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## Does Mandatory Military Service Impede Male Representatives from Pursuing Higher Education in Post-Soviet Armenia?

### Brání povinná vojenská služba v postsovětské Arménii mužským zástupcům ve vysokoškolském vzdělávání?

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#### Abstract:

The enforcement of mandatory military reforms in 2016 and 2018 has significantly affected the overall layout of higher education (HE) in Armenia, creating a number of challenges for different stakeholders. The current research paper makes an attempt to examine the main perceptions of teachers, students, educators, etc., of the enforcement of mandatory military service reforms on the HE system in post-Soviet Armenia. The data of the following study was obtained from four different state universities located in the Republic of Armenia. The outcomes of the research demonstrate that different stakeholders hold controversial opinions in terms of the application of these reforms. The findings illustrate that these reforms positively influenced in developing academic integrity, and equality among students with different social and geographic backgrounds, however, they have worsened the overall competitiveness of higher education creating a female-dominating educational environment.

#### Abstrakt:

Prosazení povinných vojenských reforem v letech 2016 a 2018 významně ovlivnilo celkové uspořádání vysokoškolského vzdělávání v Arménii a postavilo před různé zúčastněné strany řadu výzev. Tento článek zkoumá hlavní názory učitelů, studentů, pedagogů atd. na zavedení reforem povinné vojenské služby v systému vysokého školství v postsovětské Arménii. Data pro následující studii byla získána na čtyřech různých

státních univerzitách v Arménské republice. Výsledky výzkumu ukazují, že různé zúčastněné strany mají na uplatňování těchto reforem rozporné názory. Zjištění ukazují, že reformy měly pozitivní vliv na posílení akademické integrity a rovnosti mezi studenty s různým sociálním a geografickým zázemím, zhoršily však celkovou konkurenceschopnost vysokoškolského vzdělávání a vytvořily vzdělávací prostředí s převahou žen.

**Keywords:** Compulsory Military Service; Deferment; Educational Continuity; Higher Education; Reform.

**Klíčová slova:** povinná vojenská služba; odklad; kontinuita vzdělávání; vysokoškolské vzdělávání; reforma.

## INTRODUCTION

Compulsory military service is essential for a country to secure its safety and sovereignty amid conflicts. Following the collapse of the Soviet Union, Armenia introduced a military draft in response to ongoing military conflicts with neighboring countries, Turkey and Azerbaijan. This draft compelled a significant proportion of young men to undertake two years of military service. The mandatory military draft was implemented alongside Higher Educational Institutions. The Armenian government granted military deferment for 4-9 years on the basis of higher education. Upon graduating from university, many young Armenian men were granted the rank of lieutenant, which eased their military service. Completing military duty was also advantageous in the labour market, particularly for government office work. However, over time, Armenia passed a new law obliging all 18-year-old students to be conscripted into the army for two years, regardless of their enrolment in higher educational institutions. Many Armenian male students were taken aback by the new rule requiring obligatory military service from the age of 18.

In 2017, a peaceful protest started in front of the leading university of Armenia: Yerevan State University. The protest initiative entitled "There Will Be Deferment" received widespread recognition and support from the Armenian society. The main reason for this protest movement was a proposed modification to the Act on Military Service. The modification altered the process of obtaining deferments for male students, complicating it and lowering the number of recipients. The main objection to the new regulation stemmed from the view that students' basic rights to retain educational continuity should not be compromised. In response to the movement, the Ministries of Defense and Education of the Republic of Armenia enacted policies addressing the issue. According to the new policy, students who want to complete their bachelor's degree before joining the army must sign a contract with the Ministry of Defense of the Republic of Armenia pledging to serve in the army for three years right after graduation, rather than the initial two years. In exchange, the state covers their tuition costs.

Since the implementation of the new policy, the proportion of male dropouts from Armenia's higher education institutions has risen dramatically. Furthermore, the general GPA of young males in Armenian higher education institutions has dramatically dropped compared to their female peers, causing numerous challenges in the Armenian higher education system. Finally, the new policy has had a long-term detrimental impact on the labor market and human capital in the Republic of Armenia. Hence, the current research paper aims to:

1. to analyze and evaluate the current situation of higher education after the enforcement of military service,
2. To identify and present the problems of higher education after the enforcement of military reforms in 2016 and 2018,
3. to determine the perceptions of different stakeholders in terms of military service reforms.

The research questions addressed in the following paper are as follows:

1. What are the disadvantages and advantages of the enforcement of the above-mentioned reforms?
2. How do teachers and students perceive the impact of compulsory military service on higher education?
3. What benefits might compulsory military reforms bring to education and socio-economic life of students?

The answers of these research questions will guide us to have a better understanding of the current situation of higher education, its needs, lacks and demands. The research outcomes could be a blueprint for educators and policy makers seeking to better the situation. This research contributes to the current literature on the impacts of military service.

Despite much discussion, there are no studies to our knowledge that have focused on evaluating and presenting the impact of military service reforms on higher education in Armenia.

## 1 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

To provide thorough and accurate answers to the research questions, our research team applied both quantitative and qualitative research methods. Three primary components make up our research design: in-depth interviews with university staff, interviews with students and phone calls or online interviews with parents and civil society organizations. To guarantee the comprehensive and holistic outcome of the research, our research team tried its best to include as many interviewees as possible. Over 77 university teachers and experts, 111 students (both male and female) and 56 parents took part in our study. The interviews covered both closed and open-ended questions. The conducted interviews provided sufficient background for data analysis. To elicit the opinions of all parties, we employed a ten-point Likert scale numerical format. The Likert scale is important for building knowledge in social science research because it is the process of measuring qualitative or quantitative attributes of entities (Heo et al., 2022).

University teachers and students were chosen based on purposive sampling. To obtain data, surveys conducted in the classroom, field notes, and other methods were employed by our research team. This methodology enabled us to understand and thoroughly analyze the effects of required military service on Armenia's higher education system and labor market from the viewpoints of various stakeholders.

## 2 LITERATURE REVIEW

A number of studies have tried to examine the consequences of mandatory military service on socio-economic life of various countries. To date, the outcomes of research on compulsory military service and its impact on education are controversial. Of course, the outcomes of any study are mainly dependable on the target country, identification strategies, dependent and independent variables, institutional military service, laws, etc. The research conducted by R. Savcic et al., in the Republic of Cyprus reports that military service has a positive and significant effect on men's subsequent academic performance as measured by grade point average (Savcic et al., 2023).

Another study conducted by Bingley et al. (2022) in Denmark demonstrates that men with low Armed Forces Qualification Test (AFQT) scores are more likely to take vocational training, not higher education, because of military service (Savcic et al., 2023).

However, for Italy, no effect of military conscription on enrolment in tertiary education is found, except for recruits from lower socio-economic backgrounds (Di Pietro 2013).

According to Di Pietro 2015 no effect of military conscription on enrolment to tertiary education is found in Italy, except for recruits from lower socio-economic backgrounds (Hubers & Webbink, 2015).

Galiani, Rossi and Schargrodsky (2011) document that conscription increases the likelihood of developing a crime record (Torun & Tumen, 2016).

Vincent Lynk-Jensen (2018) finds that conscription reduces years of schooling as well as the probability of finishing high school at the age of 25 for draftees, but it does not affect crime or the probability of being unemployed (Savic et al., 2020).

Mouganie (2020) does not find a significant effect of CMS abolition on employment or wages in France (Mouganie 2020).

Peacetime military service has both positive and negative effects on human capital. While it depreciates academic skills, it also enhances non-cognitive ones (Savcic et al., 2023).

### Military service and its outcomes for higher education in the Republic of Armenia

In the Republic of Armenia, all male citizens are conscripted to mandatory military service after they turn 18. More specifically, many male citizens start their military

service after the completion of high school or a few months later. The standard duration of compulsory military service is 2 years; however, it may vary depending on certain cases.

After becoming an independent country in 1991 until the second Nagorno-Karabakh war in 2016, two major reforms were employed that drastically affected the socio-economic and educational fields in Armenia. The first reform deeply affected the majority of students performing their bachelor's and master's degrees at state universities (Yerevan State University, Armenian State University of Economics, Yerevan State Pedagogical University, Yerevan State University of Architecture, etc.), while the second reform had an impact on PhD students.

**Reform 1.** During the period 1991 up to 2009, students enrolling state universities of Armenia were obtaining army deferment from the government. The army deferment period covered 4 and 2 years for bachelor's and master's degrees respectively. After the completion of the master's degree, many students were trying to be enrolled for a PhD program to avoid mandatory military service permanently. However, only 1 percent of students managed to do so taking into consideration the limited places. Each profession got only two seats. At that time, education in Armenia was very competitive. Many male citizens tried their best to get higher education, especially in the fields of law, foreign languages, economics, etc. After the completion of the bachelor's degree, the majority of male students went to serve army taking into considerations the difficulties they were going to face in labor market without completing their mandatory service. A number of experts in Armenia welcomed the continuity and integrity of education and military service in two major aspects, firstly, students were able to complete their educational degree without an interruption; secondly, male citizens went to serve army in more mature age.

A protest movement started in front of Yerevan State University in the fall of 2017. The student movement attracted the attention and support from the public. The modification changed the procedure for male students seeking deferments, increasing its complexity and decreasing number of recipients. The employment of the new act sought to stop boys from avoiding the army using education as an excuse (Navigating Higher Education and Military Service: Challenges Faced by Male Students in Armenia, 2024).

Although young men's education may be disrupted by the mandatory military duty, the Armenian government has taken measures to alleviate this problem. According to those measures students who want to obtain their bachelor's degree before serving in the army are required to sign a contract with the Ministry of Defense committing to serve in the army for three years after they graduate, instead of the initial two years. In return, the state covers their tuition fees. Otherwise, upon reaching the age of 18, they will be conscripted to the army for two years (Governmental Decision N451).

In this study, we made an attempt to present evidence based on the above-mentioned claims in regard to the effect of each reform on higher education and labour market.

It would be ideal to obtain accurate and comprehensive information about the specifics of male citizen's compulsory military service, army-avoidance tactics, education in army, the proportion of male students who applied for three-year mandatory military service, the approval rate of those applications, etc. However, it should be mentioned that the Ministry of Defense of the Republic of Armenia declined our inquiry and did

not facilitate the provision of such figures. So, our research has to rely mainly only on publicly accessible information. In the next section of our research paper, we discuss the outcomes of the available information and make an attempt to shed light on the main research question.

### 3 FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

The following study was conducted in the Republic of Armenia in the academic years 2022-2024. The data of the current research was obtained from four state and one private university in Armenia: Yerevan State University (YSU is the leading university of Armenia, Yerevan State Agrarian University, Yerevan State University of Architecture, Yerevan State University of Economics, Russian-Armenian (Slavonic) University).

We tried to employ a diverse non-probability sample to guide the university selection process. Our research methodology consists of two parts. The first part aims to reveal the overall perceptions of compulsory military service held by different stakeholders. To thoroughly evaluate the gathered data and satisfy the research objectives, the current study employed a number of research instruments, including commentary, quizzes, interviews and quantitative and qualitative research procedures.

The current study seeks to identify the outcomes of mandatory military service on higher educational institutions of Armenia. To fulfil the objectives of our study, we held interviews with 57 participants (37 students and 20 teachers). All of the participants were Armenian.

Prior to the obtainment of any data, all participants were provided adequate information about the objectives of the current study. Naturally, permission to do so was requested and granted.

It was clear from the interview results that all parties were not satisfied with the outcomes and implementation of the new reforms.

To ensure the privacy of each interviewee, all participant parties were identified with an alpha-numeric identifiers (teachers: T1-T20, students: S1-S37)

To collect the required data for the following research paper, we used interviews as the research instrument. With the help of interviews, we successfully managed to gain an immense amount of qualitative data. Interviews provide an opportunity for participants to share their feelings, prejudices, opinions, desires, and attitudes towards different phenomena they experience in the workplace or other organizational contexts (Dunwoodie et al., 2022).

### 3.1 Teachers' comments

**T1** Frankly speaking, the implementation of the reforms has a positive effect. Those reforms decreased the risks of corruption in higher educational institutions. A number of students avoided mandatory military service through nepotism and bribery. However, after the defense of PhD thesis, those students were barely engaged in science. So, as for me, the influence of new reforms is mainly positive. Positive -10 points.

1	22	3	44	5	6	7	8	9	10
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**T2** Nowadays, the percentage of dropout male students after the completion of mandatory military service has significantly increased. In some classes, one can barely notice one or two boys. I think these two reforms have negatively affected on the university life of students. Before 2009, students had the chance to complete their educational program, while now the disruption of continuity has decreased the overall number of male students and their GPA compared to female students. Neutral-5 points.

1	22	3	44	5	6	7	8	9	10
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**T3** After the completion of military service, the majority of male students do not drop out, but change their full time education to distance learning and start working with a low salary. The main goal of those students is just to obtain a diploma, which leads us to the conclusion that male students are actually not interested in education. This is the main reason why our labor market lacks of professionals. Neutral -5 points.

1	22	3	44	5	6	7	8	9	10
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**T4** You know, I heard lots of complaints from different stakeholders in terms of these two reforms. Literary, no one can deny the negative impact of these reforms. However, we should not forget that we live in a "not war, not peace" situation, where every moment a war may burst out. So, I totally approve the measures taken by the government. The safety of a country is more important than education. Positive -10 points.

1	22	3	44	5	6	7	8	9	10
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**T5** To be frank, I think that after the enforcement of those two reforms, the competitiveness of learning among students has dropped. Male students get enrolled to a university and after a term, they are subjected to mandatory military service. Of course, they can't be interested in learning, they are looking forward to the start and completion of their military service. So, we, teachers, in some content, just give them some grades, we don't want to make the process more complicated. After the completion of military service, some students try to resume their studies, however they mainly forget the content, they face difficulties in the initial stage, so we just try to compromise something for them, so that they can be prompted to continue the educational process smoothly. All the steps have decreased the quality of education in university life. Besides this, I think classrooms nowadays are more female-driven. Before, male students dominated, now the situation has changed, which in turn affected the mentality and overall atmosphere of the classroom management as well. Negative-7 points.

1	22	3	44	5	6	7	8	9	10
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**T6** After 2020, I feel we have an academic collapse in the field of PhD studies. I share the opinions that the PhD process was full of some bribery, and sometimes it served as a way to avoid the military service, however one should mention that 50 percent of those male students continued to work and progress in academic life. Before, we had an extensive amount of article submission, journals were flourishing, even more male students were trying to publish articles in WOS or Scopus indexed journals. For now, I can say, the rate of publication and submission has significantly dropped. For a long time, we have not even arranged PhD thesis defenses, everything has just stopped. Positive-9 points.

1	22	3	44	5	6	7	8	9	10
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**T7** Distance learning was not common in Armenia. Even more, those diplomas were not considered as a proof of education. After the implementation of these two reforms, the number of students enrolling into distance learning for bachelor's degree has significantly increased. So, one can notice, we have female dominated full time bachelor's degree and male-dominated distance learning. I think distance learning does not fully fulfill the intended educational goals. Male students do not get proper education; they are not ready for labor market. This highly affects the quality and reputation of any university. For me it is more like "buy and sell diploma". Students need diploma and university needs money from the students. So, the main purpose of education has gone. Negative-2 points.

1	22	3	44	5	6	7	8	9	10
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**T8** A lot of problems have emerged since 2017. The academic staff clearly notices the degradation of students. After the completion of the mandatory military service, male students simply beg for some low grades. Their main excuse is that due to the military service they have forgotten the past knowledge and they need time to adapt to the new learning environment and society. Their argument is reasonable; however, students should not take it for granted. Negative-2 points.

1	22	3	44	5	6	7	8	9	10
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**T9** The current unfavorable situation of the educational life in Armenia should not be associated only with the employment of the new reforms. The socio-economic poor conditions, high rate of unemployment, low salaries, temporary wars and conflicts with Azerbaijan and high rate of migration have caused the severance of the matter. Many male students come to the conclusion that university education will not help them find the proper job with a desired salary. So, they are more inclined in attending various training centers that can provide knowledge in a short period of time, instead of spending money for a long term and theoretical knowledge. Training centers have become the major educational centers for IT specialists, language learners, economists. Those training centers provide more practical knowledge which ease their way to market. Positive-8 points.

1	22	3	44	5	6	7	8	9	10
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**T10** The new military reforms have enabled a number of students to get higher education with the support of the country. I can clearly notice the increase of the number of students from remote regions of Armenia. Before, students with low family income were not able to enter any higher educational institution, while now the geographic map of students has changed. Compared to that, students located in Yerevan and nearby places prefer getting higher education in foreign countries, as they regard national educational system not competitive. Positive-9 points.

1	22	3	44	5	6	7	8	9	10
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### 3.2 Students' comments

**S1** From my perspective, our country should not impose this kind of reforms on students like me. We are too young and inexperienced for military service. It is much better if we go and serve in the army after the completion of our bachelor's or master's degree. Instead of doing this, our government can call other civilians to come and serve with a decent salary. Two years is not a short period. It totally distorts us from our learning process. Negative -4 points.

1	22	3	44	5	6	7	8	9	10
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**S2** It was so hard for me to get reintegrated to this educational system again. It was so hard to interact with course-mates. They have a very immature mentality. The courses are boring, that is why I have decided to change my full time study to distance learning. I can combine work and education, will earn money. I don't want my parents to take that responsibility. Negative-4 points.

1	22	3	44	5	6	7	8	9	10
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**S3** I was so angry when I heard I could not go abroad to study because of my compulsory military service. That ruined my plans. I was planning to go to Athens, Greece. I got my enrollment, however our ministry of education did not allow me to leave the country. I am studying at Yerevan State University of Economics just for my parents. It is already 2 months passed and I have three months left till the start of my mandatory service, and I have no interest in these boring subjects. Here we use old books, books that were popular in the period of the USSR. I can't get any scholarship; all the scholarships are only for girls. Negative -2 points.

1	22	3	44	5	6	7	8	9	10
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**S4** After the completion of my mandatory military service, I can see the true colors of this society. Education in Armenia is fake. I just need a diploma to get a job in the government. Everything is about connections, whom do you know, whose patronage you should get to take different vacancies. Grades in our university are also superficial. Those students who are close to lecturers or are their children always get benefits: easy grades,

scholarship, arbitrary attendance of classes. At the beginning, I was so motivated to do so much, for this stage I feel disappointed a lot. Positive -9 points.

1	22	3	44	5	6	7	8	9	10
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**S5** For now, the only thing that comes to my mind is earning money. I feel I don't have enough patience to deal with all these subjects. Many of them are useless and not related to the major, that is why I changed my full time study into distance learning. I feel our faculty (Journalism) should provide more practical knowledge, everything is theoretical based on old books and materials. I can get practical knowledge and experience by working in this field. Why do I need to attend university for a full time program? Neutral-5 points.

1	22	3	44	5	6	7	8	9	10
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**S6** In 2017, I enrolled in my bachelor's degree with excellent scores, so I got a four year deferment. I was so happy, so were my parents. I was taking my studies very seriously. I had decided to continue for master's degree, then PhD. Alas, the new reform in 2018 totally destroyed my plans. I didn't even complete my master's degree. Mandatory military service negatively influenced my life and career. For now, I am thinking of moving to another country. Positive-9 points.

1	22	3	44	5	6	7	8	9	10
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**S7** The nation-army initiative was very beneficial for me. I am from a small village in Ashtarak town. My family is engaged in farming. I had an interest in studying, getting higher education, however my family could not afford it at all. With the help of the nation-army initiative, I was able to get my bachelor's degree for free. At the same time, I served in the army for three years with honor. Now I am doing my master's degree. At the same time, I'm working at the ministry of Defense of the Republic of Armenia. I highly appreciate this initiative. Positive-9 points.

1	22	3	44	5	6	7	8	9	10
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**S8** Frankly speaking, I don't see any difference between enrolling to any university, then completing military service, coming back and continuing education. Of course, our country needs us, education is important, but country is more important. It is worth mentioning that our country supports us financially. When it comes to complaints on educational continuity, I think that makes no sense. Students with some special connections always got those advantages, nowadays they are not satisfied as there is no room for them to escape from serving in the army. Everyone is equal regardless of their social status. Neutral-3 points.

1	22	3	44	5	6	7	8	9	10
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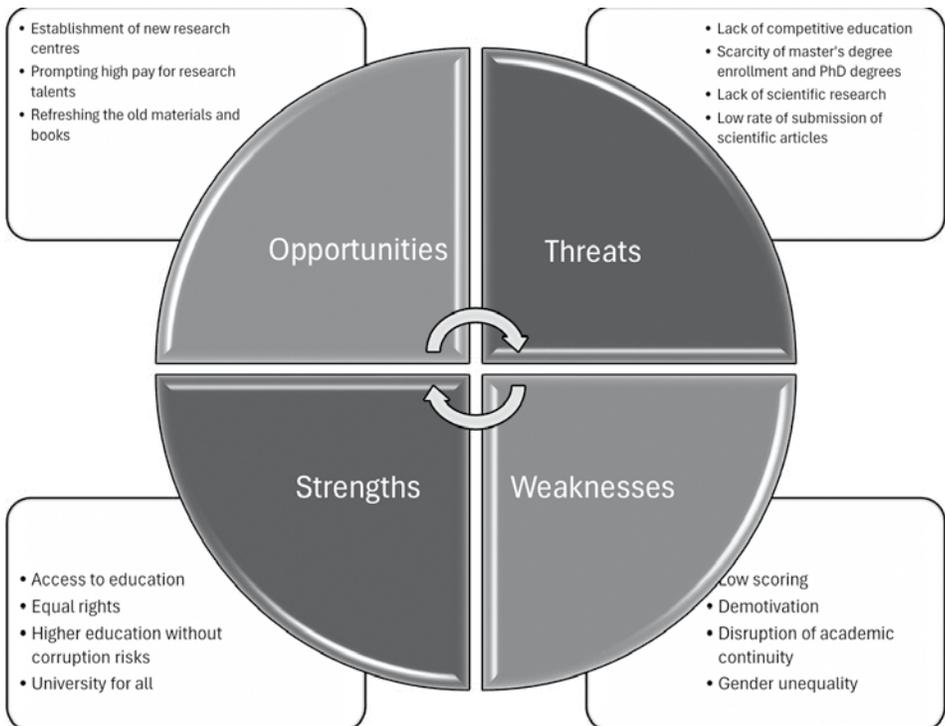
**S9** Compulsory military service has critically changed my horizon and worldview. I can picture myself before and after army. I was not interested in studies in my first year of university, however now, I got more mature and I am taking my studies really seriously. Lecturers also treat us nicely. I got a partial scholarship. I like my profession a lot. Military service made me realize what I want to acquire in life. Positive-8 points.

1	22	3	44	5	6	7	8	9	10
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**S10** You know this topic goes extreme. Majority of students consider reforms implemented in 2018 as devastating, while I think it simply disclosed the real picture of the educational system of Armenia. There were fake excellent learners, whose main goal was getting rid of military service in a legal way. The chairs of almost all the universities, journals, etc. were corrupted. Now we have equal rights and I respect our government for that. This reform does not exclude deferment, simply it really seeks to find people who are interested in science. If you examine the data of those PhDs before 2018, you can clearly see no one writes articles or does any scientific research after earning their degrees. So, for me this reform is constructive. We don't have pseudoscience any more. Positive -7 points.

1	22	3	44	5	6	7	8	9	10
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To summarize the comments made by different parties of our research, we employed SWOT analysis (a framework of four major elements: Strengths, Opportunities, Weaknesses and Threats). SWOT analysis is a significant tool for situation analysis that helps the managers to identify organizational and environmental factors (Gürel, 2017).



**Graph 1:** SWOT analysis of the comments

To conduct the second part of our research, we created a data set profile of all the students enrolled at the above-mentioned universities from September 2015 to 2024. After receiving the consent of university management body, we obtained the full data on the national entrance exam scores, the grades of male students before and after completing the mandatory military service. Our data set contains information on the students' non-gradable exams as well as those with the pass or fail results. Besides scores, our data set also includes some extra information such as the students' level of studies (bachelor, master or PhD), gender, year of birth, faculty name, age of university admission, years of conducting mandatory military service, etc.

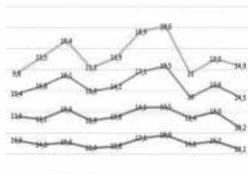
The distribution of the major differences by gender is presented in Table 1. A third of the sample consists of male students, who, as a result of forced conscription, start university on average 1.8 years older than their female counterparts. Male representatives enroll the university with equal grades, and they graduate with lower grades compared to their female counterparts.

**Table 1:** An overview of the major variables

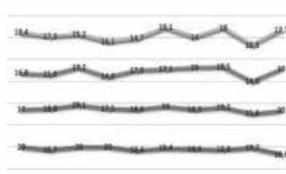
	All	Males	Females
Age at enrollment			
Median	18.80	19.80	17.70
Deviation	0.91	0.81	0.58
Minimum	17	17	17
Maximum	19	21	20
Admission overall grade			
Mean	17.82	17.74	17.85
Deviation	2.50	2.51	2.56
Minimum	9.75	11.67	9.75
Maximum	20	19.99	20
Grade point average (GPA)			
Mean	6.19	6.15	6.21
Deviation	3.26	3.18	3.30
Maximum	10	9.77	10.1

The details of other variables (year of birth, admission term, and district of student's origin) are not provided in the test due to personal privacy issues. To thoroughly examine the influence of military reforms on university students' GPA, our research team has employed the DID (difference in differences) model. The DID model is one of the most popular methods in the social sciences for estimating causal effects in non-experimental settings (Roth et al., 2023). We examine the gender-specific characters of the reforms and try to figure out the difference between the GPAs of male students, who were impacted by the changes, and female students, who were not, over a brief

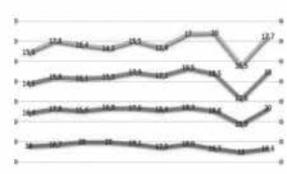
period of time ( $\pm 2$  years). If the mandatory military service has a significant impact on GPA, then we can conclude that the GPA of male students should differ from the GPA of female students. More particularly, if the effect is positive, then following the first (second) reform, the GPA of male students should rise (fall) compared to the GPA of female students, and vice versa. As mentioned above, our research team tried to access the average of all the grades that the student received for all of their university exams to calculate their GPA, which we then regress against a set of variables specific to each individual. We obtained information of students' GPA scores before and after conscription in military service from four state universities. The first line graph represents the outcomes of GPA scores (see below). In this line graph the median GPA scores are illustrated for the academic years 2018-2023. The second line graph shows the GPA median scores before the reform enforcement (see Line Graph 2). To compare the GPA scores before the reforms and after that, we examined GPA median scores for the 2010-2016 time period as well, and then made an attempt to compare both. And finally in order to have a holistic understanding of the GPA index, we compared the median GPA scores of female students with male students. Line Graph 3 reflects the outcomes of our investigation.



**Line Graph 1**



**Line Graph 2**



**Line Graph 3**

The research paper aims to study the effects of mandatory military service reforms on the higher education in the post-Soviet Armenia. Taking into account the initial perceptions of different stakeholders, we can clearly underscore the fact that the enforcement of those two reforms has had a negative impact on the educational life in terms of gender-equality and GPA score, however, those reforms have also provided equality. Before the introduction of reforms, the competitiveness of higher education was mainly targeted for military avoidance. This complies with prior studies done by Torun and Tumen. Individuals may attend higher education to avoid or postpone their required military service (Torun & Tumen, 2016). The fact that education was a way to avoid military service can be objectified by the examples of several countries (Sargsyan, 2015). More specifically, teachers T1 and T6 regard the implementation of these reforms as positive taking into consideration the fact that the level of bribery, favoritism, and academic plagiarism has declined a lot. At the same time, they suggest that the government take some measures to activate research programs and draw the attention of male students mainly via grants and scholarships. Participants T2, T3, T7 consider those reforms negative, voicing the high level of drop outs and distance learning after the completion of mandatory military service. This idea totally goes well with the prior research conducted by Hubers and Webbink who stated that compulsory military service decreases the proportion of Dutch university graduates (Hubers & Webbink, 2015).

Participants T5, T9, T10 underscore the low level of uncompetitive education, however they consider the causes of this problem to go far beyond the military service. They think that migration, low income market and the relatively low ranking level of universities also influence students. The comments done by different parties of the following research have created a room for discussion. The majority of students complain about the violation of their educational right, more particularly the dis of academic continuity. Specifically, participants S1, S2, S7 mentioned the mandatory military service as the reason for their low GPA level and lack of motivation. Similar comments were also tackled by some lecturers. University staff is more concerned with the increase of distance learning, low interest in educational programs, low attendance index and low motivation in pursuing PhD degrees. However, some students did not share this viewpoint. Moreover, according to them, military reforms ensured the equality of education in the state universities of Armenia and an absolute collapse of bribery. Even more, some of them consider the outcomes of the reforms only positive in terms of scholarships, equal opportunities for all, etc. Sociologist Gans (1972) says that the poor segments of society are quite functional in this sense; they are lured into armies (as well as other dangerous or difficult civilian jobs) for the sake of the payment (Ritzer, 1983: 233). This is the main reason why many residents of rural areas in Armenia highly support these reforms. Coming to the second question, it is obvious that the overall GPA level has critically dropped since the enforcement of the second reform. However, the GPA overall drop is dependent on many factors, such as financial situation, instant inflation, continuous war, migration, deterioration of socio-economic life in Armenia, easy access to foreign universities with the help of many scholarship programs. The GPA median scores clearly illustrate that the competitiveness of male students' learning before the enforcement of the second reform was mainly the result of avoidance of mandatory military service. The inner motivation was not driven by the real interest of a learner. We notice that the former public respect for teachers, lecturers, and scientists has experienced a great decline. In the digital era, the attitude towards knowledge and its bearer has changed drastically. Various factors have contributed to this, many of which are due to the unprecedented changes in the field of technology and information in recent decades, the so-called "side effects" (Atoyan et al., 2021).

This argument was stated by many lecturers as well as learners in their comments. Compared to their male counterparts, female students always excel over their male counterparts, which is shown in the results collected by different universities. Of course, one should notice that compared to males, females have better learning environmental background.

## CONCLUSION

This research paper aims to examine the perceptions of various stakeholders, including teachers, students, and representatives of civil society, regarding the impact of mandatory military service on higher education in Armenia. At the same time, the paper attempts to present the median GPA of male students before and after conscription. The

outcomes of this study clearly demonstrate that the different stakeholders have contrasting views on the implementation of the new reforms. More specifically, some teachers and students believe that compulsory military service has increased the number of students dropping out, created a female-dominated higher education system, caused a collapse in PhD enrolment and interest in scientific research, lowered the number of students studying for a master's degree and deteriorated labor market requirements.

At the same time, our research outcomes have highlighted the major advantages of enforcing these new reforms. Firstly, these reforms have extended the geographical reach of students, enabling them to obtain a tuition-free education. Secondly, these reforms have eliminated all corruption risks related to PhD enrolment and created a competitive environment for those wishing to engage in research programs. The research findings also show that, compared to their female counterparts, students may achieve lower GPA.

These findings clearly demonstrate the importance of incorporating mandatory military reforms into higher education in order to strengthen the country's safety, maintain academic integrity and ensure consistency. We hope that our study will provide a valuable foundation for further research.

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