

Enlistment Motivation in the All-Volunteer Force Environment:
A Review of Major Surveys

David P. Boesel
John A. Richards
Defense Manpower Data Center

It is unlikely that any event since World War II has stimulated more military-related social research in this country than the termination of the draft in 1973. In the years immediately preceding and in the nine years since the inception of the All-Volunteer Force (AVF), military-eligible youth have come under increasing scrutiny, especially in surveys. Most notable among the surveys of this population have been the Gilbert Youth Attitude Surveys, conducted semiannually by Gilbert Youth Research, Inc. from 1971 through 1974, and the Youth Attitude Tracking Surveys, conducted semiannually from 1975 through 1980 and annually since then by Market Facts Inc. Both surveys were conducted among roughly the same population--non-prior Service, male youth in age groups 16-21 for the Gilbert surveys and 17-21 for those conducted by Market Facts. The Gilbert surveys used personal interviews, while Market Facts has been using telephone interviews. Both were cross-sectional, rather than longitudinal.

Also begun in 1971 were the DoD Surveys of Personnel Entering Military Service--that is, surveys of military recruits conducted immediately following their being sworn in at AFEES in-processing centers. The AFEES surveys were conducted annually through 1976, and once since then, in 1979. Unfortunately, the quality of the AFEES surveys has been, for a variety of reasons, inconsistent. The 1979 administration was the only carefully-controlled and fully-documented survey in the series.

Several important studies of this population--the "Youth in Transition" studies by the Institute for Social Research, for example--predate the AVF or were conducted primarily for other purposes and are, therefore, beyond the scope of our talk. Also, there have been a number of recent studies that provide excellent data on military recruits vis-a-vis their non-military peers--the Ohio State National Longitudinal Study of Youth Labor Force Behavior and the 1981 Rand Survey of Applicants for Military Service are the two best examples. Findings from both of these will be discussed in a few minutes by my colleague, David Boesel.

This review concentrates on self-reported reasons for enlisting in the military. These resemble attitudinal data and must be regarded as only one kind of variable contributing to enlistment. Others include aggregate variables such as unemployment rates and military pay, and individual variables such as parental occupation and respondent education, among others. A variety of multivariate analyses are currently being conducted in an effort to sort out the relative contributions of each, as well as the interactions among them.

The Draft-Motivated Enlistee

There was a time when one of the most common reasons for enlisting in the military was to beat the local draft board to the punch, thereby preserving an element of self-determination. In a 1964 DoD Survey of Active Duty Personnel, 20 percent of the non-high school graduates, 40 percent of the high school graduates and 58 percent of the college graduates claimed their enlistments were motivated by the draft (Lee and Parker, 1977). Yet, even in the days of conscription, another incentive showed up in study after study as far back as 1949: many enlistees and potential enlistees were strongly influenced by the opportunity provided by the Services to learn a marketable trade or skill. This motivation has persisted, and later surveys suggest it occurs within the context of a more generalized desire for self-improvement.

The Youth Attitude Tracking Survey

The Youth Attitude Tracking Survey, now conducted annually, has become a staple among the military recruiting community. This survey, the successor to the Gilbert Youth Attitude Surveys, is administered to approximately 5,000 military-eligible males (a female sample was added beginning with the 1981 survey) every fall. It provides data on enlistment propensity, attitudes toward and perceptions of the military, and a number of demographic variables. To be of maximum utility to recruiters, the sample is stratified by geographical tracking areas.

The salient findings from the last administration of the Youth Attitude Survey are summarized in Table 1.

In this table, the top seven ranked job attributes are grouped according to their achievability in military vs civilian jobs, as perceived by positive and negative propensity respondents. Positive propensity respondents are those who said they would probably or definitely serve in the military within the next few years and negative propensity respondents are those who said they would probably or definitely not serve. Those who expressed an

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TABLE 1
PERCEIVED ACHIEVABILITY OF IMPORTANT JOB ATTRIBUTES IN MILITARY vs CIVILIAN JOBS

	MORE ACHIEVABLE IN MILITARY	MORE ACHIEVABLE IN CIVILIAN JOBS
POSITIVE PROPENSITY RESPONDENTS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • JOB SECURITY • TEACHES VALUABLE TRADE OR SKILL • DEVELOPING YOUR POTENTIAL • OPPORTUNITY FOR ADVANCEMENT 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ENJOY YOUR JOB • GOOD INCOME • EMPLOYER TREATS YOU WELL
NEGATIVE PROPENSITY RESPONDENTS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • JOB SECURITY • TEACHES VALUABLE TRADE OR SKILL 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ENJOY YOUR JOB • GOOD INCOME • DEVELOPING YOUR POTENTIAL • EMPLOYER TREATS YOU WELL • OPPORTUNITY FOR ADVANCEMENT

SOURCE: FALL 1981 YOUTH ATTITUDE TRACKING SURVEY

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TABLE 2
MOST IMPORTANT REASON FOR ENLISTING IN THE MILITARY BY LEVEL OF EDUCATION

FORM 1

MOST IMPORTANT REASON	2 YEARS HIGH SCHOOL	HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATE	2 YEARS COLLEGE	4 YEARS COLLEGE	TOTAL SAMPLE
	(N=829)	(N=4242)	(N=233)	(N=149)	(N=7419)
SKILL TRAINING	25.1	29.4	17.2	21.5	26.8
MONEY FOR COLLEGE	3.0	7.0	12.4	4.7	6.8
TO BETTER MYSELF IN LIFE	42.8	38.8	39.5	43.6	39.0
SERVE MY COUNTRY	9.2	7.5	7.3	12.1	8.1

FORM 2

MOST IMPORTANT REASON	2 YEARS HIGH SCHOOL	HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATE	2 YEARS COLLEGE	4 YEARS COLLEGE	TOTAL SAMPLE
	(N=964)	(N=3980)	(N=198)	(N=111)	(N=7332)
SKILL TRAINING	36.3	37.7	28.8	24.3	35.4
MONEY FOR COLLEGE	7.0	9.2	17.7	7.2	9.0
TO BETTER MYSELF IN LIFE	28.3	27.3	37.9	34.2	28.0
SERVE MY COUNTRY	13.6	9.4	7.6	16.2	10.0

SOURCE: 1979 DOD SURVEY OF PERSONNEL ENTERING MILITARY SERVICE

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interest in military service view it as a job where they can learn, develop and advance while enjoying a high degree of job security. To achieve these job goals, they are willing to make some sacrifices in the areas of job enjoyment, income, and employer good will, which they feel would more likely be found in civilian jobs.

The negative propensity group apparently agrees that the Services are more likely to provide job security and skill training. However, they feel that opportunities for advancement and development of potential are more likely to be found in civilian jobs.

In the survey report, the authors point out that, "over time these attitudes and perceptions have remained fairly constant, though in the past year negative propensity males have come to regard 'teaches a valuable trade/skill' as one of the more desired job characteristics. This might reflect perceptions of an increasingly competitive job market and the consequent greater need to obtain practical vocational training" (Market Facts, Inc., 1982).

Surveys of Personnel Entering Military Service

With the DoD Surveys of Personnel Entering Military Service the focus shifts from eligible youths to those who have just been sworn into the Service at an AFES in-processing center. My discussion of the AFES surveys will be based on data from the 1979 survey.

The 1979 AFES Survey was administered in two waves, one in the spring and one in the fall. Two forms were used with each wave, and they were modified between waves, so there were four forms in all. All eligible non-prior service males and females were sampled for a 20-day period. The two versions of the form were distributed on an every-other-person basis. There were between seven and eight thousand respondents for each form.

Respondents were asked to indicate the one MOST important reason for their enlisting in the Service. In Forms 1 and 3 the response options were listed in the same order, but for Forms 2 and 4 the order was reversed to test for order effects. The results for each pair of forms in which responses were listed in the same order were quite similar; however, a pronounced order effect shows up when results are compared across variations. This effect is particularly noticeable in the two most frequently mentioned reasons for enlisting. It can be seen quite clearly in the data for the total sample, which I've presented in Table 2 for both Forms 1 and 2. (Because of space limitations, I've omitted data for Forms 3 and 4 since they were similar to the data for their like-ordered counterparts.) In addition to data for the combined sample, Table 2 shows the top four reasons for enlistment by four educational level sub-groups.

For Form 1, SKILL TRAINING is the second most frequently cited reason for enlisting, coming after TO BETTER MYSELF IN LIFE, which appeared above SKILL TRAINING in the list of options. The results for Form 2 are just the reverse, as was the order of the response options, with SKILL TRAINING clearly leading the list. This effect is less pronounced for other reasons for enlisting.

In spite of the order effect, SKILL TRAINING makes a strong showing in these data. If you cancel out the order effect by combining Form 1 and Form 2 data, about a third of the respondents across forms said it was the main inducement to enlistment. TO BETTER MYSELF IN LIFE was also selected by about one-third of the respondents to Forms 1 and 2 combined. "TO BETTER MYSELF IN LIFE" is a rather vague statement though, and it obviously means different things to different people. It would not be unreasonable to assume that training and education comprise a major component of this concept for some people.

The data on reasons for enlistment become more interesting when their relation to level of education is examined. The appeal of SKILL TRAINING generally declines as a function of increased educational attainment. MONEY FOR COLLEGE follows a more distinct pattern, increasing in importance as a reason for enlisting for those with up to two years of college, then falling back sharply for those with four-year degrees.

Patriotism, or SERVE MY COUNTRY, is a surprisingly powerful incentive according to these data. It is the third most commonly cited reason for enlisting, and, somewhat counter-intuitively, it takes a big leap in importance for four-year college graduates.

The conclusions of the author of an unpublished paper on the 1974 AFES Survey summarize well the major findings from this entire series. He reported that, "without any doubt, the main reason given for entering the Service was to obtain job training. This is true for all ages, races, sexes, branches of the Service and regions of the country" (Giesecke, 1976).

The National Longitudinal Survey

The Youth Cohort of the National Longitudinal Survey of Labor Force Experience began in 1979 with a sample of 12,000 youth age 14 to 22, including 1,200 military members, and has been repeated each year since then. Sponsored by the Department of Labor, with substantial contributions from the Department of Defense, the NLS Youth Cohort provides an invaluable source of information on enlistment and on the military and post-military careers of service members.

An analysis of 1980 NLS data (Kim, 1982b) emphasizes the importance of training, education, and more broadly, personal development among the reasons for enlisting given by respondents in the military. Training, a desire to better oneself, and money for college education are most frequently cited as the main reason for enlisting.

1980 National Longitudinal Survey (NLS)
Main Reason for Enlisting
(1979 Enlistees)

	<u>% of Enlistees</u>
Training for civilian job	28
Better myself in life	20
Money for college education	15
Travel	9
Was unemployed	8
Serve my country	7
Get away from home	6
Prove myself	5
Earn more money than on civilian job	1
Get away from personal problem	.6
Family tradition to serve	.2
Retirement/fringe benefits	.2

These data are supported by the 1981 Survey of Military Applicants, conducted as a complement to the DoD Educational Benefits Experiment of 1980. In a preliminary analysis of the Applicants data, Rand researchers find a clear relation between the probability of enlistment and the need for money to finance education: the greater the need, the greater the tendency among (in this case, high quality) applicants to actually enlist.

Enlistment Rate by Financial Need
(High Quality Applicants)

	Additional Amount Needed to Continue Education				
	<u>\$0</u>	<u>\$1-\$1000</u>	<u>\$1001-2000</u>	<u>\$2001-3000</u>	<u>\$3000+</u>
Enlistment Rate	43%	52%	59%	60%	65%
(N)	(404)	(239)	(290)	(252)	(182)

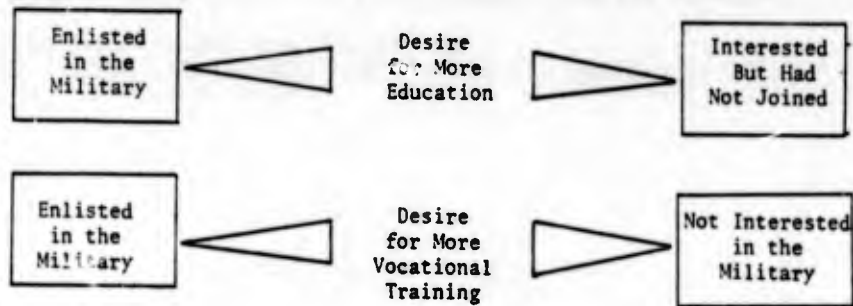
In another analysis of NLS data, Kim (1982a) assesses the role of training and education as they affect the principal choices facing high school graduates: college, other civilian pursuits, or the military. Employing multiple logit methods, Kim finds that educational aspirations and the desire for vocational training are powerful predictors of the outcome of this decision process. Male youth who have the highest educational aspirations tend to go on to college. "However," Kim notes, "when the choice is either the military or a noncollege civilian pursuit, an individual with a higher educational desire has a higher probability of choosing the armed forces," and it is a reasonable inference that a need for money to finance higher education is a factor in this decision.

The foregoing might seem to suggest that educational benefits should be increased as the supply of potential recruits dwindles in the coming years. However, Friedland and Little (1982), in an interesting analysis of National Longitudinal Survey data, argue the contrary.

The authors use discriminant analysis to identify the variables which best distinguish among three groups of respondents - military members, youth who had talked to recruiters but had not enlisted at the time of the survey, and those who had never talked to recruiters.

For white males, the variable which most clearly distinguishes those in the military from those who were interested but had not joined is educational aspirations; the variable which most clearly distinguishes the military group from the not-interested group is desire for vocational training. In both cases, those in the military have the greater desire.

1979 NLS
 Best Discriminating Variables:
 Desire for More Education and Training



"In short," Friedland and Little observe, "variables reflecting a desire for self-improvement distinguish those in the military from those not in the military, and particularly . . . from those not in the military who considered at some time joining. . ."

Looking at the means for each group we see that the military group has the highest educational aspirations, and those who were interested but had not enlisted have the lowest. The military group also shows the greatest desire for vocational training, though the "interested-but-had-not-joined" group occupies an intermediate position between the military and the "not-interested" groups. Those in the intermediate group show a fair amount of desire for vocational training.

1979 NLS
 Educational Aspirations and Desire
 for Vocational Training: Mean Scores

	<u>Not Interested in the Military</u>	<u>Interested but Did Not Join</u>	<u>Enlisted in the Military</u>	<u>Significance of F Test</u>
Educational Aspiration Scale (0-5)	3.01	2.72	3.36	F .01
Desire for Vocational Training (0-1)	.58	.75	.86	F .01

From these analyses Friedland and Little conclude that increased educational benefits may be of limited value at best, because those who find them attractive have already joined, while those who expressed interest in the military but did not join are apparently not much motivated by educational aspirations. We may further note that the recent cutbacks in federal student loans and grants are likely to increase the number of youth who aspire to higher education but cannot afford college. This should improve the drawing power of the military's educational benefits program at its present level. An increased emphasis on training, we infer from the findings above, might produce some incremental gains, inasmuch as the "interested" group shows some desire for training, but again, those with the most desire are already in the Services.

While the Friedland and Little study is interesting and provocative, it leaves some important questions unanswered. For one thing, while we can see that the "interested" group has the lowest educational aspirations of the three, we cannot tell from this analysis what priority they give to education. Even if their level of aspiration is lower than that of military members, it may still be enough to warrant increased educational benefits. Second, we do not know what the youth in the "interested" group are doing and why did they decided to follow some other path. How valid is the implicit assumption that because they have talked to military recruiters they should be regarded as good potential source of accessions? Some must have applied for the military and been rejected; what proportion of the sample do they comprise? These and related questions pertaining to this significant group of youth are currently the focus of analysis at the Defense Manpower Data Center.

In summary, the specific desire for training, and a broader desire for personal development -- through training, education, and experience -- seem to be the mainsprings of motivation to enlist, according to surveys over the last decade or more. From these studies it appears that for a great many youth the Services, like the colleges and junior colleges, represent a period of maturation and preparation for adulthood.

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