

Abstract

Rudimentary Study for the Transition of Discourses on Military Service

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1. Research Purpose

The purpose of this study is to collect rudimentary data in order to promote the transition of discourses on the current conscription system by disclosing the problems of the present military system. Specifically, the study aims to give a concrete shape to the content of “sacrifices” and “losses” due to the military service through the survey of experiences of men in their twenties, and to provide implications for the improvement of future military service by identifying the perceptions of those who served in the military and the general public regarding changes in the conscription system.

2. Study Subjects

This study conducted a survey of men in their twenties regarding their military experiences and perceptions about the directions for the improvement of the military service system as well as the general public regarding their perceptions about the directions for the improvement of the military service system. As for the military experiences of men in their twenties, the survey asked questions about their attitude toward entering the military service, experience of duty assignment and self-development, economic compensation for military service, return to society after being discharged from the military, and issues of time arising from the military service. As for the perceptions of men in their twenties and the general public about the directions for the improvement of the military service system, the study surveyed and analyzed their perceptions about the conscription system and measures for changes in the military system, the future generation and the improvement of the military service system, and military forces and women.

Based on the survey results of the two groups, this study presents implications for the directions of improving the future military service system and points of discussions on the military service system.

3. Major Research Findings

1) Military Service Experiences of Men in their 20s and Their Perceptions about Improving the Military Service System

A. Military Service Experiences

Men in their 20s with military experiences waited 4.09 months on average before entering the military service, and 23.0% of them could not enter the service for the period they hoped. Of them, 80.8% thought 'they might not have entered the military if they could choose,' 24.4% had 'sought ways to avoid enlistment to the military,' and 13.2% had 'thought about refusing to preform military service.'

Of the young men surveyed, 56.0% were assigned duties that they wanted during their military service, and 70.1% perceived that 'their assigned duties were very important in the role of the military forces to protect national security.' On the other hand, 27.8% thought 'their duties were suitable for the civilians, not soldiers,' and 26.9% perceived 'their duties were helpful for their career.'

A high proportion of the young men who served in the military participated in snow clearing (81.4%), weeding (74.7%), and military facility maintenance (73.5%) in addition to the assigned duties. About half or 48.1% of them handled personal business of their supervisors. Also, about half or 49.6% developed themselves during the military service, and of those who participated in self-development activities, 82.1% responded that the activities were helpful for employment and study after the service, and 72.7% answered that they were helpful in filling the gap caused by the military service.

The difficulties they had in daily life when they returned to society from the service included 'study' (62.5%), 'employment/re-employment' (59.4%), 'changes in society and culture' (54.0%), and 'personal relations' (52.6%) in that order. Of the respondents, 44.3% had suffered trauma from what they had

experienced during the military service, and 38.2% of them answered they still suffered from the trauma up to the present. This is to say, about four out of 10 suffer trauma caused by the military service.

B. Perceptions about Improving the Military Service System

Of the men surveyed, 51.5% responded 'the current conscription system that requires most men to serve in the military to keep national security in South Korea is the most appropriate,' 39.3% answered 'the size of military force is the measure of military power,' and 71.5% 'there is other way than military service that they can do their duty for national defense.'

Regarding the measures for changing the military, more respondents had a positive evaluation of 'soldiers' going out on weekdays and using mobile phones' (64.1%) than 'reducing the number of the draftees' (45.7%) or 'shortening the military service period' (48.5%). Over 50% of those enlisted since 2014 thought 'all the three measures were desirable.' About half or 51.7% had the opinion that the decision of the Constitutional Court of Korea for conscientious objectors was wrong.

Regarding the recruitment and maintenance of military service sources, 48.7% had the opinion that it was not desirable for men only to perform the mandatory duty. To the introduction of a volunteer military system, 72.5% agreed. Regarding the main reason for opposing the introduction of a volunteer military system, 40.1% said it would be difficult to maintain military forces because too many people would not join the military.

Of the respondents, 78.2% agreed to the argument that the conscription system is discriminatory against men, and 80.0% agreed that women too should enter the military service.

Regarding the type of women's military service, they answered 'military service equal to that of men' (37.7%), 'social service' (31.2%), 'short-term mandatory military training' (22.8%), and 'the same way as the current system' (8.1%) in that order.

2) Perceptions of the General Public about Improving the Military Service System

A. The Military and the Conscription System

Of the general public surveyed, 49.4% agreed to the statement that the current conscription system is proper to maintain national security in South Korea; 34.7%, with 38.2% of women and 31.5% of men, to the statement that the size of military force is the measure of military power; and 73.6%, with 71.4% of women and 75.7% of men, to the statement that there is other way than military service that they can do their duty for national defense.

Of the respondents, 49.6%, with 48.4% of women and 50.8% of men, agreed to the statement that men should serve in the military to be manly, and 77.1%, with 72.8% of women and 81.1% of men, to the statement that if they are men in the Republic of Korea, they will carry out their duty for national defense. This shows that more men agreed to the statements than women did.

B. Perceptions about Changes in the Military

Of the general public surveyed, 65.2%, 55.5%, and 59.0% each showed a positive response to the measures of soldiers' going out on weekdays and using mobile phones, reducing the number of the draftees, and shortening the military service period, respectively. Men had a higher response to 'ensuring privacy' than women by 2.8 percentage points, while women had a higher response to 'shortening the military service period' by 20.6

percentage points.

As for the ruling of the Constitutional Court for conscientious objectors, the highest proportion or 42.5% of the general public responded that 'the decision was right.' However, there was a gender gap in the response: the highest proportion of women or 48.8% responded that 'the decision was right,' while the highest proportion of men or 44.6% responded that 'the decision was wrong.'

C. Perceptions about Improving the Military Service System

The opinion of the general public that the current conscription system requiring men only to mandatorily serve in the military accounted for 58.0%.

Of the general public, 80.1%, with 81.0% of women and 79.2% of men, agreed to the introduction of volunteer military system.

Of the general public, 59.9%, with 51.8% of women and 67.5% of men, agreed to the argument that the conscription system is discriminatory against men, and 62.5%, with 53.7% of women and 70.8% of men, agreed to the statement that women too should enter the military service.

Regarding the type of women's military service, the general public answered 'social service' (35.3%), 'the same way as the current system' (25.6%), 'military service equal to that of men' (20.5%), and 'short-term mandatory military training' (18.6%) in that order.

4. Policy Implications

- . Make a continued effort to create an equal military culture.
- . Increase the compensation and support for those who serve in the military.

- . Expand the review and discussion on the appropriateness of the current conscription system.
- . Explore the alternative military service system and promote discussions on the duty for national defense.