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Stanko Rihtar, Vlado Šakić, Antun Plenković:  
**Public Image and Subjective Welfare of Croatian Veterans**

The public opinion towards war veterans is in many cases controversial. On the one hand, they are respected, treated as heroes and valuable members of society, and their war merits were compensated through material, social and symbolical means. On the other hand, they are often

marginalized, and their stigmatization is not uncommon: It is most often related to the psychological consequences of war trauma, but also to assumed dubious motives for joining the military (such as improving social and material status, disturbed personality, etc.). It is well-known that self-stigmatization is difficult to bear, so publicly-created negative images, if exaggerated, can have particularly severe consequences on the lives of defenders and veterans. In order to answer that question, an online survey conducted with 749 Croatian veterans from the Homeland War (1991—1995) sought to fulfill two goals: first, to examine to what extent the veterans adopted the positive and negative images about their population; and second, to determine how it is related to their subjective well-being. The results show that almost all veterans are aware of and emphasize their merits, but they partly accepted negative views of their status. Additionally, it was shown that the mentioned veterans' problems are not related or are only marginally related to their subjective well-being. The findings are interpreted in a broader context, taking into account the phenomenon of personal compensation of public (macrosocial) deficits, typical of transitional societies.

Key words: *Croatia, defenders, public opinion, stigma, contribution, compensation*