

## UČINKI OBVEZNEGA SLUŽENJA VOJAŠKEGA ROKA NA PRIDOBIVANJE POKLICNIH PRIPADNIKOV V ESTONIJI

## THE EFFECTS OF CONSCRIPT SERVICE ON THE RECRUITMENT OF PROFESSIONAL SOLDIERS IN ESTONIA

**Povzetek** Estonske obrambne sile so urejene po načelu rezervnih sil, zato je v Estoniji v veljavi obvezno služenje vojaškega roka. V tem članku preučujemo, kako sistem obveznega služenja vojaškega roka vpliva na proces pridobivanja kadra v estonskih obrambnih silah (EOS). S pomočjo podatkov iz ankete, izvedene med estonskimi naborniki, bomo preučili individualne in strukturne dejavnike, ki vplivajo na to, koliko so EOS zanimive kot delodajalec med naborniki. Testirali smo dve predpostavki, ki temeljita na teoriji. (1) Ob upoštevanju pristopa družbenega učenja predpostavljamo, da pozitivne in negativne izkušnje v času obveznega služenja vojaškega roka lahko vplivajo na namero posameznika, da se zaposli kot poklicni pripadnik. (2) Na podlagi predpostavke o izbiri predvidevamo, da bodo tisti, ki so imeli pred vpoklicem pozitivne izkušnje z vojaškim načinom življenja, sprejeli obvezno služenje vojaškega roka v bolj pozitivni luči in jim bodo obrambne sile kot delodajalec zato še bolj zanimive. Rezultati kažejo, da je predpostavka o izbiri bolj podprta. To pomeni, da se pozitiven odnos do obrambnih sil in namen, da se posameznik tam zaposli, ne oblikujeta med služenjem vojaškega roka, temveč na to bolj vplivajo izkušnje pred vpoklicem ter sodelovanje v prostovoljnih organizacijah, povezanih z vojsko ali nacionalno varnostjo. Lahko bi rekli, da se odnos, ki ga je nabornik razvil pred obveznim služenjem, s služenjem vojaškega roka še bolj utrdi.

**Ključne besede** *Obvezno služenje vojaškega roka, naborništvo, pridobivanje kadra, obrambne sile, Estonija.*

**Abstract** The Estonian Defence Forces have been structured according to the principle of reserve force, and therefore Estonia uses compulsory conscription. In this paper, we will explore how the compulsory military service system influences the recruitment process into the Estonian Defence Forces (EDF). More precisely, we will study the

individual and structural factors that determine the perceived attractiveness of the EDF as an employer among conscripts by using data from the Estonian Conscript Survey. We are testing two theory-driven assumptions: (1) following the social learning approach, we assume that positive and negative experiences during the conscription period may have an influence on the intention to continue as a professional in the military; (2) based on the selection hypothesis, we assume that those who have had positive experiences with the military way of life before being drafted will perceive compulsory military service in a more positive light, and therefore the attractiveness of the Defence Forces as an employer may even increase. The results show that the selection hypothesis has stronger support. It means that positive attitudes and the intention to join the defence forces are not formed during the service, but rather pre-conscription experience and involvement in voluntary organizations related to the military or interior security have a bigger influence. The service could be seen as affirming the attitudes that the conscript had already developed prior to conscript service.

**Key words** *Conscription, recruitment, defence forces, Estonia*

**Introduction** Most Western militaries are not only struggling to attract and recruit young people to fill their ranks; they are also hard-pressed to retain the trained and skilled personnel they already have. After the Cold War, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and its member states estimated that the most immediate task concerning the militaries of the former Warsaw Pact countries would be to reform those militaries and establish Western standards for civil-military relations; in short, to reunite Europe also in the sense of military affairs (Spohr Readman, 2004).

However, the events of September 11, 2001 led to a re-definition of the understanding of security and conflict, posing different challenges for militaries, and spurred the abolishment of large conscript-based armies, leading to the all-voluntary force, the professionalization of the armed forces in most European countries. Nevertheless, some countries believed that their military needs would continue to be better served by a conscript- and reserve-based military. These were mostly smaller countries that bordered on historically aggressive neighbours, and which had strong public support for continued conscription. They also tended to be countries where the economic and socio-cultural cost of transforming the conscript- and reserve-based armed forces into an all-voluntary force was considered too high (Herranen, 2004).

However, regardless of a country's chosen military model, there are still recruitment and retention (R&R) issues that need to be addressed. The NATO research task group HFM-107 (*Recruiting and Retention of Military Personnel*, 2007) stressed in its report that R&R in NATO countries is affected by a variety of factors, including low unemployment rates; incongruence between the prevailing social values and the military organizational culture; military operational and personnel tempo; relatively higher private sector wages; the geographical location of military jobs; promotion systems based on seniority versus merit; mismatches between individual interests and

job assignments; the management of the major processes of recruitment, selection and classification; turnover and retention; and the shrinking of the 18-24-year-old target demographic.

## THE ROLE OF CONSCRIPTION

The motivation driving enlistment into the all-volunteer force has been extensively studied, as have recruitment tactics, and, at least in the US, they show reasonable stability over the course of time (Woodruff, 2017). Previous research has also examined the effect of conscription on recruitment into the armed forces as an active serviceman. Gilroy and Williams (2006) note that R&R depends not just on demographic factors but also on the general public opinion with regard to the defence forces and conscription, national defence and veteran policy, social factors, and economic and labour market conditions. Estonia is among the countries that mandate compulsory military service for young males – for Estonian citizens in its case – at a time when most European countries have scrapped compulsory military service (Gilroy and Williams, 2006). Cronberg (2006) posits a correlation between conscription and the general will to defend one’s country – that is, the extent to which the role of conscription is valued in the national identity correlates with a general will to defend one’s country. Yet conscription itself varies greatly from one country to the next in terms of duration, percentage of those completing service and percentage of those who voluntarily become conscripts (Cronberg 2006).

Leander (2004) highlights that support for conscription and various countries’ decision to continue conscription is related to views of the role and necessity of conscription – in other words, to the types of myths prevalent in a society in connection with compulsory military service. In Estonia, public support for the conscription- and reserve-based army model is very high, ranging from an all-time low of 85% in 2007 to 92% in 2017 (Kivirähk, 2017).

In the next section, we will take a brief look at the Estonian military context.

## THE ESTONIAN MILITARY CONTEXT

The EDF is structured according to the principle of a reserve force with compulsory conscript service for all male citizens. Since 2013, female citizens have been able to join the conscript service on voluntary basis. The duration of the conscript service is either 8 or 11 months, depending on the conscript’s speciality and position within the military. Male citizens can expect to be called up from the age of 17 up to the age of 27.

In addition to the EDF, Estonia also has a voluntary militarily organized national defence organization called the Estonian Defence League (EDL). This organization was re-established in 1990, a year before Estonia regained its independence from

the Soviet Union. The task of the Estonian Defence League is to enhance, by relying on free will and self-initiative, the nation's readiness to defend the independence of Estonia and its constitutional order (Estonian Defence League Act, 2013). The EDL has three affiliated organizations: the Women's Voluntary Defence Organization (WVDO), the Young Eagles and the Home Daughters. Young people can become junior members of the EDL and the WVDO at the age of 16. The Young Eagles and the Home Daughters are youth organizations that aim to provide young people with a variety of activities combined with patriotic education. All of these four organizations were established before WWII, during the first period of independence (1918-1940), and were at that time large mass organizations. Today, the popularity of these organizations has not reached the levels of participation they enjoyed prior to WWII; nevertheless, they represent the nation's will to defend itself and are often referred to as the nation's "safety blanket".

## 1. THEORETICAL ASSUMPTIONS

The aim of this article is to elaborate on the effect that conscript service has on the intention to choose a military career as a professional service member of the EDF. The theoretical ground of our study is based on a number of theories: the enlistment decision-making model, which in turn is based on the theory of behavioural intention; the social learning theory of career decision-making; and the selection approach.

### 1.1 The enlistment decision-making model

In this article, we rely on the assumptions of the theory of behavioural intention (Fishbein and Ajzen, 1975), which addresses the relationship between attitudes and behaviours. The main idea is that behavioural intention is the precondition for actual behaviour, and this intention is in turn affected by attitudes towards behaviour and subjective norms, as well as by the perception of one's own capability to conduct the behaviour. In military studies, this idea has been developed into the Enlistment Decision-Making Model, which presupposes that enlistment behaviour is influenced by enlistment intention (Lagree et al., 2000), and enlistment intention is in turn influenced by attitudes towards and subjective norms on enlistment in the armed forces. "Subjective norms" refers to how parents and peers will see and support the enlistment behaviour. Empirical findings have indicated that intention has a significant role in the formation process of the behaviour. For instance, military propensity has been seen as the main predictor of military enlistment, and demographic, educational and family factors influenced enlistment indirectly via propensity (Bachman et al., 2000).

Relying on these approaches and empirical findings, we will concentrate on the intention to join active service in the EDF. Furthermore, in our conceptual model we include aspects of the employer knowledge model (Cable and Turban, 2001), which has been tested in military studies by Lievens et al. (2005). According to their findings, the attraction of military organizations as employers depends on

trait inferences, how familiar the applicant is with military organizations, how they perceive the job and organizational attributes (Lievens et al., 2005). Moreover, the trait inferences and job and organizational attributes have more pronounced effects when familiarity with military organizations is high. Research also shows that those who join the armed forces as professional military service members because of intrinsic goals, such as altruism and self-enhancement, may in the long run turn out to be more desirable members of the military organization than those who have joined for extrinsic goals, such as, for example, economic goals (Woodruff, 2017).

## 1.2 The social learning theory of career decision-making and the selection approach

Here we take into account ideas from two widely applied classical approaches in social sciences – social learning theory and the selection hypothesis. Specifically, we are interested in whether and how the intention to join the active service changes during the conscription period. Krumboltz (1979) developed the Social Learning Theory of Career Decision-Making (SLTCDM). The theory identified four categories of factors that influence the decision-making path for any individual: genetic endowment and special abilities; environmental conditions and events; learning experiences; and task approach skills. In the case of conscript service as the precondition for joining the active military service<sup>1</sup>, two of the four categories are especially important. According to Krumboltz (1979), environmental conditions and events refer to social, political and economic forces, which are mostly outside the individual's control, e.g. policies and procedures of recruitment of military personnel. As stated by (Ginexi et al., 1994) the decision to enter the military may be affected by the concrete benefits offered by military service. In case of the EDF, conscript service could be seen as an environmental condition and an event which could potentially make the career path into the military a smoother process (e.g. a precondition for studying at the Estonian Defence College). Secondly, conscript service could be seen as a learning experience which prepares a person for a military career. Compulsory military service carries both aspects of learning – the instrumental learning experience and the associational learning experience. Instrumental learning means that an individual is positively reinforced or punished for the exercise of a particular behaviour. In conscript service, both positive and negative reinforcements are used. Associational learning occurs when an individual associates some previously neutral event or stimulus with an emotionally laden event or stimulus. Thus, positive military-related experiences before or during conscription may influence the intention to join the active service.

Social learning theory also stresses the importance of self-efficacy on behaviour. In essence, if an individual is confident about his or her skills, and that the use of these skills will likely have positive outcomes, the intention to repeat these activities increases. Thus the expected skills and obtained skills during conscription may have a significant influence on the decision to join the active service. However, following

<sup>1</sup> In most cases conscription service is the usual way into service in the EDF. However, one can also join if one has completed military basic training in the EDL.

the SLTCDM model, the fourth component is task approach skills, which could be seen as interactions between learning experiences, genetic characteristics, special attitudes and environmental influences. For instance, these skills may include performance standards, work habits, perceptual and cognitive processes, mental sets, emotional responses and so on. The experience of conscription may have, in different individuals, a diverse influence on the intention to join active service, depending on the composition of the aspects of social learning highlighted above.

In our analysis we are also aware of the selection model approach, which points out that, according to various background characteristics, some people are more suitable for some kinds of activities, career choices and so on. For instance, studies from the US have shown that social background, academic experiences and vocational choices made during the high school years had a significant influence on enlistment (Bachman et al., 2000).

## 2. METHOD

### 2.1. Data

The present study uses data from the on-going Estonian Conscript Survey (ECS) to examine the influence of a conscript's characteristics and conscript service on the behavioural intention to continue their military career in the defence forces. The survey was initiated in cooperation with the Centre for Applied Studies of the Estonian Defence College and the Centre of Excellence for Strategic Sustainability at the University of Tartu. The study was designed as a longitudinal research questionnaire for conscripts and reservists in 2016. The survey is a part of an ongoing research project within the EDF: "The development of human resources research in defence".

All conscripts are given the opportunity to participate in the ECS, but they can also decline to participate without any consequences for them, their service period or their future career in the military. The data is gathered via tablets, using LimeSurvey software, in the units to which the conscripts are assigned. To secure anonymity and confidentiality, the conscripts are assigned codes which are different from their personal ID codes, so that longitudinal data can be connected to the same person, but that person cannot be identified by the researchers. The data is analyzed anonymously.

The data used in this article is from the ECS 2016-2017 pilot study, which was carried out in three survey waves among the conscripts that started their service either in July 2016 (11-month service) or in October 2016 (8-month service). The three waves of the survey during their service took place in the first month, then after the soldier's basic training course (month 3-4), and again during the last month before ending the service.

The questionnaire included topics such as: knowledge of and attitudes towards the EDF; attitudes towards the compulsory draft; experiences during conscription;

opinions about society, security and, individual values; health and health behaviour; learning skills; and motivation.

In 2016 the number of people drafted was 2,956, and the response rate of the first wave was 90% in the July draft and 92% in the October draft, giving a total sample size in the first wave of 2,677 individuals. Between the first and second waves of the survey, 382 conscripts were transferred to the reserves, mainly due to health reasons<sup>2</sup>. The response rate of 83% in the second wave means that 1,908 individuals finished this questionnaire. In the third wave, 1176 individuals completed the questionnaire and of these, 64% provided longitudinal data. Thus the longitudinal sample holds data from 750 individuals i.e. those who participated in all three waves of the ECS. Excluding those discharged early – i.e. those transferred to the reserves before finishing their service – the response rate for the third wave was 35%.

For this article, we analyzed the longitudinal data from the 750 conscripts. The mean age of the respondents was 20.5 (SD=1.5, age span 18-28 years). In terms of the level of education, 22% had basic education, 71% secondary education, and 7% had completed tertiary education. Based on age and education, we did not find significant differences between the longitudinal sample and the total sample of the first wave, only that in the longitudinal sample, the proportion of voluntary conscripts was higher – 42% compared to the 38% in the cross-sectional first wave sample. Following the theoretical assumptions of the Enlistment Decision-Making Model, in our analysis we divided the conscripts into two groups: those who had previous experience with the EDL or other voluntary interior security organizations (22%), and those who did not have such experiences.

## 2.2 Measures

Our dependent variable was behavioural intention towards becoming an active serviceman. The respondents were asked, “How do you feel about becoming an active serviceman in the EDF?” (*Active service* in the model). The question was rated on the following scale: 1 = Definitely want to become an active service member, 2 = Probably would become an active service member, 3 = Would consider this opportunity depending on the circumstances, 4 = Probably would not consider it, 5 = Definitely would not consider it. This question was included in all three waves of the 2016 ECS.

*Defence-related attitudes* Defence-related attitudes were measured by three questions in the first wave of the survey:

1. In your opinion, how important is the participation of Estonian military units on foreign missions to Estonian security? (*Deployments* in the model) This

<sup>2</sup> Release of the conscript from conscript service before the expiry of the conscript service can be due to: 1) no longer complying with the health requirements of the EDF; 2) becoming a parent; 3) the conscript becomes the only person maintaining a person with a severe or profound disability; 4) becoming a member of the national or EU parliament; 5) imprisonment; 6) serious unexpected family problems; 7) becoming a cadet; or 8) death (Military Service Act; RT I, 10.07.2012). However, health reasons are the most common cause of early release.

question was rated on a 4-point scale ranging from 1 = Very important to 4 = Not important at all.

2. Please indicate whether, in the event of a foreign armed invasion, it would be possible to defend Estonia until allies come to our assistance? (*Defensibility* in the model) The respondents could answer on a 4-point scale ranging from 1 = Yes, definitely to 4 = Definitely not.
3. In recent years, political tensions in Europe have increased. How likely is it, in your opinion, that Estonia will have to defend its territory militarily in the next 10 years? (*Threat level* in the model) The answers were rated on a 5-point scale ranging from 1 = Very high to 5 = Very low.

*Socio-demographic background characteristics* In the analysis we included the age of the respondent, their educational level, and whether they had had any previous connections with the EDF, e.g. being part of the Estonian Defence League, or any patriotically oriented youth organizations.

The *merits of the EDF* index was based on 11 items measuring the extent to which the conscripts agreed with statements about different aspects of the EDF, e.g. the EDF is respected in society; the EDF is seen as a good employer and career opportunities in the EDF are good (see Appendix 1 for the list of items). The items were rated on a 5-point scale ranging from 1 = Strongly agree to 5 = Strongly disagree. The merits of the EDF were estimated in each wave of the survey.

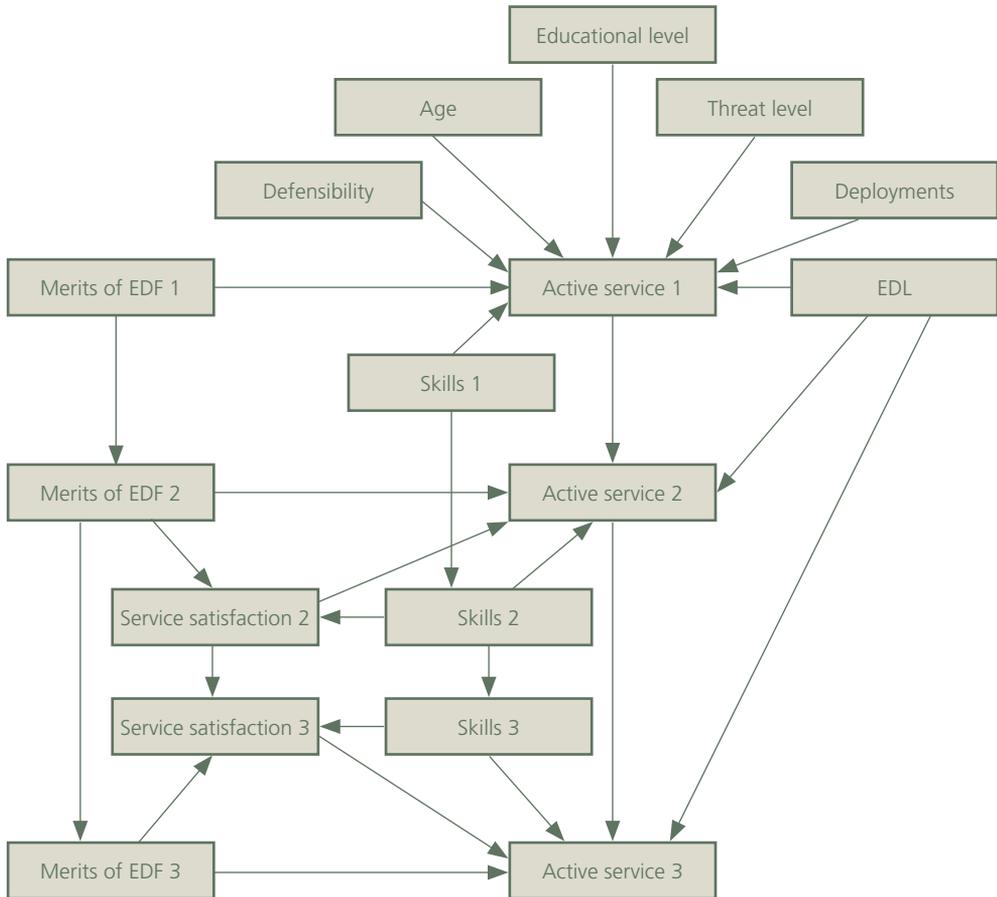
The *expected skills* index was based on 7 items measuring the skills that the conscripts expected to obtain during their service period: car driving, leadership, planning, survival, IT, first aid and language skills. The items were rated on a 3-point scale (1 = Yes, definitely, 2 = Yes, 3 = No, not this). The skills expected or acquired were measured in each wave of the survey and included the same lists of skills each time.

*Satisfaction with service* was measured by the question “How satisfied are you with your service?” on 4-point scale (1 = Satisfied to 4 = Not satisfied). This question was posed in the second and third survey waves.

## 2.3 Statistical analysis

We applied structural equation modelling (Blunch, 2013; Byrne, 2016) to test our model with regard to the effects of individual characteristics (age, education), defence-related attitudes, and expectations and experiences with conscript service on the conscripts’ intention to join the active service. Figure 1 represents the conceptual model of the estimated paths between the variables.

**Figure 1:**  
Conceptual  
SEM model  
(error variables  
not included)



The analysis of the suggested model proceeded by applying the following steps. Firstly, we estimated the effect of the following factors (exogenous variables): socio-demographic variables (age, education and involvement in the EDL), defence related attitudes, merits of the EDF and expected skills on the behavioural intention to join active service at the beginning of the conscript service. We assumed that the intention to join active service at the beginning of the conscript service is related to the same intention in the middle of the service. The intention to join active service in the middle of the conscript service is also influenced by the following factors: the expected skills measured in the middle of the service, the perceived merits of the EDF in the middle of the service, and satisfaction with the service so far. Moreover, the expected skills in the middle of the service are influenced by the expected skills in the beginning of the service, and will themselves influence the expected skills at the end of the service. The similar paths are drawn between the

merits of the EDF at the three points in time when the survey was conducted. We also expected that satisfaction with the service is influenced by expected skills to be acquired and the merits of the EDF. In the conceptual model (Figure 1) we do not show the covariances of exogenous variables or errors in endogenous variables, but they are included in the statistical models. Moreover, based on the preliminary analysis and findings by Lievens et al. (2005), showing that the more familiar one is with military organizations, the more attractive the military as employer becomes, we decided to apply multi-group structural equation modelling in two groups of conscripts separated by their former connections with the EDF. We tested the invariance of models on several levels: with respect to structural paths, structural weights, structural covariances and structural residuals.

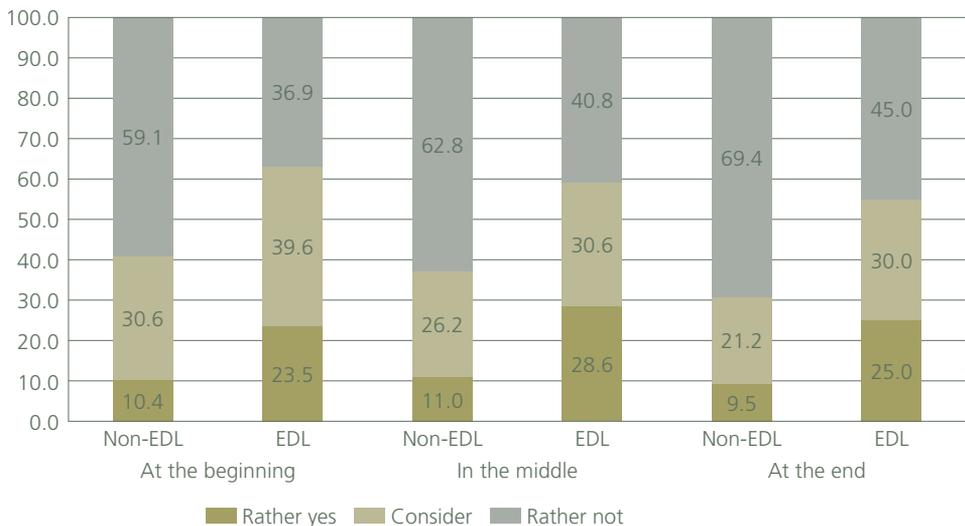
IBM SPSS Statistics 24 and Amos 24 were used for our analyses.

### 3. RESULTS

#### 3.1 Descriptive analysis

Joining the active service is not a very popular option among conscripts; the proportion of those who definitely or probably would become an active service member is approximately 12% and remains stable over the course of the service. However, the intention to join the active service is clearly related to previous military-type experience – whether the conscript had taken part in the activities of the EDF or its youth organizations (about 22% of the sample) or not. The proportion of conscripts who intend to join the active service is 23% in conscripts with an EDL background, compared to 10% in conscripts with no EDL background (see Figure 2). Interestingly the positive intention is relatively stable between both groups. In contrast, the proportion of those who would consider the

**Figure 2:** Conscripts' behavioural intention towards active service depending on their connection with EDL at the beginning, in the middle and at the end of their conscript service (%).



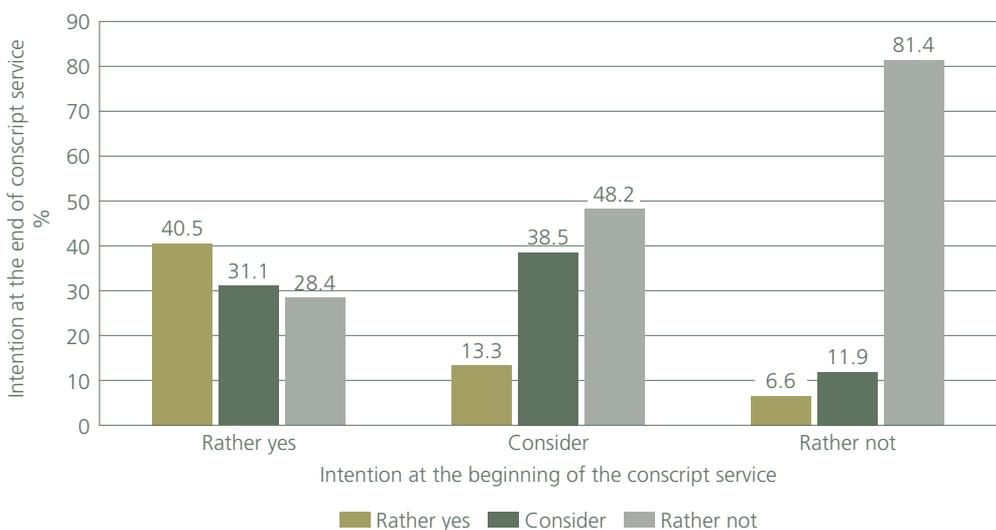
active service opportunity depending on circumstances decreases over the service period, which means that the proportion of those who definitely do not consider active service as a viable life-path will increase during the service.

Looking in more detail at the stability of the intent to join active service, and comparing the answers to the question about whether or not one would consider the professional military as a career option in the first and third survey wave, we see that the answers tended to change over the course of the conscription period. Only 40.5% of those conscripts who indicated in the first survey wave that they would definitely or probably consider becoming active service members continued to hold this attitude for the duration of their service period (see Figure 3). One third of those who definitely or probably considered becoming active service members in the first wave had become less interested in a military career, and 28% had come to the conclusion that active service is not something that they would choose. The proportion of fixed/stable intentions in those conscripts who would consider a career in the military at the beginning of their service is 38.5%. The conscripts who would not consider the military as a career option, among them the proportion with a stable intention, is 81% for the duration of their service period. This clearly indicates that a positive intention towards choosing the military as one's career is more likely to change during the service period, and could be influenced by different factors.

### 3.2 Multi-group structural equation model of active service intention

We constructed a model of the intent to choose active service according to the conceptual model in Figure 1. We estimated the path coefficients, their statistical significance, and other relevant parameters separately (unconstrained for equality) for the two groups; for the conscripts who had had prior experience with the EDL

**Figure 3:**  
The paths of intention to join active service during the conscript service (% of intention across I wave intention)



and the conscripts who had had no experience with the EDL. Next, we considered the question of model fit, and tested whether the EDL group and the non-EDL group differ from each other with regard to the investigated associations between the effect of socio-demographic background characteristics and defence-related attitudes, and on the behavioural intent to join the active service.

In the case of conscripts who had had no prior experience with the EDL at the beginning of their service, the skills they expected to acquire during their service period and the merits of the EDF had a significant positive effect on their intent to join active service (see Table 1). Nevertheless, these factors did not significantly influence the intention of conscripts who were previously connected to EDL activities to join the active service. Their intention to join active service was affected by their age, and their attitude towards Estonia's ability to defend itself. In the middle of the service, the most important determinants of the intention to continue as a career service member are the merits of the EDF and satisfaction with the conscript service. Furthermore, we can see the effect of path dependency; the intention to join the active service at the beginning of the service has a quite significant positive effect on the intention in the middle of the service, which in turn influences the intention to join the active service at the end of the service. This path is especially important for those conscripts who had had previous experience with EDL activities. The path of the conscripts previously involved with the EDL is a bit surer than for others.

At the end of service, the intention to join the active service is also affected by satisfaction with conscript service, particularly among conscripts with no EDL experience. For those who had not had any prior experience with the EDL, the skills actually obtained during conscript service had an impact on their intent to consider becoming an active service member.

Our results indicate that during conscription different factors influenced the behavioural intention to join the active service between those conscripts who had had experiences with EDL and those who had not had any such experiences. Experiences with military-type organizations prior to becoming a conscript are important, but we also established that there are characteristics that stem from the nature and course of conscription which play a role in the intent to join active service, meaning that conscription is an important process for shaping the active-duty force.

**Table 1:**  
Path  
coefficients of  
the model of  
active service  
intention for  
conscripts with  
and without  
experience  
in the EDL  
(n=713)

Paths	No connection with EDL (n=553)		Previous connection with EDL (n=160)	
	Estimate	S.E	Estimate	S.E
Deployments → Active service1	0.16**	0.06	0.21	0.13
Defensibility → Active service1	0.08	0.06	0.36**	0.13
Threat level → Active service1	0.08*	0.04	-0.01	0.08
Age → Active service1	-0.02	0.03	0.13*	0.06
Education → Active service1	0.26**	0.08	0.01	0.18
Merits of EDF1 → Active service1	0.34***	0.07	0.18	0.16
Merits of EDF2 → Active service2	0.24***	0.06	0.33*	0.14
Merits of EDF3 → Active service3	0.10	0.06	-0.11	0.11
Skills1 → Active service1	0.48***	0.10	0.02	0.22
Skills2 → Active service2	0.17*	0.08	0.12	0.18
Skills3 → Active service3	0.27**	0.09	0.83***	0.17
Service satisfaction2 → Active service2	0.22***	0.06	0.36**	0.13
Service satisfaction3 → Active service3	0.21***	0.06	0.32**	0.12
Active service1 → Active service2	0.46***	0.04	0.58***	0.07
Active service2 → Active service3	0.49***	0.04	0.51***	0.06
Merits of EDF1 → Merits of EDF2	0.67***	0.04	0.54***	0.07
Merits of EDF2 → Merits of EDF3	0.60***	0.04	0.77***	0.07
Skills1 → Skills2	0.32***	0.04	0.23**	0.08
Skills2 → Skills3	0.49***	0.04	0.51***	0.07
Service satisfaction2 → Service satisfaction3	0.27***	0.04	0.22**	0.07
Merits of EDF2 → Service satisfaction2	0.50***	0.04	0.68***	0.07
Merits of EDF3 → Service satisfaction3	0.46***	0.04	0.45***	0.07
Skills2 → Service satisfaction2	0.37***	0.06	0.28**	0.11
Skills3 → Service satisfaction3	0.27***	0.06	0.32**	0.12

In the next step, we analyzed the model fit of the unconstrained model (including all conscripts; all model effects were estimated for the two groups separately). Based on model fit indicators, firstly we can conclude that the unconstrained model quite adequately fits our data (RMSEA=0.066; CFI=0.861 with  $\chi^2=621.2$ ,  $df=150$ ,  $p<0,0005$ ;  $\chi^2/df=4.14$ ). Secondly, we constrained the structural path coefficients (structural weights) to be equal across the groups and tested whether the model fit would differ significantly from the model without this constraint (indicating EDL-group differences in structural paths) or whether it would differ to a non-significant extent (showing that the paths can be “made equal” without losing model fit, and indicating

that the paths do not differ between those conscripts with EDL experience and those without it). The results yielded nearly the same fit (RMSEA=0.063; CFI=0.854 with  $\chi^2=667.7$ ,  $df=174$ ,  $p<0,0005$ ;  $\chi^2/df=3.84$ ). But still the increase in  $\chi^2$  is significant in comparison to the differences in model fit to the unconstrained model ( $\Delta\chi^2=46.5$ ,  $\Delta df=24$ ,  $p=0.004$ ). In the next steps, we also tested the invariance of the model with respect to intercepts, covariances and residuals in the two groups considered, and got remarkably worse fit statistics than described above. Hence, the variables included in the model have different effects on the behavioural intention to join active service among conscripts in the two groups analyzed.

## 4 DISCUSSION

The question of human resources in the military system has existed for as long as there have been militaries. A wide range of studies have focused on the question of military propensity in the process of recruitment (e.g. (Bachman et al., 1998, 2000, Kleykamp 2006, Lagree et al 2000, Woodruff 2017). However, these studies have mostly focused on volunteer-based armies. In this study, we focused on the question of how military propensity (the intention to join active service) is affected by compulsory military service. We explored how military propensity changed during compulsory military service, and whether it was influenced by personal characteristics (socio-demographic factors and attitudes) or conscript-related characteristics (satisfaction, skills, and merits). The findings support two broad conclusions. Firstly, during conscription, a positive intention to join the active service will change more than the intention not to join, and rather towards not joining the active service. Secondly, the intention to join the active service in both conscripts who have a previous EDL connection and those who do not is influenced by different characteristics during service.

The first main conclusion evokes the question “why?” – why does military propensity in our sample decrease during conscription? We argue that quite often, during conscript service, an instrumental learning approach is applied. In conscript service, one of the goals is to ingrain as many military values as possible in the conscripts, who are embedded in the context of military culture, characterized by discipline, hierarchy, order, notions of patriotism, honour, loyalty, integrity and sacrifice (Olsthoorn, 2010; Rahbek-Clemmensen et al., 2012). At the same time, this process means a strong socialization to conform to the values and behaviour of the organization/system. To achieve this desired behaviour, both positive reinforcement and punishment are applied. Our previous analysis showed that, in the middle of the service, the conscripts’ fears are associated with the feeling that they will let the group or squad down and that this will be followed by the entire collective being assigned to a compulsory task – i.e. to a certain extent, we could see an orientation towards evading punishment (Talves and Truusa, 2017).

Our results indicate that conscripts who have had a previous connection with the EDL have higher military propensity, and they are more likely to maintain their

intention to join active service than conscripts who lack an EDL background. This is consistent with the findings of Lievens et al. (2005), who stressed the association between a familiarity with military organizations and the attraction of a military organization as employer. Also, it revealed that in the case of conscripts with an EDL background, the merits of the EDF and expected skills do not have significant influence on intention; however, there was a strong association between acquired skills and intention at the end of the service. This is in line with the theoretical approach of the social learning concept of self-efficacy. Those conscripts who feel that they have acquired EDF specific skills are more favourably disposed to active service. However, self-efficacy is not so visible in the case of conscripts who have a non-EDL background. Interestingly, for the non-EDL background conscripts, the driving force behind an intention to join the active service is the merits of the EDF, which are also associated with service satisfaction and the intrinsic motivation of patriotism. The merits of the EDF could also be seen as a proxy for pride and EDF-related prestige. In previous studies, pride has been seen as one of the leading positive factors for remaining in service (Moore, 2002), and it appears that it could also be seen as a positive factor for joining active service. To sum up, our findings are in accordance with the task approach skills component in the SLTCMD model. This means that depending on different backgrounds – EDL vs non-EDL – experiences in the conscript service have a different impact on the intention to join the active service.

Finally, some limitations should be acknowledged. Firstly, in our conceptual model and analysis for predicting intentions during conscript service, we included few socio-demographic background variables. However, previous studies have shown that voluntary military enlistment is associated with lower socio-economic status, living in an area with a high military presence (Kleykamp, 2006), and parental characteristics (Legree et al 2000). These aspects should therefore be considered in further analysis. Moreover, the analysis on the basis of the ECS indicated that satisfaction with service is associated with the perceived attitude from partners, parents and peers towards conscript service (Raid et. al 2018, forthcoming). Thus it could be expected that the influence of parents, partners and peers should be taken into account also in the case of military propensity. It would be also in accordance with the framework of the Theory of Planned Behaviour, which holds that behavioural intention is influenced by perceived social norms, which could be operationalized as the attitudes of significant others.

The second limitation relates to the generalizability of our results. Our study was conducted during conscript service in the EDF. We do not claim that these findings are universal for other societies with compulsory military service, especially the associations between different characteristics and behavioural intention. Compulsory military services are diverse according to the duration, retention rate and proportion of volunteers in different countries (Cronberg 2006), which may affect the influence of conscription-related factors on intention to join active service. However, we

believe that our study highlights the importance of taking into account the effect of conscript service on the process of recruitment of active service members.

**Conclusion** Various studies (Woodruff, 2017; Yi-Ming Yu, 2015) indicate that the purely occupational model with mostly extrinsic goals for becoming active service members is less desirable for the military in the long run. Our results align with these findings and confirm that those with previous familiarity with military culture and organization, and those who pursue more intrinsic goals (patriotism and acquiring skills) during their conscription service, are more likely to consider the military as a career option. These results are also important to consider in the context of reserve-based armies. Although the main emphasis of this article is geared towards understanding conscription in the context of recruiting active service members, the ultimate goal is to train people who would be motivated and capable of defending their nation if such a need should arise. Laanepere et al. (2018, forthcoming) theorize that reservists who have contextualised their conscript period as time well spent obtaining useful skills, and have conceptualized the merits of the armed forces that they are a part of, would also have higher motivation when performing their reserve duties.

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**Appendix 1:**  
Covariances  
between  
exogenous  
variables of  
the model of  
active service  
intention for  
conscripts with  
and without  
experience in  
EDL (n=713)

Covariances				
Merits of EDF1 ↔ Skills1	0.11***	0.01	0.13***	0.03
Deployments ↔ Merits of EDF1	0.20***	0.03	0.03***	0.06
Defensibility ↔ Skills1	0.05***	0.02	0.09**	0.03
Deployments ↔ Skills1	0.05***	0.02	0.07*	0.03
Deployments ↔ Defensibility	0.24***	0.03	0.27***	0.07
Defensibility ↔ Merits of EDF1	0.23***	0.03	0.33***	0.06
Defensibility ↔ Threat level	0.06	0.04	0.01	0.08
Deployments ↔ Threat level	0.21***	0.04	0.46***	0.09
Threat level ↔ Skills1	0.06**	0.02	0.11**	0.04
Threat level ↔ Merits of EDF1	0.09**	0.04	0.27***	0.07
Deployments ↔ age	0.14*	0.06	0.44***	0.11
Defensibility ↔ age	0.18***	0.06	0.14	0.11
Threat level ↔ age	0.08	0.08	0.35*	0.15
Age ↔ Skills1	0.05	0.03	0.18***	0.06
Age ↔ Merits of EDF1	0.21***	0.05	0.23*	0.09
Age ↔ Education	0.04	0.04	-0.13*	0.06
Deployments ↔ Education	-0.05**	0.02	-0.01	0.03
Defensibility ↔ Education	-0.02	0.02	0.02	0.03
Threat level ↔ Education	0.05	0.03	0.01	0.04
Education ↔ Skills1	0.01	0.01	0.01	0.02
Education ↔ Merits of EDF1	0.04**	0.02	-0.01	0.03