

Veterans' Education

Military Service and Degree Attainment

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Introduction

People in the United States place a great deal of emphasis on equality and mobility as a way to live out the American dream. Many Americans believe they have access to the resources that give everyone a chance at upward mobility. In the current job market in the US, more and more emphasis is being placed on college-level education. Any potential barrier to a higher education is then worth studying. One potential barrier is service in the military. Veterans have received little attention in the research on educational attainment, and face a different set of challenges than their civilian counterparts. Veterans are socialized into a different lifestyle with a different set of norms, and then when their service is over they are asked to reintegrate back into normal society. My research will compare the male veterans' and civilians' educational attainment.

Hypothesis: Years of military service will be negatively correlated with educational attainment, controlling for father's education.

- Research would suggest that veterans face different barriers and a different culture, thereby having a different life course experience than non-veterans.

Data

- GSS cumulative data file 1972 – 2008
- Random cluster sample representative of the United States adult population
- Sample size: N = 9,965
- Age range 18 - 89+; M = 44.23 years
- Limited sample to males with high school degree or greater. This is because there were few female respondents that had military service, and the US

military service requires at least the equivalent to a high school degree.

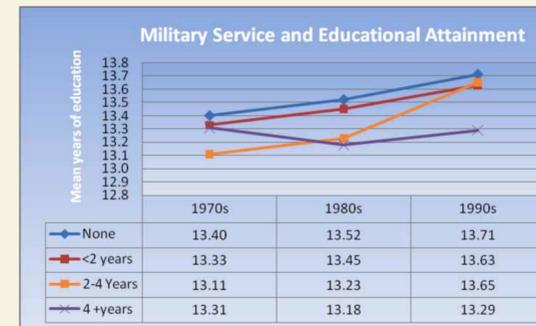
Variables

- **Dependent:** Highest degree earned (converted to typical number of years to reach each degree).
- **Independent:** Years of military service; Father's highest degree earned (converted to years to reach degree).
- **Controls:**
 - o Age
 - o Race (White, Non-White)
 - o Decade the survey was conducted (it is likely that the average educational attainment is increasing for everyone over time)
- Both veterans and civilians look to be increasing education.

Variables	%	M	SD
Years of Military Service			
None	59		
< 2 years	9		
2-4 years	24		
> 4 years	8		
Respondent's Educational Attainment		13.44	2.16
Father's educational attainment		13.34	2.18
Age		44.23	17.17
Race			
White	86		
Non-White	14		

Variable	Model 1			Model 2			Model 3		
	B	SE B	β	B	SE B	β	B	SE B	β
Race	-0.18	0.244	-0.021	-0.099	0.161	-0.012	-0.077	0.16	-0.009
Decade 1970s ¹	-0.118	0.129	-0.022	-0.004	0.124	-0.001	0.1	0.125	0.019
Decade 1980s ¹	-0.049	0.113	-0.011	0.034	0.109	-0.007	-0.009	0.109	-0.002
Age	0.035	0.003	.206***	0.036	0.003	.211***	0.042	0.003	0.2518
Father's Education				0.274	0.02	.261***	0.267	0.02	.255***
Years of Military Service							-0.233	0.046	-.105***
R ²		0.044			0.112			0.121	
F		28.687*			62.383*			56.765*	

¹ Comparison Decade 1990s
*p<.05 **p<.01 *** p<.001



- The only group that is gaining ground on non-veterans is the 2–4 years service group.
- While this gap may be growing, it isn't large, less than one year difference at the widest point.

Future Directions

- There is very little data on veterans their education, and their life-course after the military.
- The gap between veterans' and non veterans' educational attainment is likely bigger than it appears because there is no differentiation in these data between officers (who must have a degree before joining the military) and enlisted (who may not). Future directions should look at officers and enlisted individuals separately.
- How does family service in the military affect degree attainment and likelihood of entering the military?
- Is there a difference between individuals on active duty and those in the reserve branches in educational attainment?
- While cross-sectional data can help us establish a trend, longitudinal information could help determine causality.

Conclusion

Years of military service explains a small amount of variance in the educational attainment of the sample even when holding father's education constant. Future research should examine the motivations for those entering the military, the goals of those leaving the military, and where those veterans end up. A study like this could help us understand what influence military service has on the life course. This way we as a society can be better prepared for the challenges this group faces when reintegrating back into normal society.



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