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Purpose

Currently over 200,000 women serve on active duty in the military and have become a vital component of national security. Yet, we know very little about the consequences of military service for the life course outcomes of women who serve.

Literature assessing the relationship between military service and childbearing is almost nonexistent, particularly in making a direct comparison with civilians. We investigate whether military service affects childbearing so that it differs from otherwise comparable civilians.

Data

We use data taken from the 1997 National Longitudinal Survey of Youth (NLSY-97).

Because we estimate a fixed-effects model, a database consisting of person years was created where respondents contribute a person year for each round of the NLSY-97 in which they were interviewed. The pooled sample includes 108,602 person years.

The NLSY-97, like any other large, longitudinal study is not immune to problems associated with missing data. To deal with this issue we used a chained equation approach to impute missing data available in STATA.

Methods

Our dependent variable is a time-varying indicator of childbearing measured as each respondent's cumulative number of children, ranging from 0 to 9.

We make use of two primary time-varying independent variables. The first variable is a dichotomous indicator of whether the respondent is currently serving on active duty in the military. The second variable is a dichotomous indicator of whether the respondent is currently a veteran of active-duty military service.

We make use of an extended list of time-varying control variables in order to minimize the risk of obtaining spurious results related to time-varying selectivity.

We also make use of a time-varying indicator of cumulative time spent on active duty in the military, measured in weeks, and a time-varying indicator measuring time since leaving the military, measured in years.

Finally we include a dichotomous indicator of whether the respondent reported having ever served in a combat zone (*Did you ever serve in a combat or war zone?*).

Figure 1 Effect of Enlistment Status on Childbearing at Age 30

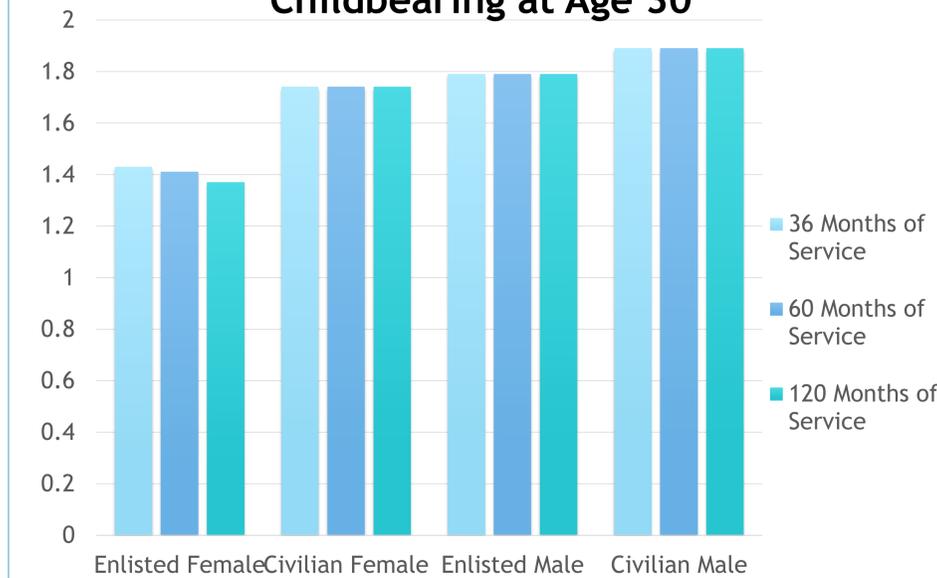
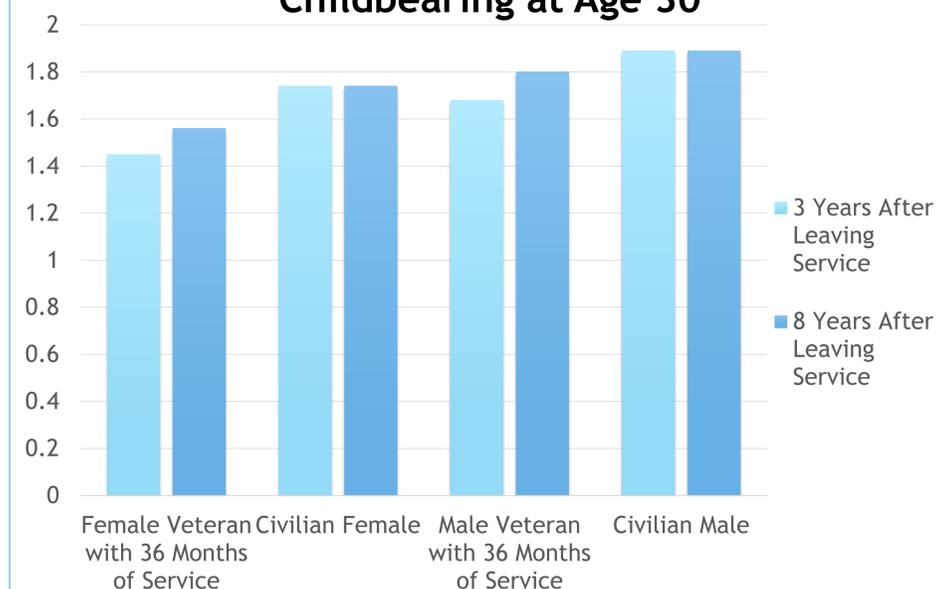


Figure 2 Effect of Veteran Status on Childbearing at Age 30



Statistical Model

We use a fixed-effects estimator to examine the relationship between the covariates and childbearing. The fixed-effects procedure controls for potential fixed sources of spuriousness associated with entry into the military and childbearing.

Results

- The effect of duration of military service is negative for women, and not statistically significant for men.
- For both men and women, the length of time being a veteran tends to increase childbearing, with no statistically significant difference between the two coefficients.
- Women currently enlisted in the military at age 30 have consistently fewer children than comparable civilian women, and the difference grows larger with increased length of service.
- Men currently enlisted in the military have fewer children than their civilian counterparts, but this difference barely changes over time.
- Enlisted men are expected to have about as many children by age 30 as civilian women and more children than enlisted women
- The average number of children born over all intervals is .3 for men and .534 for women.
- The percent of intervals involving an enlisted person is 3.4 for men and .9 for women.
- The percent of intervals involving a veteran is 2.4 for men and .7 for women.
- The average length of service for men is about three years for men and two and a half years for women. For both men and women the average number of years since becoming a veteran is about 11 years.

Conclusion

Our results suggest that military service is linked to childbearing for both men and women. Respondents in the NLSY-97 who serve in the military have fewer children than comparable civilians. The effect of enlistment status is negative for both men and women, but much stronger for women. At age 30, enlisted women have about .33 fewer children than civilian women (see Figure 2). For men the difference is about .10 children.