

The Long-Term Impact of Extended Military Service on Women's Employment, Education, and Fertility

Abstract

Military service has been found to have significant consequences for conscripts' employment, education, and other life outcomes, as it affects young people in a crucial phase of their lives. Previous research has extensively examined the impact of military service on men. However, we know little about how it may affect women. Exploiting an exogenous change in the length of women's mandatory service in Israel as a natural experiment, I estimate the long-term effect of extended military service on women's education, fertility, and labor market outcomes. At the time of the policy change, women were excluded from combat duty and fulfilled roles that resembled employment in the civilian labor market. In addition, the service required women to temporarily delay education and motherhood, focusing solely on their professional duties while serving. Thus, studying the implications of mandatory service for women offers insights into a policy that provides a full-time employment-like experience at a young age. Based on data from the 1962 and 1971 censuses, I find that each additional year of service leads to a persistent and positive impact on women's labor force participation, increasing it by 18% at age 27 and 12% at age 38. Furthermore, serving longer increases women's probability of attending higher education in the short run, but this effect vanishes over time. Finally, longer service induces women to postpone motherhood without altering their total fertility.