

Motivation to Serve, Education, and Post-9/11 Military Service: New Findings for Diverse Subpopulations

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INTRODUCTION

Background: Drawing on national surveys, we explore how servicemembers' reasons for joining the military may influence their education trajectories after service and use of benefits. Using confirmatory factor analysis we identify 7 main reasons for joining the military, and we then show that different subpopulations are more likely to join the military based on these specific reasons.

Purpose: Previous evidence indicates that GI Bill education benefits are a viable means to encourage individuals to join the military. The current study expands the scope of previous examinations to understand how education benefits relate to a host of other motivations to join the military. Additionally, we wish to understand the motivations of different subpopulations and, further, how these motivations to join the military translate into post-service education behavior and ultimately the take-up of the Post-9/11 GI Bill education benefits.

METHODS

Conceptual Framework: We expect that underrepresented subpopulations will be more likely to join the military for education benefits; likewise, those who joined for benefits will be more likely to pursue education and use their benefits.

Data Source: 2014 Google Impact Award funded survey of servicemembers

Sample: 8,400 military servicemembers

Questions of Interest: Demographic characteristics of respondents, motivations to join the military, service related experiences, education after service, and use of GI Bill education benefits after service

Data Analysis: Confirmatory Factor Analysis identified 7 main factors for joining the military (among 19 possible choices). We then regressed a number of demographic controls onto these factors to understand which subpopulations are more likely to join for each factor. Finally, we constructed logistic regressions using each factor as a predictor of (1) continuing education after service and (2) using Post-9/11 GI Bill benefits to pay for that education.

RESULTS

Table 1: Motivations to join the military

	Education and health benefits	Leadership	Future earnings	Military promotion potential	Family history	Skills	Lack of job opportunities
Female	0.0025 (0.0389)	-0.1667*** (0.0394)	-0.0338 (0.0397)	-0.0793** (0.0390)	0.1179*** (0.0397)	-0.0477 (0.0397)	-0.1048*** (0.0387)
American Indian or Alaska Native	0.0865 (0.0843)	-0.0278 (0.0853)	0.0299 (0.0860)	0.0350 (0.0844)	-0.0855 (0.0861)	0.0939 (0.0860)	0.0175 (0.0838)
Asian or Pacific Islander	0.2127** (0.0872)	0.0131 (0.0881)	0.0917 (0.0888)	0.0013 (0.0872)	0.0243 (0.0889)	-0.0596 (0.0888)	-0.0507 (0.0866)
Black or African-American	0.1413*** (0.0450)	-0.0802* (0.0454)	0.2341*** (0.0458)	0.0502 (0.0450)	0.2467*** (0.0459)	-0.0784* (0.0458)	0.0198 (0.0447)
Latino/a	0.0591 (0.0553)	0.0696 (0.0559)	-0.0504 (0.0564)	-0.0514 (0.0553)	0.2212*** (0.0564)	-0.0324 (0.0564)	-0.0251 (0.0550)
Educational attainment	0.0188** (0.0090)	0.0164* (0.0091)	-0.0243*** (0.0092)	-0.0163* (0.009)	0.0134 (0.0092)	-0.0100 (0.0092)	-0.0165* (0.009)
Observations	3916	3916	3916	3916	3916	3916	3916

DISCUSSION

Understanding the different subpopulations in the military service and the reasons these groups join the military provides allows preliminary analysis of the policies and mechanisms necessary to maintain a diverse force structure. Mechanisms designed to encourage individuals to join the military can also influence post-service transition strategies (i.e. education benefits).

This study found that different subpopulations are motivated to join the military for different reasons. Women are most likely to join the military due to family history, whereas African-American and Asian servicemembers join for education/health benefits. Additionally African-American servicemembers join for career/earning opportunities.

We show that joining for education benefits increase the likelihood of using those benefits as expected, but also that individuals seeking military advancement are more likely to pursue education. Servicemembers with service related disability ratings are also more likely to pursue education, but not as likely to use Post-9/11 education benefits. Women, African-Americans, and servicemembers with children are also more likely to pursue higher education as a means to transition after service.

The findings indicate that military should consider policies to maximize specific post-service opportunities to subpopulations in order to encourage volunteers and maintain adequate force strength. Additionally post-service education may be a viable support environment for servicemembers dealing with injuries.

TABLE 2: EDUCATION PLANS

	Continuing education	Using Post-9/11 Education Benefits
Female	0.0343** (0.0173)	-0.0195 (0.0181)
Children	0.0134*** (0.0046)	-0.0134*** (0.0049)
Household income	-0.0110*** (0.0019)	0.0025 (0.0022)
Black or African-American	0.0981*** (0.0201)	-0.0237 (0.0204)
SRD	0.0270** (0.0111)	-0.0376*** (0.0119)
Education and health benefits	0.0076 (0.0069)	0.0251*** (0.0073)
Leadership	0.0029 (0.0069)	-0.0020 (0.0073)
Future earnings	0.0051 (0.0068)	-0.0053 (0.0073)
Military promotion potential	0.0170** (0.0069)	-0.0018 (0.0073)
Family history	0.0105 (0.0067)	0.0193*** (0.0072)
Skills	-0.0023 (0.0067)	-0.0080 (0.0073)
Lack of job opportunities	-0.0121* (0.0069)	-0.0114 (0.0076)
Observations	3866	2913
Pseudo R-squared	0.136	0.189

* p<0.10 ** p<0.05 *** p<0.01

