
ANALYSIS OF SWEDISH YOUTH ATTITUDE TOWARDS COMPULSORY MILITARY SERVICE

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DOI: 10.13165/PSPO-25-37-03-01

Abstract. Geopolitical tensions stemming from conflicts and the escalating application of military action in specific locations are rendering the assurance of national security a primary priority for nations. In response to these problems, numerous countries are evaluating optimal preparations for future threats, with one aspect of this plan being the revitalisation and enhancement of military composition. Recruiting young individuals for compulsory military service is crucial for maintaining national security and ensuring the continuity of military personnel. Young individuals possess the potential to become productive members of the armed forces, since their physical talents and cognitive adaptability can swiftly align with military requirements. The aim of the article is to analyse the attitudes and motivations of Swedish adolescents towards compulsory military service. The study utilises correlation-regression analysis. The survey was conducted remotely in Sweden. Participants were chosen using purposive sampling, ensuring they fulfilled the study criteria: Swedish nationals aged 18-29 who are now or have previously completed compulsory military service. A total of 102 respondents were contacted. The research indicates that adolescents' motivation to choose compulsory military service is affected by personal goals, social environment, and information dissemination methods. Furthermore, it has been noted that in Sweden, young individuals are more inclined to enlist in military service for pragmatic motivations, patriotism, and career prospects.

Keywords: compulsory military service, Generation Z, Sweden, motivation

Introduction

In the 21st century, the world faces new security challenges that require modern solutions. The changing geopolitical situation, technological advances, and hybrid threats are forcing countries to rethink their defence strategies and methods of forming their armed forces. Countries located close to higher-risk areas, including Lithuania, are rapidly increasing their military personnel as a basis for defence. Therefore, in order to ensure national security, especially in the event of a threat of war, it is becoming increasingly important to attract young people to the military. However, under the current circumstances, with the war in Ukraine and aggression from countries such as Russia and Belarus, this task is becoming more difficult. Young people need to be shown the value and importance of compulsory service in preparing for external threats, when civilian alternatives such as starting a business or greater freedom in choosing a career seem more attractive (Fransen, 2019). It has been observed that young people who volunteer are more motivated than those who serve under compulsory service. Young people who choose to serve voluntarily tend to be more committed and motivated because they have consciously decided to join the military. This leads to better results in training, higher morale, and greater readiness to cope with the challenges of service. This subject has been extensively examined internationally by Österberg et al. (2020), Strand (2024), Holcner et al. (2021), among others. Österberg et al. (2020) found three primary categories of variables

motivating youth in Sweden and Norway to enlist in the armed forces: military career prospects, international deployments, and service conditions along with socio-economic incentives. Strand (2024) analysed the reinstatement of compulsory military service in Sweden and its evolution in the modern setting. The redesigned system prioritises voluntarism, individual capabilities, and gender equality, so differentiating itself from the conventional citizen-soldier model. Holcner et al. (2021) analysed the influence of economic variables, including the labour market, gross domestic product (GDP), unemployment rate, and military expenditure, on the enlistment of youth in the military. Research indicates that in improved economic conditions, attracting young individuals to compulsory or voluntary service becomes increasingly challenging, as civilian employment prospects appear more appealing. The study indicated that elevated military earnings relative to civilian salaries positively influence soldier recruitment. The aim of the article is to analyse the attitudes and motivations of Swedish adolescents towards compulsory military service.

Literature review

The concept of compulsory military service and motives of youth to join military service

One of the primary means of ensuring national security and fostering a sense of civic duty is compulsory military service (Barany, 2018). This service, essential to the defence system in numerous nations, represents individuals' dedication to the collective welfare and the preservation of peace. Its core is manifested not only in military readiness but also in a broader context—the personal development of youth and societal security. Following the conclusion of the Cold War, most European nations diminished their military capabilities and defence expenditures. From 1990 to 2013, up to 24 countries entirely eliminated conscription, influenced by the general perception that the risk of conflict was negligible (Kazlauskienė, 2024). In response to Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014, Lithuania reinstated conscription in 2015 (Kojala & Keršanskas, 2015). Compulsory military service can be regarded as a strategy to safeguard the state and guarantee its security. During Russia's military invasion of Ukraine, which commenced in 2022, the Russian army comprised both conscripts and professional soldiers tasked with defending the state and, in certain instances, expanding its territory. Under these conditions, the impetus for nations to reintroduce conscription is amplified, as it is a validated and efficacious method of self-defence (Kazlauskienė, 2024).

Compulsory military service is frequently regarded as a mechanism for assuring national defence, as well as a significant instrument for enhancing social cohesion and fostering civic awareness (Barany, 2018). The advantages of compulsory service can be categorised into five dimensions. *Ensuring national security*. Compulsory military service ensures that the state has enough trained soldiers ready to defend the country from potential threats. This contributes to a permanent military reserve that can be quickly mobilized in extreme situations (Kenstavičienė, 2015). *Fostering citizenship and social responsibility*. Participation in compulsory military service helps young people understand the importance of defending their country and promotes citizenship, discipline, and responsibility (Barany, 2018). This is a social value that unites citizens around a common goal—the protection of the state (Obinger et al., 2020). *Social integration*. Service brings together young people from different social strata and regions, promoting mutual understanding, communication, and cooperation. This helps to reduce social exclusion and strengthen national unity. *Personal development*. Military service provides an opportunity to acquire new skills such as leadership, discipline, teamwork, physical fitness, and stress resistance. These skills are valuable not only in the military but also in civilian

life. *Career opportunities*. Those who have completed compulsory military service can continue their career in the military, become professional soldiers, or join the voluntary non-regular military service. This provides additional career prospects and opportunities.

The desire of youth to enlist in the military is significant both historically and contemporaneously, as it directly influences soldiers' dedication and efficacy. Throughout history, military commanders have endeavoured to maintain the motivation of both fresh recruits and seasoned soldiers (Binková & Štěpánková, 2023). Research indicates that persons who opt for voluntary duty tend to have greater motivation than conscripts, for whom military service is mandated by law. Consequently, suitable motivational strategies are crucial for sustaining the preparedness and efficacy of the armed forces. This serves as both the foundation for action and an intrinsic motivator that propels an individual towards their objectives.

Sweden's military structure, and integration into NATO

The Swedish defence system has undergone constant change, adapting to the changing geopolitical situation. Since 1814, Sweden has pursued a policy of neutrality, avoiding military alliances and direct involvement in military conflicts. This policy allowed the country to remain on the sidelines during the First and Second World Wars. However, with the end of the Cold War and the emergence of new security threats, Sweden began to review its doctrine of neutrality (Winnerstig, 2014). In 1995, the country joined the European Union. However, in the 21st century, due to the changed geopolitical situation, especially Russia's aggression against Ukraine and growing tensions in the Baltic region, Sweden has once again reviewed its security policy and gradually moved away from traditional neutrality. In 2022, in response to Russia's invasion of Ukraine, Sweden made the historic decision to forsake its neutrality, which had persisted for over 200 years, and to formally pursue NATO membership (Brommesson et al., 2022). This represented a pivotal alteration in Swedish security strategy in the 21st century, motivated not solely by military threats but also by the necessity for regional defence collaboration. On March 7, 2024, Sweden formally joined NATO as its 32nd member. The Swedish government officially announced its decision to join NATO in response to the altered geopolitical landscape following the dissolution of the Soviet Union, intending to enhance its security and collaboration with other democratic nations. This decision signifies a pivotal transformation in Sweden's foreign and security policy, transitioning from neutrality to active engagement in collective defence. The Swedish Armed Forces are responsible for the country's defence and for fulfilling its international commitments. They consist of three main branches: the Army, the Air Force, and the Navy. The active personnel of SAF, comprising professional officers, permanent group leaders, soldiers, and sailors, totals 15,400, a rather small figure that indicates a restricted availability of manpower, potentially prompting the reintroduction of compulsory military service. Women constitute 9,600 members of the whole armed forces, the majority of whom have civilian positions (4,100 women). The majority of the personnel consists of National Guard contractors — 22,200 soldiers who serve in voluntary territorial defence groups tasked with safeguarding strategic assets and rapidly addressing crises. Eligibility for membership requires Swedish citizenship, completion of basic military training, and the signing of a contract with the armed forces, obligating participation in regular training sessions several weeks year. Members serve voluntarily, maintain civilian employment, but can be mobilised within 24 hours if required. The overall military manpower, excluding civilian employees, is 49,400, indicating that Sweden has a hybrid defence paradigm integrating professional forces, reserves, and volunteers. In 2024, Sweden, upon joining NATO, pledged to allocate a minimum of 2% of its GDP to defence expenditures. Compulsory military service

was instituted in Sweden in 1901, supplanting the prior system. The new system mandated military service for all men aged 21 to 40 to bolster the nation's defence capabilities. In 2010, the Swedish Parliament resolved to discontinue compulsory military service during peacetime, asserting that a voluntary army would adequately suffice for national defence. In 2017, the government reinstated compulsory military service to address challenges in recruiting military personnel and to enhance national defence capabilities amid a declining security situation in Europe (Jäckle, 2023; Brommesson et al., 2022). The circumstances in the Swedish region could no longer be safeguarded just by voluntary enlistment and professional military forces (Österberg, 2018). At that time, it was unfeasible to satisfy the military equipment requirements solely through voluntary means; the army was understaffed, numerous critical jobs were vacant, and troops frequently had to undertake multiple responsibilities simultaneously (Strand, 2024). Following the revision of the Swedish conscription system, it now encompasses all citizens aged 16 to 70, mandating their participation in national defence readiness. Upon reaching the age of 18, individuals must submit information regarding their health and personal attributes through an online questionnaire. According to the material obtained, certain young individuals are summoned to conscription centres, where they undertake medical, physical, and psychological evaluations to assess their eligibility for military duty. Compulsory military duty ranges from 6 to 15 months, contingent upon the designated role and specialisation. During this interval, conscripts acquire weapon proficiency, enhance tactical abilities, and improve physical fitness. Upon successful completion of their service, individuals may be designated to specific roles in the case of conflict and, if required, summoned for further training or exercises. Sweden offers a civil service option for anyone unable to fulfil military service due to religious or personal convictions. Civil service entails employment throughout diverse civil entities, aiding in public safety and welfare. Moreover, under extraordinary conditions, all individual residents in Sweden may be obligated to undertake general service to maintain the operation of important public services during crises or wartime. These responsibilities may encompass many tasks aligned with the individual's professional competencies, like water supply, childcare, or food production. This system guarantees that Sweden possesses a ready and trained populace capable of contributing to the nation's defence and security in multiple capacities. Military duty in Sweden is recognised as a legal obligation requiring citizens to defend their nation with arms (Strand, 2024). Military personnel not only develop defensive capabilities but also integrate into a cohesive national community, embodying its essence. Conscripts are trained not only for combat and military operations but also in skills, attributes, and conduct that align with the criteria of a respected citizen. Compulsory military service might thus be regarded as a ritual—a recurrent assurance that the military will transform adolescents into men. Narratives of citizen-soldiers have imbued conscription with significance that transcends the confines of the military labour system (Strand, 2024). The incorporation of the SAF into society diminished with the cessation of compulsory military service in 2010. A study (Wallenius et al., 2019) indicated that during the period of 2013–2014 the SAF are experiencing diminishing public interest, restricted understanding of military operations, and ambiguous political communication. Support for the SAF remains comparatively robust, however confidence in defence policy is diminished. A divide exists between civilian and military domains, accompanied by a deficit of confidence between military and political leaders, which obstructs public engagement in defence matters (Wallenius et al., 2019). It can be stated that Sweden's shift to voluntary service has been ineffective, as it has significantly alienated the SAF from society, and public sentiment influences the decisions of individual youths. A persistent issue noted is the absence of information. A new discussion on compulsory military service emerged in Sweden following its reimplementation in 2017. It examines how the government and

military portrayed the conscription system as contemporary, equitable, and socially acceptable. The primary elements (Strand, 2024), are as follows: *Voluntary and compulsory aspects*. Despite conscription being compulsory, it is portrayed as fundamentally reliant on voluntariness and motivation. Conscription is deemed essential solely in the absence of sufficient volunteers. This enables the system to align with Sweden's neoliberal policy, which prioritises individual choice. *Individualism versus collectivism*. Compulsory service is not depicted as an element of national identity or communal civic responsibility. Rather, education is highlighted as an opportunity for personal growth and the attainment of significant skills that may be advantageous in the job market. *Gender equality*. The conscription system was made gender-neutral, incorporating women into military duty. This was portrayed as a contemporary and progressive advancement, bolstering Sweden's reputation as a nation dedicated to equality (Kasearu, et al., 2020). *The government's prudent stance on compulsory service*. The administration and armed forces were compelled to promote voluntary service to minimise involuntary conscription. Military personnel were urged to depict service as a professional opportunity rather than a civic obligation. In 2017, for the first time in Swedish history, women were conscripted for military duty alongside men of the same age, undertaking same responsibilities. Strand (2024), examined the restoration and perception of military conscription in Sweden, contends that gender is a "antiquated" selection factor. Her research underscores the purposeful utilisation of images of female conscripts in the communication channels of defence organisations to secure public endorsement for compulsory military service. The equal treatment of women and men is regarded as an innovation and is highlighted as a significant advancement warranting especial emphasis in public discourse. Sweden has engaged youth in the military via contemporary recruitment initiatives designed to address the requirements of various social demographics. Stern and Strand (2024) highlight the following principal youth recruitment strategies:

Utilisation of personal narratives. The campaigns showcased actual soldiers discussing their military experiences, emphasising the obstacles encountered, personal development, and self-actualization. This method fostered an emotional bond with prospective recruits by prompting them to resonate with the soldiers' narratives. *Highlighting diversity and inclusiveness*. Diverse social groups engaged in the initiatives, including women, LGBTQ+ individuals, and youth of immigrant descent. Military service is depicted as a setting in which individuals can experience acceptance irrespective of their social or ethnic backgrounds (Stern & Strand, 2024). *Promotion of social accountability and civic obligation*. In many narratives, particularly those involving troops of immigrant descent, military service is shown as a means to "repay the debt" to Sweden for the possibilities it has afforded. *Promise of personal growth and self-actualization*. The narratives of soldiers highlight how the military facilitated the surmounting of phobias, the enhancement of self-confidence, and the acquisition of new abilities. *An alternative to the conventional life trajectory*. The advertisements motivated youth to contemplate the military as a means of discovering their direction, particularly for those who felt adrift or alienated from conventional culture. *Nature integrated into service*. In several narratives, military service is depicted as a means to flee urban life, explore the natural world, and attain a deeper connection to the authentic essence of Sweden. SAF employs the following strategies to recruit for compulsory military service. *Advertising initiatives and public discourse*. The SAF conduct diverse advertising campaigns throughout social media, traditional media, and official military websites, highlighting the personal advantages of military service. The portrayal of soldiers underscores that the primary emphasis is on individual growth rather than attaining communal advantages. *Career development and training initiatives*. Soldiers receive career planning programs, encompassing individual counselling and personal

development plans, to assist them in strategising their future in both military and civilian contexts. These initiatives enhance motivation, impart essential skills, and contribute to troops' sense of worth. *Collaboration with the private sector.* The military collaborates with the corporate sector to facilitate soldiers' reintegration into the civilian labour market, highlighting the talents possessed by troops as advantageous to companies. This cooperation model promotes the perception of military service among youth as a means to acquire valuable skills and enhance their competitiveness in the employment market. *Personal branding.* Young individuals are instructed on enhancing their self-presentation and skills, are equipped to compose CVs, and emphasise the attributes gained via military experience, underscoring their worth for future professional advancements.

Motivation of young people to join the military

The desire of youth to join in the military has consistently been significant, as it directly influences troops' dedication and efficacy. Throughout history, military commanders have endeavoured to maintain the motivation of both fresh recruits and seasoned soldiers (Binková & Štěpánková, 2023). Research indicates that persons who choose for voluntary duty tend to have greater motivation than conscripts, who are compelled to serve by legal mandate. Consequently, suitable motivational strategies are crucial for sustaining the preparedness and efficacy of the armed forces. This serves as both the foundation for action and a natural drive that propels an individual towards their objectives. The primary motive for soldiers to enlist in the military is pragmatic, specifically to get military knowledge and practical abilities. Nonetheless, some enlist due to compulsory conscription. It may be inferred that the majority of soldiers perceive military service as a means for self-improvement and skill acquisition, whilst some are compelled to serve owing to its obligatory nature. A small percentage of individuals enlist for patriotic motivations, suggesting a deficiency in civic engagement or a diminished sense of patriotism in contemporary society. In this instance, it would be prudent to enhance civic knowledge and patriotic ideals to elevate their significance in the motivational process. The education system and public discourse should highlight both the individual advantages of service and the personal obligation towards national security. A minority of the population elects to enlist in the military forces due to financial incentives, unemployment, or a perceived decrease in responsibilities. Analysis of soldiers' motivations for enlisting in the army reveals that the primary elements influencing this decision are the attainment of military capabilities and the prospect of self-actualization. These factors are crucial for determining military service (Vileikiénė et al., 2015). Baltutytė's (2019) study reveals that young people's motivation to serve depends on their personal values, expectations, and perception of the benefits of service. According to various studies, young people's motivation is based not only on patriotism but also on practical goals, such as the opportunity to acquire military skills or better career prospects. Volunteers are more motivated than those who serve under compulsory service, but both face similar challenges: monotonous tasks, shortcomings in the motivation system, and limited incentives. This shows that modern defence institutions need to look for innovative methods and measures to encourage young people to join the military. It is therefore important to study the methods used by other countries to attract young people to compulsory military service in order to identify effective measures that will enable states to better prepare for potential military conflicts. The arrangement of service is distinctly illogical and unengaging. This suggests that the army encounters issues such as inadequate personnel management and diminished motivation, which could adversely impact troops' commitment and contentment with their service (Vileikiénė et al., 2015). Inadequate compensation is a

critical issue, as previously noted, Generation Z individuals often exert modest effort while anticipating substantial rewards, yet the military demands considerable commitment from all members (Tidhar, 2021). Elevated stress levels also lead to a reduction in motivation, perhaps resulting in long-term implications for soldier retention. In this instance, it is crucial to prioritise the enhancement of service conditions, particularly through the modernisation of equipment, as the current generation of youth is significantly orientated towards technology. Additionally, ensuring that soldiers feel appreciated and motivated could augment their engagement and the quality of their performance (Sankauskienė, 2016).

The readiness of citizens to defend their country is significant, as it reflects their civic spirit and commitment to national defence.

Based on literature review four hypothesis have been developed:

H1: Financial incentives have a positive effect on motivating young people to join in compulsory military service in Sweden.

H2: Family has a positive effect on young people's decision to join in compulsory military service.

H3: Friends have a positive effect on young people's decision to join in compulsory military service.

H4: Public opinion has a positive effect on young people's decision to join in compulsory military service.

Methodology

Research instrument

The research employs a quantitative methodology, utilising an online electronic survey. The examination of quantitative data is organised based on the structure and coherence of the questionnaire. The quantitative research method is advantageous as it facilitates the generalisation of responses from a substantial cohort of participants (Barella et al. 2024). It facilitates the comparison of several responder groups based on demographic parameters such as age, gender, or residence, and assesses the impact of these factors on motivation. The quantitative method enables the modelling of data and the prediction of the relevance of specific indicators (Barella et al. 2024). The electronic questionnaire aims to assess the motivations of youth in the Swedish Armed Forces and the strategies implemented to encourage their participation in compulsory military service. Structured questionnaire prepared in accordance with the research aim. The questionnaire was formulated based on scientific research regarding youth motivation (Baltutytė, 2022; Strand & Berndtsson, 2015; Pocienė, 2018), public perceptions of the military and recruitment tactics (Strand & Berndtsson, 2015; Pocienė, 2018), in addition to prior studies.

The survey comprises three primary elements. The initial component comprises socio-demographic enquiries regarding the respondents' gender, age, education, and employment status. These enquiries assist in delineating the study's target demographic and facilitate the analysis of data based on several characteristics. The second group of items addresses motivation and experience in military duty, analysing the primary motivating elements that influenced respondents to select compulsory military service, their individual experiences during service, and their readiness to defend their nation. An analysis of the Swedish public's perception of troops and the military is conducted. The third component pertains to recruitment strategies and competencies developed throughout service. In this section, respondents evaluate

the abilities they developed and the services they received during their service, and provide their perspectives on tactics for recruiting individuals into the army and enhancing the proposed measures. The justification for the questionnaire is also presented. The research was carried out anonymously to safeguard respondent confidentiality and maintain data dependability. A Likert scale was employed to evaluate respondents' attitudes, with responses ranging from 1 to 5: 1 – strongly agree, 2 – agree, 3 – neither agree nor disagree, 4 – disagree, 5 – strongly disagree.

The data gathered in this investigation undergone quantitative analysis procedures. The Cronbach Alpha coefficient was computed for the complete questionnaire to assess its reliability (Kline, 1998). The research organization process was divided into several stages. First, based on theoretical literature and previous studies, a structured questionnaire was developed. The questionnaire was created on the website www.apklausa.lt in English to make it easier for Swedish citizens. An electronic link to the questionnaire was shared on social networks (Facebook, Instagram, and WhatsApp) and distributed by email to representatives of the Swedish Defence University and military institutions. The survey began on 16th January 2025 and was completed on 11th February 2025. In total, the collection of responses from respondents took 26 days. Respondents were selected using a targeted sampling method to ensure that they met the criteria for the survey: Swedish citizens aged 18–29 who are performing or have already completed compulsory military service. The survey data is analysed according to the structure and consistency of the questionnaire questions.

The survey is conducted in accordance with basic ethical principles. Participation in the survey was voluntary, and all data was collected and processed anonymously. Anonymity means that no data revealing the identity of individuals will be collected or disclosed.

However, the study had several limitations. First, the main challenge was to reach the target group of respondents, i.e., Swedish conscripts currently performing compulsory military service. As the questionnaire was designed for use on a survey platform, email and social media (Facebook, Instagram, and WhatsApp) were chosen as the dissemination channels. Another limitation concerns the objectivity of the survey results. As an online survey was used, the respondents' participation depended on their willingness and motivation to participate in the study. Some potential respondents may not have been interested or may have missed the opportunity to complete the survey, which limited the final number of survey participants. Finally, the quality of the survey results depended on the sincerity and accuracy of the respondents' answers. Subjective answers, caution, or unwillingness to share personal opinions may have influenced the data collected and its interpretation.

Sample

The study comprised 102 participants, including 76 men (74.5%), 21 women (24.5%), and 1 individual (1%) identifying as another gender. The increased male participation in the study may be attributed to the historical orientation of compulsory military service in Sweden towards men, despite recent years saw the conscription of both genders. The participation of students from the Swedish Defence University in the study may account for the elevated male representation in the sample, since military courses often garner greater male interest. The age distribution of responses indicates that the predominant group is aged 22–25, comprising 55 individuals (53.9%), which represents over half of all participants. The second largest demographic comprises respondents aged 18–21, totalling 27 individuals (26.5%), who represent a substantial portion of the sample. The 26–29 age cohort comprises 12 respondents (11.8%), whereas the least represented demographic is individuals aged 29 and above, totalling 8 respondents (7.8%). This distribution aligns with the age thresholds for compulsory military

service, suggesting that the sample represents the primary demographic of the armed forces. The survey respondents reside in diverse regions of Sweden. The Northern region comprises the biggest proportion of responders at 27%, whereas the Central region accounts for the smallest share at 11%. Participants from the Southern region constitute 25% of the overall sample, those from the Eastern region represent 24%, and those from the Western region comprise 13%. The statistics indicate that participants from various regions of Sweden engaged in the survey, enabling the evaluation of potential regional disparities. Given that compulsory military duty is implemented nationwide, it is essential for the poll to encompass a geographically diversified array of respondents. This approach aligns the survey data more closely with national data, as respondents are geographically dispersed and have served in various units. An examination of the distribution of respondents based on their conscription experience reveals that the majority responded affirmatively—98 respondents (96.1%), indicating that nearly all participants had firsthand experience with compulsory military service. This distribution verifies that the survey aligns with the purpose of interviewing individuals who have completed or are presently undertaking compulsory military service. It is noteworthy that one respondent did not provide a response, potentially indicating an inadvertent omission or hesitance to address the topic. Nonetheless, the prevalence of affirmative responses substantiates that the data is exceptionally appropriate for examining the experience of compulsory military service and motivating influences.

An evaluation of the distribution of respondents' occupational status indicates that a significant majority, 82.4% are students. The labour market participation rate is markedly diminished: 8.8% reported present employment, whilst 5.9% are unemployed. The labour market participation rate is markedly diminished: 8.8% reported present employment, whilst 5.9% balance job with academic pursuits. Simultaneously, merely 1% reported that they are neither students nor employed at present. This distribution indicates that the sample predominantly comprises persons from an academic setting. Students can deliver more proficient responses owing to their advanced education and enhanced comprehension of the national defence framework and the military's function. Students frequently possess enhanced analytical thinking skills, enabling them to evaluate compulsory military service from both strategic and social viewpoints. The proportion of employed respondents is notably smaller, since the majority of students has a well-defined future plan centred on their academic and professional advancement, resulting in a diminished likelihood of engaging in supplementary employment.

Results and discussion

The research focused whether the respondents' attitude towards compulsory service in military has been influenced by family or close environment.

Analysis of respondents' replies regarding familial military service reveals that a significant majority, comprising 69 individuals (67.6%), were raised in households with a military service member. Thirty-one respondents (30.4%) reported that no family members had served in the military, while two respondents (2%) abstained from answering. The data indicates that a significant percentage of survey respondents have had direct or indirect interaction with the military via close relatives since childhood. This suggests that their perspectives on compulsory military service and their motivational influences may be influenced by familial experiences. Individuals with relatives who have served in the military may be more predisposed to perceive military service favourably, as their kin have shared their experiences and perspectives. It is observed that over one-third of respondents lacked

immediate family connections in the military, suggesting that their drive to enlist may stem from alternative motivations, such personal ambition, patriotism, or financial incentives.

The motivation of youth to undertake compulsory military service is an important determinant of service efficacy, the makeup of the armed forces, and national security. Comprehending the determinants that affect young individuals' choices to enlist in compulsory military duty is crucial for formulating successful military personnel policies, enhancing recruitment techniques, and augmenting the appeal of service. By examining the motivations of respondents, critical areas will be identified where the military should concentrate its efforts to engage young individuals. Motivational components will be observed based on the responses, elucidating the connections between these elements and their relationships with demographic and social variables, so offering a comprehensive overview of motivation. The statistics indicate that the primary motivation for enlisting in compulsory military duty is the aspiration to test oneself, as evidenced by 93 respondents (91.2%). Other notable indicators are the learning of military skills (73.5%) and patriotism (72.5%), suggesting that young individuals regard service as a means for self-enhancement and the fulfilment of their civic responsibilities. Career opportunities drive 56.9% of respondents, whilst family influence is significant for only 47.1%. Recommendations from friends (30.4%) and, specifically, financial incentives (7.8%) exert the least influence on the decision-making process.

This indicates that young individuals opting for compulsory military service generally pursue personal growth and novel experiences, rather than material advantages or societal pressures. Traditional external variables, such as recommendations from family or friends, exert less influence, whereas personal determination and values are the predominant factors shaping the decision. The Cronbach Alpha $\alpha = 0.529$ for this set of questions signifies low scale reliability; yet, the responses may still hold relevance (Kline, 1998). The respondents' open-ended responses were analysed to acquire a more nuanced picture of young people's opinions towards obligatory military service and their motivations. Upon examining supplementary motivational elements that influenced respondents to enlist in compulsory military service, numerous significant motivational themes surfaced, pertaining to personal beliefs, social context, and individual choices. The data presented indicate other motivations that compelled respondents to enlist in compulsory military duty (Table 1). The responses are categorised into three primary groups.

Table 1. Distribution of supplementary motivations that compelled respondents to participate in compulsory military service

Motivation	Answers
A sense of duty and traditions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>“Every man in family for generations has done it.”</i> • <i>“In my parent's generation every man served. This 'duty' was fascinating to me so even if it was not compulsory I would have enlisted.</i> • <i>“Someone has to do it”</i>
Team spirit and structure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>“Comradery”</i> • <i>“Being in a team”</i> • <i>“Teamwork”</i> • <i>“I like the structure and the environment”</i>
Uncertainty and indecision	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>“Did not know what I wanted to do, so why not?”</i> • <i>“Really nothing better to do, was probably going to work at some store”</i>

Source: authors

Team spirit and organisational structure were also often cited as significant elements. Certain responders highlighted their appreciation for the orderly environment, defined framework, and collaborative efforts, which fostered a sense of belonging and discipline. This indicates that military hierarchy and communal ethos can serve as significant motivators. The elements least referenced were unpredictability and uncertainty regarding actions. Only a limited number of respondents acknowledged that they opted for military duty without a definite objective or due to a lack of alternative options. This suggests that the majority of young individuals enlist in the military with a distinct reason, while arbitrary selection is rather uncommon. It is important to ascertain whether young individuals enlist in the military with motivation, as this influences their attitude, adaptability, and eagerness to learn. Motivated soldiers assimilate knowledge more rapidly, participate more readily in training, and execute assignments freely. An examination of the replies by age uncovers tendencies in the perspectives of various groups towards compulsion to serve. The research indicates that the favourable disposition towards service is most pronounced among respondents aged 22–25, with 52 individuals (94.5%) conveying approval. Given that this age group is the most populous, it is unexpected, since young individuals commence their service with considerable motivation (Table 2). In the 18–21 age demographic, the positive attitude was marginally lower, with 23 responders (85.2%). Among those aged 26–29 and those 29 and older, the positive sentiment attained 100%, as all replies were either "strongly agree" or "agree."

Table 2. Distribution of respondents' motivations before starting service by age group (absolute numbers)

Answers	Age			
	18-21	22-25	26-29	29 and more
Strongly agree	13	42	7	5
Agree	10	10	5	3
Neither agree, nor disagree	3	3	0	0
Disagree	0	0	0	0
Strongly disagree	1	0	0	0

It is noteworthy that elder respondents provided exclusively affirmative responses. This indicates that individuals exhibit greater resolve over their choices and possess increased confidence in making significant life decisions. Their responses indicate that older individuals are more contemplative regarding their motivations and more inclined to meet their obligations prior to undertaking substantial commitments such as compulsory military duty. Family exerts considerable effect on the lives of young individuals, particularly throughout their initial decision-making processes.

Public perceptions of the military significantly impact young individuals' propensity to enlist in the armed forces. Favourable attitudes can enhance trust in the military, whilst unfavourable attitudes might diminish support for military decisions and resource allocation for defence. The other important factor concerning youth is society. The perception of the military is a significant determinant, as it might affect the inclination of youth to enlist in the armed forces. Society frequently exhibits a herd mentality, wherein individuals accept the beliefs and behaviours of the majority, even if their initial stance was neutral or divergent. An affirmative evaluation can enhance faith in the military, but a negative assessment may diminish support for military actions and resource allocation to defence.

Alongside the comprehensive evaluation of the military, it is important to examine public perceptions on the role of troops in safeguarding national security. The perception of a soldier and his contributions may differ from that of the institution itself. Thus, it is valuable to

ascertain whether the populace views soldiers as a key guarantee of security. This research indicates that the results exhibit greater variability than the comprehensive evaluation of the military, with a considerable percentage of respondents remaining ambivalent in their views. The Swedish public demonstrates a markedly favourable disposition towards the military, as evidenced by the distribution of respondents' replies. Approximately 81.7% of respondents indicated support for the military, whilst merely 3.9% held an unfavourable opinion. 14.7% of respondents remained undecided, suggesting a neutral or tenuous stance. The results indicate that the military receives substantial societal support, likely attributable to historical and geopolitical influences, along with public engagement.

The information young people get from many sources influences not only their personal drive but also their choice to engage in compulsory military service. This choice can be much influenced by effective public and military communication together with properly chosen information channels. Table 3 presents the responses of the respondents to the question concerning the influence of information sources on their military joining decision. Calculated for this question, the Cronbach alpha coefficient is 0.850, suggesting great consistency and dependability of the question (Kline, 1998). This helps us to come into the conclusion that the responses of the respondents are fit for analysis and sufficiently steady.

Table 3. Information sources' impact on the military joining decision in percent

Information source	Strongly agree or agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree or strongly disagree
“Facebook”	7.8%	24.5%	67.7%
“Whatsapp”	2.9%	16.7%	80.4%
“Instagram”	13.7%	27.5%	58.8%
“X” (former Twitter)	2.9%	18.6%	78.5%
“TikTok”	4.9%	16.7%	78.4%
“Youtube”	31.4%	34.3%	34.3%
“LinkedIn”	2.9%	15.7%	81.4%
Friends	64.7%	21.6%	13.7%
Family	77.5%	13.7%	8.8%
Television	35.3%	38.2%	26.5%
Press	24.5%	25.5%	50%
Information at high school	29.4%	35.3%	35.3%
Military's presentations in universities	6.9%	20.6%	72.5%
Official military websites	41.2%	31.4%	27.5%

According to the statistics, family (77.5%) and friends (64.7%) had the most impact on the army joining decision. This implies that the most significant avenues of information influencing a good attitude towards military service are the close social surroundings and trustworthy official sources (41.2%). While suggestions from friends can serve as social support in the decision-making process, family can be related to the experiences and attitudes of parents or relatives towards military service.

Television (35.3%), the social network YouTube (31.4%), and the press (24.5%) are further important sources of information. This indicates that young people's awareness of the military is still shaped in great part by conventional media and outlets. The findings, however, show that social media sites including Facebook (7.8%), Instagram (13.7%), TikTok (16.7%), and others have a rather little impact.

The respondents' choice to join the military was not much influenced by some information channels. About LinkedIn, 81.4% of respondents said WhatsApp had nothing bearing on their

choice; about WhatsApp, 80.4% said the same. This indicates that in the military's communication strategy these outlets are not major instruments.

The study revealed the need of close surroundings and trustworthy sources since the most significant sources of information influencing young people's choice to join the army are family, friends, and official army websites. Additionally, useful tools for spreading information about military service are conventional media, particularly YouTube and television. Social media sites including Facebook, Instagram, and LinkedIn were not very important in the decision-making process thus their value in the context of hiring is limited. These facts could help the SAF to better interact with the public so that the target audience may be reached more readily.

An independent sample t-test was performed to evaluate the differences between the two groups. The cohort with familial military service exhibited an average motivation score of 1.42 ($SD = 0.736$). The cohort with no familial military service recorded an average motivation score of 1.48 ($SD = 0.626$). T-test results: $t(98) = -0.418$, $p = 0.677$; so, the difference is not statistically significant. The results indicate that family military history is statistically unimportant; yet, respondents' answers suggest it significantly influences young people's motivation to serve.

Further, a correlation ratio was estimated to ascertain the relationship between soldiers' pre-service motivation and many motivational factors: familial support, peer recommendations, financial incentives, and societal perceptions of the military. In summary, correlation results showed that a statistically significant correlation exists between pre-service motivation and family ($r = 0.278$, $p = 0.005$) and public opinion ($r = 0.315$, $p = 0.001$). Meanwhile, the correlation between motivation against service and financial benefits ($r = -0.092$, $p = 0.356$), as well as the correlation between motivation against service and recommendations from friends ($r = 0.070$, $p = 0.484$), were indicated as insignificant, which do not support hypotheses H1 and H3. It can be assumed that these two factors also have no effect on pre-service motivation, and further regression analysis will not be performed with these factors. Next, two linear regression equations are formed (Table 4). In one, the dependent variable is motivation against service and the independent variable is family, while in the other, the dependent variable is motivation against service and the independent variable is recommendations from friends.

Table 4. Results of regression analysis: soldiers' motivation before service and factors influencing it

	Family	Public Perception
Constant	0.979	0.759
B	0.174	0.319
Error	0.170	0.213
F	8.348	11.023
R^2	0.077	0.099
R	0.278	0.315
p	<0.001	<0.001

Since both models are statistically significant ($p < 0.001$), the results support hypotheses H2 and H4. However, family explains only 7% and public opinion 9.9% of the influence on motivation against service. This means that there are other factors that were not included in the questionnaire but have a greater influence than these two.

33.3% of respondents hold a favourable view of the military due to its contributions to national security. Nevertheless, the plurality – 47.1% – selected the neutral response "neither agree nor disagree," suggesting a potential absence of definitive stance on this matter among

society or a reluctance among respondents to disclose their views. 19.6% have a poor perception of the soldiers' involvement. The descriptive data indicate that the mean rating of respondents is 2.85, accompanied by a standard deviation of 0.916. This indicates that the general public's disposition is predominantly neutral, albeit with a little positive inclination. The standard deviation of 0.916 indicates a significant dispersion in the respondents' answers.

While the majority of respondents selected a neutral response, an analysis of unequivocal opinions reveals that 37% harbour an unfavourable view of soldiers, whereas 63% maintain a positive perspective. This permits the inference that troops are not regarded as favourably as the army itself. The attitudes of young individuals towards the military may fluctuate based on their personal experiences during duty, impacted by factors such as service conditions, skills gained, or societal perceptions. Examining these alterations by educational attainment offers enhanced insight into the perspectives of various socioeconomic groups regarding compulsory military service and identifies the predominant variables shaping their views.

Summarizing all respondents' answers, it was found that 71.6% of respondents reported a positive change in attitude after the service.

Conclusions

The motivation of young people to participate in compulsory military service is a complex phenomenon determined by various factors. The results of the study confirm the Maslow hierarchy of needs model, according to which self-actualization and social needs are the main factors determining young people's motivation to participate in compulsory military service. Empirical data revealed that young people most often choose to serve in order to test themselves, acquire military skills, and for patriotic reasons, while the aspect of financial gain remains less significant. This is consistent with the findings of a study conducted by Baltutytė (2019), which showed that young people's motivation to join the army is most often linked to practical reasons – acquiring military skills, personal development, and career prospects, although the latter was less emphasized.

The results of the study also confirmed the tendency of youth to be guided by individualistic values and choose career paths that ensure personal stability and social recognition (Pocienė, 2018). This conclusion suggests that today's youth value personal growth more than collective or altruistic motives.

The social environment—family and community support—also plays an important role in young people's decision to join compulsory military service. This statement confirms hypotheses H1 and H3, as family and society were identified as significant motivational factors with a positive influence, while the influence of friends was assessed as insignificant, which refutes hypothesis H2. These results are consistent with the study by Binková and Štěpánková (2023), which showed that support from the immediate environment is important for the decision to join the army, but unlike the theoretical part, the influence of friends on this decision was not significant.

The results of the study revealed that the most significant factors encouraging young people to join compulsory military service in Sweden are the influence of family and friends, followed by official army websites and YouTube. Social networks were the least significant. Pocienė's (2018) study found that young people obtain most of their information about the military from friends, acquaintances, and relatives, and least from internet portals. This result is consistent with the data obtained in this study, confirming that the personal social environment has the greatest influence on the decision to serve in the military. In addition, it was found that Swedish soldiers gain many benefits from their service, the most important of

which are military skills, teamwork, and leadership skills. This is consistent with the information presented in the theoretical part, which states that Sweden invests significantly in shaping a positive image of soldiers in order to create the most favorable perception of the military in society (Strand & Berndtsson, 2015).

In summary, the data obtained in the study do not differ significantly from previous studies, but some changes have emerged. The influence of family and friends remained the most important factor determining young people's decision to participate in compulsory military service in Sweden. However, it has been noted that official military information sources and YouTube are becoming increasingly important, although they are still not as influential as the personal social environment.

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