	Sweden	<i>n</i>
<i>Support from supervisor</i>					
1. I am satisfied with the leadership provided by my direct supervisor.	3.54 (1.16)	3.81 (1.13)	3.82 (1.23)	3.72 (1.27)	3300
2. I trust my direct supervisor.	3.92 (1.10)	4.14 (1.05)	4.15 (1.11)	4.03 (1.22)	3297
3. My direct supervisor really cares about my well-being.	3.70 (1.18)	3.86 (1.13)	4.12 (1.08)	4.12 (1.13)	3288
4. My direct supervisor and I can effectively solve conflicts between work and non-work issues.	3.91 (1.03)	3.95 (1.07)	4.12 (1.03)	4.09 (1.07)	3293
Mean value index (item 1 to 4)	3.77 (0.96)	3.94 (0.98)	4.05 (1.00)	3.99 (1.05)	3302

<i>Support from armed forces</i>					
1. The organization would ignore any complaint from me.	2.99 (1.15)	3.01 (1.12)	3.49 (1.13)	3.52 (1.22)	3299
2. The organization would understand a long absence due to e.g. parental leave.	3.77 (1.06)	3.73 (1.11)	3.98 (1.05)	3.71 (1.16)	3288
3. Help is available from the organization when I have a problem.	3.33 (1.00)	3.55 (1.00)	3.44 (1.03)	3.29 (1.12)	3283
4. The organization really cares about my well-being.	2.78 (1.06)	3.11 (1.16)	2.99 (1.13)	3.13 (1.21)	3291
5. The organization would fail to understand my absence due to a personal problem.	2.67 (1.06)	2.56 (1.14)	2.54 (1.14)	2.53 (1.20)	3288
6. The organization would grant a reasonable request for a change in my working conditions.	3.14 (0.90)	3.34 (1.07)	3.16 (0.99)	3.21 (1.09)	3294
7. The organization cares about my general satisfaction at work.	2.89 (1.03)	3.19 (1.11)	2.91 (1.08)	2.79 (1.17)	3293
8. The organization shows very little concern for me.	2.97 (1.22)	2.92 (1.10)	2.87 (1.13)	2.85 (1.24)	3288
Mean value index (item 1 to 8)*	3.16 (0.77)	3.31 (0.82)	3.20 (0.75)	3.15 (0.84)	3303
<i>Support from friends or family</i>					
1. When something goes wrong at work, I can talk it over with my friends or family.	3.88 (1.03)	3.76 (1.09)	3.50 (1.10)	3.83 (1.10)	3298
2. My friends/family care about how I feel about my job.	4.07 (0.90)	3.85 (0.92)	3.82 (0.94)	3.98 (0.98)	3292
3. My friends/family help me feel better when I've had a hard day at work.	3.93 (0.95)	4.00 (0.86)	3.60 (1.02)	3.90 (0.98)	3294
4. My friends/family are interested in my work.	3.73 (0.92)	3.61 (0.92)	3.36 (0.93)	3.39 (0.99)	3292
Mean value index (item 1 to 4)	3.90 (0.78)	3.81 (0.78)	3.57 (0.82)	3.78 (0.83)	3300

Note. For F23\_1 to F23\_4 and F24\_1 to F24\_8 1 = Completely disagree, 2 = Somewhat disagree, 3 = Neither agree nor disagree, 4 = Somewhat agree, 5 = Completely agree. For F25\_1 to F25\_4 1 = Never, 2 = Rarely, 3 = Sometimes, 4 = Often, 5 = Always, and  $n$  = number of responses.

\* For support from armed forces, item 1, 5 and 8 are reversed.

The country that the respondent lived in had a small but significant effect on their perceived level of support from their supervisor,  $H(3) = 48.02$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\eta^2 = .01$ . Pairwise comparisons, based on mean ranks, revealed that the highest perceived support from the supervisor was in Norway ( $Mn\ rank = 1753$ ) and that the second highest perceived support was in Sweden, and was not significantly different than the level in Norway ( $Mn\ rank = 1703$ ,  $z_{kw} = -1.18$ ,  $p > .05$ ). In turn, the second lowest perceived support was in Finland, and was significantly lower than in Sweden ( $Mn\ rank = 1610$ ,  $z_{kw} = -2.12$ ,  $p < .05$ ). Finally, the lowest perceived support from the supervisor was in Denmark, where it was significantly lower than in Finland ( $Mn\ rank = 1405$ ,  $z_{kw} = 3.76$ ,  $p < .001$ ).

Regarding the perceived level of organizational support, a Kruskal-Wallis test indicated that the country that the respondent lived in had a small but significant effect,  $H(3) = 19.76$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\eta^2 = .01$ . Pairwise comparisons, based on mean ranks, revealed that the highest perceived support from armed forces was in Finland ( $Mn\ rank = 1772$ ) and that the second

highest perceived support was in Norway, albeit significantly lower than in Finland ( $Mn\ rank = 1641, z_{kw} = 2.93, p < .01$ ). In turn, the second lowest perceived support was in Denmark, but the difference between the level in Norway was insignificant ( $Mn\ rank = 1594, z_{kw} = 0.89, p > .05$ ). Finally, the lowest perceived support from the armed forces was in Sweden, but the only significant difference was that between Finland ( $Mn\ rank = 1589, z_{kw} = 4.12, p < .001$ ).

For perceived level of support from friends or family, a Kruskal-Wallis test also indicated that the country that the respondent lived in had a small but significant effect,  $H(3) = 71.97, p < .001, \eta^2 = .02$ . Pairwise comparisons, based on mean ranks, revealed that the highest perceived support from family or friends was in Denmark ( $Mn\ rank = 1841$ ) and that the second highest perceived support was in Finland, albeit significantly lower than the level in Denmark ( $Mn\ rank = 1727, z_{kw} = -2.10, p < .05$ ). In turn, the second lowest perceived support was in Sweden, but the difference between that of Finland was not significant ( $Mn\ rank = 1696, z_{kw} = 0.70, p > .05$ ). Finally, the lowest perceived support from family or friends was in Norway, and was significantly lower than in Sweden ( $Mn\ rank = 1447, z_{kw} = 5.83, p < .001$ ).

## Coping, overall satisfaction and well-being

Table 8 contains the mean and standard deviation for each of the items regarding coping and overall satisfaction, including the single item measuring future career intentions.

Table 8. Mean and standard deviation for coping and overall satisfaction ( $N = 3308$ )

Variable	Denmark	Finland	Norway	Sweden	<i>n</i>
<i>Coping</i>					
1. I look for creative ways to alter difficult situations.	4.11 (0.68)	4.24 (0.70)	4.20 (0.69)	4.09 (0.76)	3299
2. Regardless of what happens to me, I believe I can control my reaction to it.	3.82 (0.84)	3.90 (0.87)	3.95 (0.72)	3.79 (0.91)	3297
3. I believe that I can grow in positive ways by dealing with difficult situations.	4.15 (0.69)	4.36 (0.69)	4.41 (0.61)	4.25 (0.80)	3288
4. I actively look for ways to replace the losses I encounter in life.	3.72 (0.74)	3.54 (0.99)	3.98 (0.87)	4.22 (0.79)	3280
Mean value index (item 1 to 4)	3.95 (0.51)	4.01 (0.55)	4.14 (0.50)	4.09 (0.57)	3301
<i>Overall satisfaction</i>					
1. Overall, I am satisfied with my life.	4.16 (0.77)	4.10 (0.78)	4.27 (0.80)	4.17 (0.89)	3300
2. Overall, I am satisfied with my job.	3.74 (0.94)	3.69 (0.99)	3.88 (0.99)	3.75 (1.10)	3289
3. I frequently think of quitting my job.	2.61 (1.39)	2.29 (1.35)	3.01 (1.41)	2.92 (1.51)	3298
Mean value index (item 1 to 3)	3.77 (0.84)	3.83 (0.85)	3.72 (0.85)	3.67 (0.97)	3302

Note. For F26\_1 to F26\_4 and F29\_1 to F29\_3 1 = Completely disagree, 2 = Somewhat disagree, 3 = Neither agree nor disagree, 4 = Somewhat agree, 5 = Completely agree, and *n* = number of responses.

The country that the respondent lived in had a small but significant effect on their coping,

$H(3) = 56.55, p < .001, \eta^2 = .02$ . Pairwise comparisons, based on mean ranks, revealed that coping was highest in Norway ( $Mn\ rank = 1772$ ) and second highest in Sweden, but the level was not significantly lower than in Norway ( $Mn\ rank = 1718, z_{kw} = -1.27, p > .05$ ). In turn, coping was second lowest in Finland, and it was significantly lower than in Sweden ( $Mn\ rank = 1558, z_{kw} = 3.64, p < .001$ ). Finally, coping was lowest in Denmark, and was significantly lower than in Finland ( $Mn\ rank = 1425, z_{kw} = 2.46, p < .05$ ).

A Kruskal-Wallis test also indicated that the country that the respondent lived in had a very small but significant effect on their overall satisfaction,  $H(3) = 17.32, p < .01, \eta^2 = .004$ . Pairwise comparisons, based on mean ranks, revealed that the highest overall satisfaction was in Finland ( $Mn\ rank = 1760$ ) and that the second highest satisfaction was in Denmark, and that the level was not significantly lower than in Finland ( $Mn\ rank = 1672, z_{kw} = 1.61, p > .05$ ). In turn, the second lowest satisfaction was in Norway, but was only significantly lower than in Finland ( $Mn\ rank = 1608, z_{kw} = 3.42, p < .01$ ). Finally, the lowest overall satisfaction was in Sweden, and was only significantly lower than in Finland ( $Mn\ rank = 1592, z_{kw} = 3.79, p < .001$ ). This could be rephrased to say that overall satisfaction in Finland was significantly higher than in both Norway and Sweden.

Table 9. Percentages for level of well-being at work versus at home ( $N = 3308$ )

Category	Denmark	Finland	Norway	Sweden
<i>Well-being at work</i>				
Leaning towards poor (0-3)	27.7	25.8	25	38.2
Neutral middle (4-6)	29.2	25.1	32.2	30.2
Leaning towards excellent (7-10)	42.9	49.1	42.8	31.5
Mean value and standard deviation	5.53 (2.41)	5.73 (2.44)	5.61 (2.38)	4.85 (2.53)
<i>Well-being at home</i>				
Leaning towards poor (0-3)	15.2	14.7	17.2	28
Neutral middle (4-6)	31.1	25.1	31.8	33.3
Leaning towards excellent (7-10)	53.6	60.1	50.9	38.6
Mean value and standard deviation	6.45 (2.53)	6.59 (2.40)	6.22 (2.47)	5.45 (2.50)

Regarding the level of well-being at work, the highest proportions in Denmark, Finland and Norway lean towards excellent while the highest proportion in Sweden leans towards poor. For the level of well-being at home, the highest proportions in all countries lean towards excellent. However, Sweden stands out with a higher proportion leaning towards poor compared to the other three countries.

A Kruskal-Wallis test indicated that the country that the respondent lived in had a small but significant effect on the level of well-being at work,  $H(3) = 70.28, p < .001, \eta^2 = .02$ .

Pairwise comparisons, based on mean ranks, revealed that the lowest well-being at work was in Sweden ( $Mn\ rank = 1443$ ), and that the well-being at work in Denmark was significantly higher than in Sweden ( $Mn\ rank = 1698, z_{kw} = -4.83, p < .001$ ). The well-being at work was even higher in Norway, but the difference was not significant from that of Denmark ( $Mn\ rank = 1729, z_{kw} = 0.60, p > .05$ ). The well-being at work was highest in Finland, but, again, was not significantly different from that of Denmark ( $Mn\ rank = 1772, z_{kw} = 1.37, p > .05$ ).

For the level of well-being at home, a Kruskal-Wallis test also indicated that the country that the respondent lived in had a small but significant effect,  $H(3) = 110.69, p < .001, \eta^2 = .03$ .

Pairwise comparisons, based on mean ranks, revealed that the lowest well-being at home was in Sweden ( $Mn\ rank = 1399$ ). In Norway well-being at home was significantly higher than in Sweden ( $Mn\ rank = 1690, z_{kw} = -6.86, p < .001$ ). In Denmark well-being at home was even higher, but the difference was not significant from that in Norway ( $Mn\ rank = 1784, z_{kw} = -1.77, p > .05$ ). In Finland well-being at home was highest, and was significantly different from the level in Norway ( $Mn\ rank = 1824, z_{kw} = 3.02, p < .01$ ).

## Commitment to the organization

In table 10, the mean and standard deviation for each of the items regarding commitment to the organization are shown.

Table 10. Mean and standard deviation for commitment to the organization ( $N = 3308$ )

Variable	Denmark	Finland	Norway	Sweden	<i>n</i>
<i>Commitment to the organization</i>					
1. I am willing to put in a great deal of effort beyond that normally expected in order to help this organization be successful.	4.19 (0.83)	3.58 (1.02)	4.27 (0.82)	4.23 (0.90)	3299
2. I talk up this organization to my friends as a great organization to work for.	3.46 (1.08)	3.53 (1.09)	3.54 (1.18)	3.74 (1.16)	3296
3. I would accept almost any type of job assignment in order to keep working for this organization.	2.05 (1.09)	2.03 (1.11)	2.25 (1.22)	2.15 (1.24)	3298
4. I find that my values and the organization's values are similar.	3.43 (0.96)	3.83 (0.90)	4.31 (0.77)	4.31 (0.88)	3296
5. I am proud to tell others that I am part of this organization.	3.90 (0.98)	3.81 (1.03)	4.05 (1.04)	4.08 (1.11)	3291
6. This organization really inspires the very best in me in the way of job performance.	3.19 (1.01)	3.19 (1.01)	3.50 (1.00)	3.47 (1.08)	3294
7. I am extremely glad that I chose this organization to work for over others I was considering at the time I joined.	3.73 (1.03)	3.75 (1.04)	3.73 (1.05)	3.74 (1.14)	3294

8. I really care about the future of this organization.	4.12 (0.94)	4.11 (0.92)	4.17 (0.97)	4.25 (0.99)	3289
9. For me this is the best of all possible organizations for which to work.	3.15 (1.06)	3.32 (1.12)	3.33 (1.12)	3.36 (1.19)	3292
Mean value index (item 1 to 9)	3.47 (0.66)	3.46 (0.73)	3.68 (0.72)	3.70 (0.76)	3302

*Note.* For F30\_1 to F30\_9 1 = Completely disagree, 2 = Somewhat disagree, 3 = Neither agree nor disagree, 4 = Somewhat agree, 5 = Completely agree, and  $n$  = number of responses.

The level of commitment to the organization was lowest in Finland, second lowest in Denmark, second highest in Norway and highest in Sweden. The Kruskal-Wallis test indicated that the country that the respondent lived in had a small but significant effect on the level of commitment to the organization,  $H(3) = 86.06, p < .001, \eta^2 = .03$ . Pairwise comparisons, based on mean ranks, revealed that commitment to the organization was highest in Sweden ( $Mn\ rank = 1801$ ) and second highest in Norway, but not significantly different from that in Sweden ( $Mn\ rank = 1750, z_{kw} = -1.18, p > .05$ ). In turn, Finland had the second lowest commitment, which was significantly lower than in both Sweden ( $Mn\ rank = 1469, z_{kw} = -7.46, p < .001$ ) and Norway ( $z_{kw} = -6.29, p < .001$ ). Finally, commitment to the organization was lowest in Denmark, and was significantly lower than in Norway ( $Mn\ rank = 1456, z_{kw} = 5.51, p < .001$ ). This can be summarized as levels of commitment to the organization being comparable in Sweden and Norway, while the levels in both Denmark and Finland are significantly lower than the first two countries.

### Open-ended questions

The survey contained two open-ended questions, where the respondents had the opportunity to elaborate their answers. The first question asked the respondents to describe their biggest challenges regarding their work-life balance. The most frequent challenge mentioned among all the respondents was the heavy workload.

*“My partner and I are hesitating to start a family because of the unpredictability and the workload we experience working in operational departments. Heavy work weeks also make me very tired after work and I often need the weekend to recover, instead of using the weekend to do things I want to do in my spare time”*

Furthermore, the imbalance between tasks and available resources made respondents feel that the armed forces had unrealistic expectations of them. Respondents in Norway and Finland more frequently mentioned issues regarding geographical distances between home and work,

and long commuting times, but these were also mentioned by respondents in Sweden and Denmark.

*“Geography. Places to work and grow a career are scattered all over the country. You either have to accept a 10 - 15 year period of putting the career on hold or choose not being the father you want to be”*

In addition, respondents described a lack of flexibility regarding when and where work should be performed. Sudden changes and an unpredictability in work schedules were other challenges regarding the respondents' work-life balance.

*“Constant changes in the shifts I have at work. Frequently (weekly) working during weekends, over-night and during holidays - while not getting paid a single cent extra for the time. Having to work 60-70 hours a week, not being paid or appreciated at all for the time spent, only to see the following week's schedule being reconfigured in order to avoid paying extra salary. Basically a never ending circle”*

Finally, common issues mentioned by respondents in all four countries were expectations of availability after working hours, and difficulties in mentally detaching from work.

*“I am often expected to work beyond normal working hours and ordinary duties. It creates serious stress and I can't put the work down when I go home for the day, but keep thinking about everything I have to do. I'm not alone, there are colleagues who stay until 02-03 at night because they don't have time to finish their tasks”*

The second question asked the respondents to describe what the armed forces can do to help them manage their work-life balance. A majority of the respondents in all countries highlighted better pay and benefits as the most important incentive. Among the Norwegian sample, dissatisfaction with the current pension system was frequently mentioned.

A majority of the respondents argued that the armed forces should not only focus on recruiting, but also on retaining personnel. Furthermore, reasonable expectations regarding workload and a better balance between tasks and resources was sought after. In order to gain a better work-life balance, predictability in working schedules was of the utmost importance.

*“Have a clear, long-term perspective on working hours and workload. Discuss work schedules well in advance, so that people can plan their everyday life. Here, the armed forces must also ensure that the level of ambition is in line with the employees' well-being in the workplace, so that a high turnover is avoided”*

Respondents also highlighted increased flexibility, e.g. being able to work from home to a greater extent, and being able to get long-term planned career solutions based on individual requirements.

*“Understand and respect that just because I say no to education and jobs far away from my home, does not mean that I “check out” of having a career in the armed forces. It just means I need to prioritize my kids while they are young. And when they are older, I would very much like to focus more on career. When the time comes”*

## **Discussion**

The aim of this study was to investigate how work-life balance and different work-related demands and resources affect well-being, job satisfaction, commitment to the organization, and willingness to remain in the organization among military personnel in Denmark, Finland, Norway and Sweden. Overall, the results show that the Swedish respondents scored lower on work and family related issues, although, some results point in other directions. Generally, the Finnish sample scored higher concerning the different work-related areas, compared to the other countries. In Sweden the balance between work and non-work life was lowest, followed by Denmark and Norway, while in Finland the level was highest.

For job characteristics, job satisfaction and recognition, the highest satisfaction with job characteristics was in Denmark, and second highest in Norway, but significantly lower than in Denmark. The satisfaction in Sweden was second lowest and in turn significantly lower than in Norway. Finally, the lowest satisfaction with job characteristics was in Finland, and was significantly lower than the satisfaction in Sweden, which is contradictory when compared to the other results.

The Danish sample were older in comparison, which might affect responses concerning options to decide when and where to work, and preferred work location (a higher proportion of the Danish sample might be in staff positions, where it could be easier to decide where to work). The organizational support from leaders and the support from home were assessed as being even across the four countries.

The results for influence of work life on family life and vice versa, reveal that work life had the highest influence on family life in Finland; in Denmark it was second highest, but still significantly lower than in Finland. The influence in Norway was even lower than in Denmark

but the difference was not significant. In turn, the lowest influence of work life on family life was in Sweden, and the level was significantly lower than in Norway. According to the mean values, the highest influence of family life on work life was in Denmark, the second highest in Norway, the second lowest in Sweden, and the lowest value was in Finland. In conclusion, work had the highest impact on family life in Finland, but results were reversed when it came to the impact of family life on work. Willingness to stay in the organization was lowest in Norway and Sweden, where 46 percent and 44 percent respectively, stated that they frequently thought of leaving their job. In Denmark and Finland, less than a third of the samples were frequently thinking of leaving their job.

The Swedish sample scored as high as the other countries when it comes to commitment to the organization, but scored significantly lower concerning well-being at work and well-being at home. The Swedish armed forces (SAF) are currently undergoing some significant changes. These include implementation of a three-category command system, where some officers are being forced to change from OF to OR ranks, dramatic organizational growth, dismissed contracts for soldiers due to a change in employment legislation, which might have affected the results negatively. Furthermore, the location of new units, considerable vacancies in some branches and Sweden's application for NATO membership, also contribute to a hectic situation for the SAF.

It is vital for armed forces to investigate the well-being and work-life balance among their personnel. Therefore, the authors strongly propose continuation of the current questionnaire studies, because views on these topics will most probably vary over time. Furthermore, studies should take a qualitative approach in order to gain a deeper understanding of the dynamics regarding work-life balance in the Nordic countries. The worsening security situation in the Nordic region, and Sweden and Finland's applications to join NATO, imply that there could be even more pressure on military personnel.

There is a need to continue to investigate the concept of work-life balance in the armed forces. This will increase knowledge of the topic in the armed forces, and among politicians and other stakeholders. Furthermore, this knowledge will enable the armed forces to attract, recruit and, most importantly, retain the right personnel.

## Conclusion

The results of this survey suggest that the armed forces in the Nordic countries currently face considerable challenges, and probably even greater challenges in the years ahead. It is important to review employees' pay and benefits. These not only include salary, but also pensions, and allowances for individuals deployed on operations, abroad and nationally. Salary is not the only financial incentive that needs to be addressed. There must be a focus, not only on recruiting personnel, but also on efforts to retain personnel in the organization. Otherwise, there is a risk of losing competence when large age groups approach retirement age.

There is also a need to maintain a good balance between tasks and resources. Many officers state that they have many tasks, but insufficient resources to deal with them. This will, in turn, worsen the work-life balance and make employees consider leaving the organization. There is also a need for increased flexibility both in terms of being able to work from home, and career solutions where employees have different requirements concerning family life and work life. Having small children, or any demanding personal situations, need to be taken into account when the armed forces and the employee plan the individual's career. When the present survey was conducted, the situation for the armed forces in the Nordic countries was very challenging. Challenges included the war in Ukraine, applications for NATO membership by Finland and Sweden, organizational growth and the aftermath of major personnel reforms. Bearing these in mind, unpredictability in work schedules is understandable. However, increasing the predictability of work schedules is something that many personnel mention as being critical for them to stay in the organization.

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