

Status Configurations, Military Service and Higher Education

PUBLICATION: *Social Forces* (2012); 91(2), 397-422.

PUBLICATION TYPE: Peer-Reviewed Journal Article

KEYWORDS: Educational benefit, military service, socioeconomic status, social mobility

RESEARCH HIGHLIGHTS:

- The researchers of this study have two hypotheses: those with inconsistent social statuses are likely to be attracted to the military because of the educational opportunities the military offers, and those with inconsistent social statuses are more likely to benefit from enlisting in the military than those with consistent statuses because of the heightened access to education that is offered through military service.
- This study confirms that military service is correlated with individuals pursuing education beyond their high school diploma. However, of individuals with a military history, a majority stop at an associate's degree.
- The researchers found that community colleges are often a better fit for veterans. This is the case because many community colleges have evolved into institutions that prepare some students for four-year colleges and offer other students skills and training needed for occupations.

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ABSTRACT:

“The U.S. Armed Forces offer educational and training benefits as incentives for service. This study investigates the influence of status configurations on military enlistment and their link to greater educational opportunity. Three statuses (socio economic status of origin, cognitive ability and academic performance) have particular relevance for life course options. We hypothesize that young men with inconsistent statuses are more likely to enlist than men with consistent status profiles, and that military service improves access to college for certain configurations. Analyses of the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health (Add Health) show (1. that several status configurations markedly increased the likelihood of military enlistment and (2. within status configurations, recruits were generally more likely to enroll in higher education than nonveterans, with associate degrees being more likely.”

Implications

FOR PRACTICE

The results of this study further illuminate the effect that socio-demographic factors, such as race and income, have on one's decision to enlist in the military. Since young men from disadvantaged backgrounds are more likely to view the military as a path to gain education through the new G.I. Bill, K-12 administrators of disadvantaged schools without JROTC programs may explore starting a JROTC program at their school. With community colleges often being a better fit for military service members and veterans, community colleges should expand their advertising to include service members and veterans. Recognizing that many veterans stop after the earning of their associate's degree, both two-year and four-year colleges may implement into their current veteran support programs support relating to educational attainment beyond an associate's degree. Parents of disadvantaged teenagers might discuss educational aspirations with their teens and young adults, keeping in mind the educational benefits that the military offers. This study reveals that disadvantaged and less-privileged young men have lower college aspirations than their advantaged and privileged peers. Realizing this, educators and communities might place additional effort into encouraging high college aspirations to their disadvantaged and less privileged students. This study reveals that the military often can serve as a second chance for delinquent youth without a criminal record. Teens with limited opportunities should continue to view the military as a viable path to improving themselves through training and education.

FOR POLICY

The DoD has made enlisting in the military more attractive to many individuals by improving educational opportunities through the new 2009 G.I. Bill. The DoD could continue to make enlisting attractive to young people by offering opportunities that disadvantaged and under-privileged teens and young adults have difficulty attaining, such as higher education. Policymakers might consider funding more studies to determine the educational needs of service members and veterans and how they can best be attained.

FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

More research is needed on the relationship between military service and the pursuit of education beyond a high school diploma or its equivalency. In addition, more research is needed on the reasons young people enlist in the military. This study only focused on young men in the military. A limitation of this study is that it does not include women in the analysis. With more women enlisting in the military in past years, studies are needed on young women in the military and their educational attainment. This sample excludes Native Americans because of the small number in the sample. Future researchers should oversample Native Americans to better understand the relationship between military service and pursuit of education for this population. Using this research, future researchers should investigate the employment opportunities available to veterans with an associate's degree. Researchers should continue to investigate the types of jobs veterans and service members seek and with what type of jobs they are gainfully employed. Future researchers should consider expounding on this research through qualitative interviews with young people interested in enlisting. Research is needed on the reasons a majority of veterans do not advance past their associate's degree. This study found that Blacks and Asians are more likely to obtain a bachelor's degree than other racial groups. More research is needed on the reasons behind some racial groups being more likely to earn a bachelor's degree than other racial groups. Researchers should continue to study how statuses and differences change among the enlisted and civilian populations.

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