

GEAR UP Research Brief

College, Jobs or the Military? Enlistment during a Time of War.

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- Almost 200,000 American youth join the military each year.
- 87% of new military recruits are between the ages of 18-24.
- 99% of new military recruits have a high school diploma.
- Females comprise of 17% of all new military recruits.
- Enlisting in the military is the next best thing to college according to one study participant.

Study Overview

A study conducted by Princeton University examined factors associated with joining the military after high school as compared to attending college, joining the work force or doing some other activity. The three factors studied were educational goals, the institutional presence of the military and race and socioeconomic status. Data were gathered from the state of Texas in 2002 (during wartime) of 2,074 male high school graduates and followed up on their primary activity post-graduation.

Measures Studied for Post High-School Activity

- **Educational Goals**= desired level of educational attainment.
- **Institutional Presence of the Military** = the percent of county employment from active-duty military members.
- **Race/Ethnicity**= White, African American, Hispanic, Other.
- **Socioeconomic Status (SES)** = home ownership.

Control variables included citizenship, parent in the military, mothers education, unemployment rate, per-capita income, percent of population female, African American, Hispanic and recruiter density.

Findings

- High college aspirations decrease the odds of joining the military but they also increase the odds of choosing military over employment.
- Aspiring to a four-year college degree decreases the odds by more than 50% of pursuing an activity besides work or military enlistment.
- For every one point increase of military employment there was a 25% percent decrease in the odds of attending college. A similar decrease in the odds of choosing to join the workforce.
- There were few differences within race for college enrollment and military enlistment variables. Youth identified their race as 'other' were more likely to attend college than join the military.
- Predictors of going to work versus joining the military found that Hispanics were twice as likely as their white counter parts to join the workforce rather than enlist.
- A strong military presence in the community increases the odds military enlistment as compared to doing some other activity besides college.
- Those of a lower SES were half as likely to go to college versus enlisting in the military when compared to youth with a higher SES background.

Future Research

According to the author, including military enlistment as an option of post-high school activity is understudied. Educational goals have a strong influence on choices and the military does provide a means for college through educational benefits. Another factor impacting the number of new enlistees is the exposure to the military and the concentration of military bases. A post-war analysis of this same study may also reveal specific wartime effects.