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Research Report

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Identifying Opportunities to Recruit More Individuals Above the Age of 21 into the U.S. Army

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About This Report

This report documents research and analysis conducted as part of a project entitled *Identifying Opportunities to Recruit More Youth Above the Age of 21 Into the Army*, sponsored by the Assistant Secretary of the Army for Manpower and Reserve Affairs. The purpose of the project was to examine accession, attrition, and performance trends of older cohorts of first-time Army enlistees and current constraints to recruiting this group and to identify and recommend recruitment strategies that could more effectively recruit them.

This research was conducted within RAND Arroyo Center's Personnel, Training, and Health Program. RAND Arroyo Center, part of the RAND Corporation, is a federally funded research and development center (FFRDC) sponsored by the United States Army.

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Summary

The Army is facing an increasingly difficult recruiting environment. In recent years, a strong (prepandemic) economy and unemployment below 4 percent, combined with growing ineligibility among the target 18-to-24-year-old recruiting population due to obesity, substance use, or other disqualifying conditions, have posed challenges to meeting the recruiting mission. In 2018, the Regular Army missed its recruiting goal for the first time since 2005, falling short of its target of 76,500 by about 6,500 soldiers or around 8.5 percent. Although the Army met a substantially reduced recruiting goal in 2019 and similarly met its reduced fiscal year (FY) 2020 goal,[1] it must address the challenges of recruitment in an increasingly difficult recruiting environment—including the need for new strategies in response to the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic—to maintain longer-term Army end strength goals.[2]

The Army has traditionally focused most of its recruiting efforts on high school diploma holders ages 18 to 24. However, one potentially undertapped group that could provide qualified and interested prospects is the over-21 population. A 2014 RAND Corporation report suggested that, as a group, older recruits score higher on enlistment qualification tests than those who join before age 20, have attained higher levels of education or have greater life experience and, once in service, are more likely than younger recruits to reenlist and to be promoted.[3]

In this project, sponsored by the Assistant Secretary of the Army for Manpower and Reserve Affairs, RAND Arroyo Center examined the potential for recruiting individuals above the age of 21, identified barriers to recruitment, and proposed strategies for addressing those barriers.

We analyzed the issues from both the supply and demand perspectives to derive an actionable set of recommendations for ways to improve recruitment among older individuals. We used multiple methods, including the following:

- review of existing literature on recruitment of older individuals
- analysis of administrative data from the Total Army Personnel Database–Active Enlisted (TAPDB-AE), with a focus on enlisted personnel who entered the Army between fiscal years 2002 and 2017, a total of over one million individuals
- interviews with dozens of recruiters from USAREC, the U.S. Army Recruitment and Retention College, recruiting brigades (BDEs), recruiting battalions (BNs), recruiting companies, and individual recruiting stations; interviews were conducted between February and June 2019
- analysis of survey data collected between 2008 and 2018 by the Joint Advertising, Marketing Research and Studies (JAMRS) Program within the U.S. Department of Defense, including both the Youth Poll and the New Army Recruit Survey–Active Duty
- 19 focus groups that included a total of around 100 U.S. Army enlisted soldiers from three different divisions across three different installations: the 101st Airborne Division (ABN) at Fort Campbell, Ken-

[1] Army Public Affairs, "U.S. Army Achieves Recruiting Goals," press release, September 17, 2019; U.S. Army Recruiting Command Public Affairs, "USAREC Plays Key Role in Success of Army's FY20 End Strength Mission," press release, October 9, 2020.

[2] Kyle Rempfer, "Army End-Strength Goal Gets Bump This Year, But Growth to Slow in the Future," *Army Times*, February 10, 2020.

[3] Bernard Rostker, Jacob Alex Klerman, and Megan Zander-Cotugno, *Recruiting Older Youths: Insights from a New Survey of Army Recruits*, Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corporation, RR-247-OSD, 2014.

tucky; 1st Cavalry Division (CD) at Fort Hood, Texas; and 3rd Infantry Division (ID) at Fort Stewart, Georgia; focus groups were conducted from June to late July 2019.

It is important to acknowledge that this research was conducted in fiscal year 2019 prior to the COVID-19 pandemic; while we provide comments throughout on issues and recommendations on which the pandemic may have a substantial impact, pandemic-specific experiences were not the focus of the analysis. Nonetheless, we recognize that since the pandemic, the recruiting landscape for the Army has changed dramatically, at least in the near term, limiting the most common approach of in-person recruiting. Despite these recent events, the findings and recommendations continue to be valid for the Army's long-term recruiting strategy, with some recommendations (such as virtual recruiting) becoming even more salient. To the extent that our data and analysis support it, we discuss the implications of COVID-19 for both the Army's near- and long-term recruiting strategy. This applies both to the over-21 population and to recruiting in general.

Key Findings

Older Individuals Represent a Potential Growth Area for Army Recruiting

Our research shows that individuals over the age of 21 are a viable population from which to recruit. Survey data from JAMRS indicate that propensity levels among potential recruits were relatively stable between 2008 and 2018, other than a significant decline in propensity among the population aged 22–24 between 2008 and 2010, which overlaps with the Great Recession. Despite lower propensity to enlist at older ages, the overall size of the older population means that successfully recruiting even a small proportion of this population can contribute significantly to overall recruitment.

The Quality of Older Recruits Is Generally High

Army administrative data show that, once through basic combat training, older recruits tend to perform better than their counterparts on a range of metrics. During interviews, recruiters noted that older recruits are typically more committed than young recruits once they become involved in the recruiting process. That is, they are less likely than younger recruits to wash out or lose interest, perhaps in part because older recruits are more likely to initiate contact with a recruiter, thus signifying their commitment to the process. After recruits complete basic combat training (BCT), they are more likely to complete their first-term contract and to reenlist for an additional term. Analysis of administrative data from the TAPDB found that soldiers over the age of 21 are statistically more likely (an estimated 2 percentage points higher) to reenlist compared with the 16–18 and 19–21 age groups (which both have a reenlistment rate of around 36 percent).

During interviews, recruiters noted several other positive aspects of older recruits, such as a perception that they are of higher quality, more focused, and more motivated, as well as being ready to ship to basic training more quickly.

Age, in Itself, Does Not Appear to Pose a Significant Barrier to Accession

During focus groups, age was reported to be an ancillary concern compared with other factors at the various stages of recruits' enlistment and accession process. Any instances of age-related concerns were drowned out by frequent and extensive general concerns about military life that spanned all age groups, such as communication challenges with leadership and the unpredictable schedule of field exercises. Issues other than age were particularly emphasized by female soldiers, who described being subjected to a greater level of scrutiny in terms of their performance compared with males, but not in relation to their age. Far more important to the

participants in these focus groups were maturity, professional competence, the ability to cooperate, and—for noncommissioned officers (NCOs) and officers—the willingness to lead by example.

Older Recruits Attrite at Higher Rates During Basic Training, at Lower Rates in Their First Term

Analysis of administrative data indicates that older recruits attrite at higher rates than younger ones during basic training. While the precise reasons for this attrition during BCT are unknown, it is possible that the early experience does not match up well with their expectations, and so they are more likely to attrite. Older recruits are more susceptible to injury, but this factor might interact with failure to adapt rather than attrition due to disability.

Also, over the course of the entire first term, older recruits are less likely to attrite compared with younger soldiers. For example, analysis of administrative data from the TADPB found that being in the 22–24 and 25–35 age groups was associated with statistically significantly lower predicted probability of attriting in the first term due to failure to adapt.

Accession of Older Recruits May Require More Time and Resources

During interviews, recruiters consistently noted that, unlike younger recruits who (before the pandemic) were typically found in predictable places, such as high schools, college campuses, and career fairs, older prospects are much more likely to be dispersed. However, with the added complications of social distancing due to COVID-19, the Army has had to seek out creative ways to recruit younger and older recruits alike.

Older recruits may require more time to access. During interviews, recruiters noted that members of the over-21 population are more likely to require a waiver (e.g., for minor drug possession charges). These waivers add to the amount of time and resources required to access the individual.

Recruiters Typically Do Not Specifically Target Older Recruits

Although recruits over the age of 21 make up a nontrivial amount of the total recruiting population each year, our interviews suggest that less attention is devoted to developing strategies to purposefully recruit older individuals compared with high school recruits. In the pre-pandemic environment, this was largely because of the comparative difficulty of locating older individuals compared with those in high school, who accounted for the lion's share of a recruiter's time and energy. However, the shift to virtual recruiting during COVID-19 may result in challenges to recruiting high school students that are similar to those for recruiting older individuals, implying greater spillover benefits to younger recruits for some of our recommendations.

In addition, soldiers reported during focus groups that older recruits were far more likely to seek out recruiters themselves than to be approached by recruiters, although it is not clear whether this has been the case during the pandemic.

Interviews with soldiers who enlisted over the age of 21 revealed that recruiters often knew little about the specific military occupational specialty (MOS) to which they enlisted. The recruiters were able to speak broadly about different branches of the Army and their roles but unable to address more specific concerns or questions about day-to-day functions of a given MOS.

Virtual Recruiting May Be Especially Important for Older Recruits

Virtual recruiting teams (VRTs) offer a potentially useful option for engaging with older recruits, although recruiters noted a general lack of training in how to use these teams effectively. VRTs are typically two- to six-person teams at the BN level who use social media and other virtual media to prospect and recruit individu-

als into the Army. Shifting personnel from direct recruiting to VRT-like functions could potentially avoid increases in BN size while potentially expanding recruiter reach—if recruiters are provided with adequate training.

Recruiting of Older Individuals Requires Targeted Messaging

Analysis of new recruit survey data from 2016 provides insights into what motivates older recruits, which can be important in developing messaging for this audience. First, survey data are consistent with the notion that older recruits are unhappy with what they were doing in their civilian life, and that they may have had limited job market options. The spike in unemployment for individuals of all ages due to the economic lockdown in response to COVID-19 and the long-term implications for sectors that have been particularly hard-hit—including food and restaurant services, tourism, and others where job losses may be longer-lasting—could affect the number of people looking to the Army as an option. Second, families and supporting those families have become increasingly important reasons to enlist. Finally, while benefit programs are important for recruits of all ages, they were significantly more important for older recruits. According to the New Recruit Survey, older recruits were more likely than younger recruits to indicate that education and child care benefits, and especially health care and pension/retirement benefits, were extremely influential in their decision to join the Army. Findings from the New Recruit Survey also indicate that older recruits, especially those ages 25–35, are more likely than younger ones to indicate that learning new information about the career opportunities and benefits available in the military and about what life is like in the military prompted their first conversation with a recruiter, even though many had thought about joining the Army for many years. During the soldier focus groups, repaying college loans came up often and was reported to be a major driver of enlistment for older recruits. Civilian survey data showed that paying for future education was one of the top reasons to join, as it also was in the new recruit data for those ages 19–24.

During focus groups, soldiers reported that a confluence of circumstances typically led to later enlistment of older recruits, with changes in personal or economic circumstances highlighted as being especially important. In general, older recruits were able to place their Army experience in a broader life perspective than younger recruits, which may have helped them see beyond the difficult stages of Army life. While it may be too soon to reflect on the effects of COVID-19 on both recruitment and early experience in the Army, they could have an important effect on future enlistment. At the same time, focus groups also suggested that there are some similarities that cut across age groups. Key concerns expressed by soldiers that were similar across age included attributes of the job, family, support, and leadership interactions. The full range of themes should be kept in mind when developing appropriate messages to target older individuals.

Finally, since older recruits tend toward combat support and combat service support MOSs, recruiting campaigns that focus only on combat roles may have limited appeal. The primary reason civilians reported not wanting to join the Army was possible injury or death, and it was high on the list of concerns for new recruits, taking top position for those ages 22–25, along with "going into combat." Since the research for this project was completed, the Army rolled out its "What's Your Warrior?" recruiting campaign, which describes a wide variety of roles for potential recruits. Other campaigns of this sort may be effective in recruiting older individuals.

Recommendations

We identified several recommendations that will help to attract and recruit older individuals into the Army. Recommendations are sensitive to the need to integrate efforts to recruit older individuals into ongoing

recruiting activities without losing focus on existing markets; most recommendations will have spillover benefits for younger recruits as well.

The framework in Table S.1 crosswalks recommendations with an example from our data, lists the organization best suited to making actionable changes, and indicates whether the recommendation pertains to doctrine, organization, training, materiel, leadership, personnel, facilities, or policy (DOTMLPF-P). We chose the DOTMLPF-P approach and linked organizations with recommendations so that senior policymakers can view potential recommendations in a framework widely used by the military and defined in joint

TABLE S.1
Recommended Strategies to Improve Recruitment of Individuals Above the Age of 21

Recommendation	Data/Example	Organization	DOTMLPF-P
Expand the Army Student Loan Repayment Program and educate recruiters more on its specific policy requirements	Older recruits are more likely to have accumulated some form of student loans, but this is not heavily marketed as an incentive by recruiters.	Department of the Army, USAREC	Training, Policy
Allow certain waivers to be managed at echelons below BDE (e.g., tattoo waivers)	Older recruits are more likely to have waivers, and therefore their enlistment packages tend to take longer to process; tattoo and other trivial waivers pushed to Army G-1 for approval lengthen this timeline.	Department of the Army, G-1	Doctrine, Policy
Expand market research and share data more widely with station-level recruiters	Recruiters noted lack of access to data that might aid in targeting specific demographics.	USAREC	Doctrine, Policy
Expand social media and virtual recruiting teams at the BN level and below	Virtual recruiting teams noted success with older recruits, but BN-level teams are small and have limited resources. Expanding this capability will be critical, particularly given social distancing requirements under COVID-19 and uncertainty around the ability to relax restrictions.	USAREC	Personnel, Training
Continue to broaden recruiting and marketing campaign messaging to appeal to a wider audience	Older recruits tend toward combat support and combat service support MOSs and identified benefit programs as important; a more targeted ad campaign may resonate more with them.	USAREC	Policy
Enhance recruiter knowledge of MOS options	In focus groups, soldiers noted that their recruiter had little knowledge of certain MOSs and relied only on Army videos.	USAREC	Training
Identify creative ways to establish a greater virtual recruiting presence while strategizing about the Army's long-term presence on college campuses and private schools	College stop-outs and drop-outs represent a viable pool of older individuals to recruit, and many can benefit from Army-specific benefits (e.g., loan repayment program)	Department of the Army, USAREC	Doctrine, Policy

doctrine.[4] Two key organizations identified as best suited are the Department of the Army, G-1 (as well as the Chief of Army Enterprise Marketing office in particular, which falls under the responsibility of Army G-1), and USAREC. Doctrine and policy are two key mechanisms to drive the solutions, while training is also noted in a few areas.

Expand the Army Loan Repayment Program

During the soldier focus groups, repaying college loans was reported to be a major driver of enlistment. Unlike other service branches, the Army has a special incentive program for certain highly qualified individuals seeking to enlist in the Army that repays previously accrued student loans. However, the program itself has strict regulations that might limit the pool of applicants eligible and willing to participate in the program. These regulations combined might make the program seem complex to an individual seeking to enlist in the Army, and the specific points may seem too cumbersome a task for either the enlistee or recruiter to surmount. The Army's Loan Repayment Program (LRP) might appeal both to older recruits who have completed a degree and to younger recruits who have dropped out of postsecondary schooling.

One recommendation is that the Army loosen the restrictions imposed on potential recruits, such as the MOS restriction or Army Services Vocational Aptitude Battery requirement. When soldiers select the LRP, they opt out of the GI Bill, which could, in many cases, save the Department of Defense dollars in future GI Bill payouts. Depending on which school and program a former service member chooses, the GI Bill can pay well over the $65,000 limit of the LRP, thus incentivizing the Department to pay a smaller sum on LRP costs in the interim and save GI Bill dollars in the long term. Along with an expansion of the program, opportunities to further enhance its use can be studied concurrently to understand who chose or did not choose to enroll in the program and why. While our research points to advantages in expanding the program, any expansion should be accompanied by a careful examination of its effects to ensure that it is achieving both the desired use and cost savings discussed here.

A related recommendation is to educate recruiters more thoroughly on other benefits that appeal to older recruits: health care benefits, pension and retirement benefits, and family and child care benefits.

Allow Certain Waivers to Be Managed at Echelons Below Brigade

The Army should reevaluate the types of waivers requiring the highest level of adjudication and determine which might be more suited for BDE-and-below levels of approval. Requiring a waiver for a certain medical, legal, or other issue is not necessarily a disqualifying factor (such as a tattoo) for enlistment in the Army. Certain factors that might be disqualifying can be waived on a case-by-case basis, and, depending on the seriousness of the waiver, can be adjudicated at various levels.

The Army should continue to reevaluate the policies to determine which waivers require G-1 approval, allowing for BDE-and-below commander's (CDR's) approval, speeding the enlistment process for those individuals. Existing data on waivers and the level at which they were adjudicated can be examined to identify types of waivers that can be adjudicated at lower levels without sacrificing various performance outcomes, such as substance use during active-duty service, other negative behavioral issues, or discharges.

[4] Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Instruction 3010.02E, *Guidance for Developing and Implementing Joint Concepts*, Washington, D.C., August 17, 2016.

Expand Market Research and Share Data More Widely with Station-Level Recruiters

JAMRS Youth Poll data, containing vital information on propensity and motivations for enlistment, currently do not include people over the age of 24. To better understand propensity at older ages, what an older population's motivations are, and what incentives would be appealing to them, expanding the ages surveyed—not just as influencers, but as potential recruits—would be highly beneficial.

We recommend the development and evaluation of standardized metrics and identification of the most informative method of providing them to recruiters, with the end goal of streamlining the data analysis and dissemination process to assist the recruiters in better reaching local markets.

Expand Social Media and Virtual Recruiting Teams at the Battalion-and-Below Level

Social media and the internet continue to be an increasingly relevant means to communicate with both Generation Z and older individuals—even more so in a pandemic world. The Army stood up VRTs in 2019, and, at the time of this writing, these were poised for expansion though still in their emerging stages. With the onset of COVID-19 and social distancing restrictions, we anticipate that the VRTs have taken on added importance and experienced Army investment and growth.

In further staffing and resourcing these teams, the Army should consider both its short-term and its long-term needs. In the short term, with social distancing requirements in place and depending on location, virtual recruiting is a necessary and perhaps sole means of recruiting. In the long term and in a postpandemic world, virtual recruiting could help mitigate the challenges of finding physical locations where large numbers of both younger and older individuals congregate. Both younger and older individuals are increasingly congregating in large numbers virtually on social media platforms. Continuing to work on increasing and strategically placing VRT positions—and improving training for recruiters in these positions—benefits recruitment efforts for all ages. Ultimately, in the long term, virtual recruiting could be an effective complement to in-person recruiting by bridging geographic distances between knowledge and expertise of recruiters (for example, who have specialized knowledge of certain MOSs or benefits programs) and potential recruits who may be located anywhere in the country.

Continue to Broaden Recruiting and Marketing Campaigns for Wider Appeal

Previous campaigns have been aimed at particular audiences; for example, "Warriors Wanted," launched in 2018, was aimed at Generation Z,[5] but that message may be less appealing to older audiences. A broader marketing campaign may suit older recruits better, including campaigns that highlight both combat MOSs and the Army's need for a variety of MOSs or careers, such as "Aircraft Electricians Wanted" or "Anesthesiologists Wanted."

After the research for this project was completed, the "What's Your Warrior?" campaign was rolled out, highlighting diversity in jobs; continuing to broaden the MOSs and benefits covered in this campaign would be consistent with our recommendation here. Many older recruits noted benefits as a major factor in their enlistment. A campaign highlighting the education, retirement, and family health care and child care benefits could appeal to this population. Further, promoting the Army as an educational and career pathway,

[5] Matthew Cox, "Army Launched New 'Warriors Wanted' Campaign Aimed at Generation Z," *Military.com*, October 19, 2018.

and as a vehicle for socioeconomic mobility and financial stability, may be particularly appealing to older prospects, particularly in the context of COVID-19.

Enhance Recruiter Knowledge of MOS Options

In interviews with soldiers who enlisted over the age of 21, an emergent theme was that recruiters often knew little about the specific MOS to which they enlisted. Staffing a recruiting station and company with a diverse pool of MOSs can help to address this so that a potential recruit's specific questions can be answered by a recruiter in a particular MOS of interest.

However, because the range of MOSs in the Army is so vast, it is impossible to have every MOS represented in a recruiting company. Therefore, more-specific education on the different jobs in the Army may be a beneficial investment for recruiters. This could be in the form of training modules at the Army Recruiting and Retention College; tools, such as videos, to help train recruiters and recruits on specific MOSs; or a collaborative virtual USAREC network of recruiters that links recruits with recruiters whose MOS is one of interest to them. This could be complementary to the long-term plans for the VRTs, whereby a recruit can access recruiting resources outside their local recruiting station to acquire the knowledge or experience of a particular MOS they are interested in. This could also help to form a personal connection outside of the immediate station and improve knowledge of MOS options that would be beneficial to recruiting in general.

Expand Virtual Recruiting While Strategizing Long-Term Army Presence on Campuses

Prior to COVID-19, university and community college campuses represented a rich environment where the Army could capitalize on large numbers of high-quality recruits in a single setting. However, this has changed as campuses grapple with the complexities of offering education during a global pandemic. Over the long term, USAREC units might enjoy mutually beneficial partnerships with ROTC programs on college campuses to attract and recruit older individuals into the Army. The Army should identify universities with ROTC programs and establish more-formal communications with local recruiting BNs or companies. In the short term, while the COVID-19 pandemic is still underway, a virtual presence will likely be necessary. However, over the long term, the Army may consider a hybrid approach combining virtual and in-person recruiting.

In addition to four-year universities, two-year technical schools and community colleges present rich opportunities for identifying and recruiting older youth into the Army. Students going through these programs might be more interested in taking advantage of the Army LRP to cover costs in the short term, or they might aim to use G.I. Bill benefits to complete a four-year degree after their time in service.

A challenge identified across various interviews with recruits was that some community colleges or four-year universities are not welcoming or are hostile toward the Army's recruiting efforts on campus. It is important to understand all relevant laws and regulations pertaining to recruiting in sensitive arenas, but more important are the relationships that CDRs and recruiters can build that will foster mutually beneficial relationships between civil and military institutions. The Army can be a viable option for some struggling students, and, if a student is struggling financially with their education, the Army Reserve or Army National Guard have options to help pay for school while the student serves in the Army in a part-time role. The Army and USAREC should pursue persistent engagement with academic institutions and community leaders alike, educating them on relevant laws and on the mutual benefits that recruiting can have on college campuses.

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

Background

The Army is facing an increasingly difficult recruiting environment. In recent years, a strong (prepandemic) economy and unemployment below 4 percent, combined with growing ineligibility among the target 18-to-24-year-old recruiting population due to obesity, substance use, or other disqualifying conditions, have posed challenges to the recruiting mission. In 2018, the Regular Army (RA) missed its recruiting goal for the first time since 2005, falling short of its target of 76,500 by about 6,500 soldiers or around 8.5 percent. The Army National Guard and the U.S. Army Reserve also missed their 2018 recruiting goals by, respectively, 9,713 (of a goal of 44,342) and 4,273 (of a goal of 15,600).[1] In 2019, the Army met its substantially reduced goal of 68,000 new active-component soldiers and similarly met its fiscal year (FY) 2020 goal of a further reduced 62,000.[2] However, to maintain longer-term Army end strength goals,[3] the challenges of recruitment in an increasingly difficult recruiting environment—including the need for new strategies in response to the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic—must be addressed.

The Army has traditionally focused most of its recruiting efforts on high school diploma holders ages 18 to 24, who include *seniors* up to age 18 and *grads* ages 19 to 24. However, one potentially undertapped group that could provide qualified and interested prospects is the over-21 population. A 2014 RAND Corporation report suggested that, as a group, older recruits score higher on enlistment qualification tests than those who join before age 20, have attained higher levels of education or have greater life experience and, once in service, are more likely than younger recruits to reenlist and to be promoted.[4] The report also suggested that the over-21 market is not actively recruited, which further suggests that older youth constitute a crucial, largely untapped, yet high-quality pool of potential recruits.

Focus of This Project

This project explores opportunities for increasing recruitment of individuals over the age of 21 into the Army. In fall 2018, the Assistant Secretary of the Army for Manpower and Reserve Affairs asked RAND

[1] U.S. Department of Defense (DoD), "Department of Defense Announces Fiscal Year 2018 Recruiting and Retention Numbers—End of Year Report," press release, November 15, 2018. In contrast, the Navy, Air Force, and Marine Corps each met or exceeded their active-duty recruitment goals in 2018 (DoD, 2018).

[2] Army Public Affairs, "U.S. Army Achieves Recruiting Goals," press release, September 17, 2019; U.S. Army Recruiting Command Public Affairs (USAREC), "USAREC Plays Key Role in Success of Army's FY20 End Strength Mission," press release, October 9, 2020.

[3] Kyle Rempfer, "Army End-Strength Goal Gets Bump This Year, But Growth to Slow in the Future," *Army Times*, February 10, 2020.

[4] Bernard Rostker, Jacob Alex Klerman, and Megan Zander-Cotugno, *Recruiting Older Youths: Insights from a New Survey of Army Recruits*, Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corporation, RR-247-OSD, 2014.

Arroyo Center to examine the potential for recruiting individuals above the age of 21, identify barriers to recruitment, and propose strategies for addressing those barriers. The project focused on answering four main questions:

- What does the existing research on recruitment say about older populations, in the United States and in other countries? What are the current recruitment and career paths of individuals above the age of 21 years?
- What recruiting strategies relevant to this population do Army recruiters use?
- What perceptions of the Army and perceived enlistment barriers and incentives are specific to this population?
- What are the enlistment decisions, barriers, and experiences of older recruits?

Notably, data collection for the project, analysis, and writing of the report took place primarily in 2019, prior to the events surrounding the COVID-19 global pandemic and ensuing lockdowns and social distancing restrictions. Since then, the recruiting landscape, at least in the near term, has changed dramatically for the Army, limiting the conventional, in-person recruiting approach. Despite more recent events, the findings and recommendations continue to be valid for the Army's long-term recruiting strategy, with some recommendations (such as virtual recruiting) becoming even more salient. To the extent that our data and analysis support it, we discuss the implications of COVID-19 for both the Army's near- and long-term recruiting strategy. This applies both to the over-21 population and to recruiting in general.

The Older Youth Population

The very limited number of studies that examine the over-21 population have found that (poor) civilian employment prospects are a substantial driver of their decisions to join the Army.[5] This is consistent with studies on younger recruits and on enlistment contracts overall.[6] While older youth ages 22 to 27 made up 26 percent of total Army accessions in FY 2009,[7] they may still represent a small proportion relative to the potential for quality recruits in this age group in the general population. The 2014 RAND study relied on data from 2009, but the enlistment decisions and the circumstances that led to those decisions back in 2009 might be very different today, years after the end of the financial crisis and Great Recession of 2007–2009.

Therefore, if updated analyses indicate that older recruits continue to perform well and represent a potential recruitment market, new strategies and messages may be required to target this population. Further, while our interviews suggest that Army recruiters generally recognize the value of older youth recruits, they do not have specific strategies at their disposal to engage them. Joint Advertising Market Research and Studies (JAMRS) Youth Poll surveys that can inform these strategies, for example, began in only 2008 to collect information from individuals over the age of 21 and currently do not include respondents over the age of 24.

[5] Rostker, Klerman, and Zander-Cotugno, 2014.

[6] See, for example, M. Rebecca Kilburn, and Jacob A. Klerman, *Enlistment Decisions in the 1990s: Evidence from Individual-Level Data*, Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corporation, MR-944-OSD/A, 1999; and Beth J. Asch, Paul Heaton, and Bogdan Savych, *Recruiting Minorities: What Explains Recent Trends in the Army and Navy?* Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corporation, MG-861-OSD, 2009.

[7] Recruits ages 28 to 42 constituted an additional 9 percent (Rostker, Klerman, and Zander-Cotugno, 2014).

Research Approach

At a time when Army recruit quality has not increased as it has in the other services,[8] the older youth population potentially represents a significantly underutilized source of high-quality recruits (high school graduates in Armed Forces Qualification Test [AFQT] Categories I through IIIA). This project examines accession trends among this population since 2009, including how they compare with younger age cohorts, identifies and evaluates current protocols and perceptions regarding recruitment of this population by Army recruiters, and identifies perceptions of, and intentions to enlist in, the Army among this population. To help address recruiting shortfalls, the results are synthesized into recommendations for strategies to improve recruitment of individuals above the age of 21.

This project employed four main analytical tasks.

Literature Review

To identify alternative recruitment models, methods, strategies, and goals, the research team reviewed current literature on recruitment and recruitment strategies in other military branches and foreign militaries. To assess whether older recruits continue to perform better than younger recruits, as indicated in the 2014 RAND report, the team built on prior RAND Arroyo Center research and used administrative data from U.S. Military Entrance Processing Command and the Total Army Personnel Database. These data summarize the current demographic profile and track the post-2009 recruitment trends for individuals above the age of 21 years, as well as the retention and reenlistment rates for those who ultimately enlisted. This summary updates the Army's understanding of this population and determines whether previous findings remain valid or need updating.

Interviews with Recruiters

The team conducted interviews with recruiters in a range of settings (e.g., rural and urban locations) between February and June 2019 to understand current views and targets for recruitment of this population, strategies and methods used, and perceived barriers to recruiting, as well as to identify lessons learned about recruiting this population and what strategies may be transferable across locations. The team also conducted interviews with U.S. Army Recruiting Command staff and Army Recruitment and Retention College staff for further insights on this population.

Analysis of Survey Data

The research team used existing survey data from JAMRS from 2008 to 2018 related to this population to summarize perceptions of the Army and perceived barriers or incentives to enlist among the population of individuals above the age of 21. The team used survey data from civilians ages 16 to 24 and from new Army recruits ages 16 to 35.

Focus Groups

The research team conducted a series of on-site focus groups with enlistees and soldiers at various stages of service (first- and second-year enlisted soldiers and those approaching service contract renewal/reenlistment) and diverse Military Occupational Specialties (MOSs) in this group at three installations in June and

[8] James Hosek, Beth J. Asch, Michael G. Mattock, and Troy D. Smith, *Military and Civilian Pay Levels, Trends, and Recruit Quality*, Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corporation, RR-2396-OSD, 2018.

July of 2019. Interview results provided new information on motivations for enlistment, perceived barriers and incentives to enlistment, expectations for service, and experiences during multiple stages of service for this population.

Development of Recommendations

Based on the results from these four approaches, the research team developed recommendations for strategies to enhance the recruitment of the over-21 population, with additional comments on how recommendations are affected in the context of COVID-19.

Organization of the Report

The remainder of this report is organized in six chapters:

- In Chapter Two, we present a brief overview of trends in Army recruitment, as well as the literature on recruitment and motivations among older recruits.
- In Chapter Three, we present quantitative analyses of trends in accession, attrition, and reenlistment in the Army to understand whether there are substantial differences in attrition rates of older and younger recruits.
- In Chapter Four, we present the thematic results of a series of interviews with the U.S. Army Recruiting Command (USAREC), the U.S. Army Recruitment and Retention College, recruiting brigades (BDEs), recruiting battalions (BNs), recruiting companies, and individual recruiting stations, regarding opportunities and challenges of recruiting individuals over the age of 21.
- In Chapter Five, we present findings from survey data collected in 2008–2018 related to perceptions of the Army and motivations to join in order to identify factors that are more or less salient to older recruits.
- In Chapter Six, we present the themes that emerged from a series of focus groups with U.S. Army enlisted service members, conducted from June to late July 2019, to understand the perspectives of soldiers who enlisted at a later age.
- Finally, in Chapter Seven, we present a summary of our findings and recommendations.

We also include six appendixes that detail the separation codes and groupings used in the administrative data analyses, detailed results from the statistical analyses of soldier outcomes, the recruiter interview protocols, additional survey data analyses of results from the Army New Recruit Survey, the focus group discussion guide, and a table of MOSs.

CHAPTER TWO

Military Recruitment Trends Among Older Individuals: Evidence from the Literature

To properly situate the challenges, opportunities, and context for the Army in recruiting older individuals, we examined the scarce literature on military recruitment trends addressing differences between older and younger recruits. We examined the literature on recruits' motivations for serving, particularly where distinctions exist between older recruits and traditional recruits, and, where available, literature on how other services and foreign militaries view older recruits. While older youth present an opportunity for military recruitment, neither the other U.S. military services nor foreign militaries specifically target older recruits to meet recruitment requirements or shortfalls.

Trends Among Older Recruits: Motivations for Serving

The literature describes two main categories of reasons for enlisting in military service: institutional and occupational.[1] Institutional reasons include patriotism and a desire to serve;[2] personal connections to the military and a family history of service;[3] a desire for discipline and structure;[4] and interest in a personal challenge.[5] Occupational reasons for joining include financial security (to include job stability, salary, benefits, and health care),[6] job opportunities,[7] the ability to travel, and the desire to leave a negative or unpromising environment.

According to the literature, older recruits may be more motivated to join the Army for career advancement (occupational) rather than institutional factors (such as a sense of adventure or desire to travel). In one study, approximately 36 percent of older recruits reported that one motivation for joining the military was that there were "no jobs at home," and 49 percent reported that there were "only dead-end jobs at home."[8] Older recruits are more likely than younger recruits to have families, making benefits such as job security, health care, and retirement appealing incentives to join.

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1 Todd C. Helmus, S. Rebecca Zimmerman, Marek N. Posard, Jasmine L. Wheeler, Cordave Ogletree, Quinton Stroud, and Margaret C. Harrell, *Life as a Private: A Study of the Motivations and Experiences of Junior Enlisted Personnel in the U.S. Army*, Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corporation, RR-2252-A, 2018.

2 Pew Research Center, *War and Sacrifice in the Post-9/11 Era*, Washington, D.C., 2011.

3 Helmus et al., 2018; Amy Schafer, *Generations of War: The Rise of the Warrior Caste and the All-Volunteer Force*, Washington, D.C.: Center for a New American Security, 2017.

4 Helmus et al., 2018.

5 Kari Hawkins, "Army Benefits Attract Older Soldiers," *Army.mil*, August 20, 2010.

6 Rostker, Klerman, and Zander-Catugno, 2014.

7 Pew Research Center, 2011.

8 Rostker, Klerman, and Zander-Catugno, 2014.

Just as older recruits are more likely to have tried the job market and found it suboptimal, some older recruits have also attempted to pursue a college degree at a community college or university.[9] As a result of their college experience, older recruits may also have accrued college debt. Loan Repayment Programs (LRPs) can serve as meaningful incentives for the older recruit population.[10]

While occupational reasons for joining are more prevalent among older recruits than younger recruits, institutional factors can still matter to older recruits. For example, Rostker, Klerman, and Zander-Catugno found that 71 percent of "late enlistee" recruits (those who did not join the Army immediately after high school) surveyed indicated that "patriotism" was a strong motivator for their enlistment, as compared with 74 percent of high school recruits surveyed.[11] Further, some older recruits expressed that their desire to enlist straight out of high school was opposed by family members or other influencers; with age and increasing independence, they were able to enlist.[12]

With respect to engaging with recruiters, older recruits are more likely than their younger counterparts to actively seek out Army recruiters, whether by entering recruiting stations or actively requesting information from recruiters.[13] Younger recruits are more likely to engage with recruiters on high school campuses or through targeted recruiting events. Recruiter interviews (covered in depth in Chapter Four) indicate that these trends persist.

Other Services' Recruiting Trends

The services vary in their maximum age for enlistment. Table 2.1 highlights the maximum age for enlistment, by service.

The maximum age for enlistment in the Army is 35. By comparison, the Marine Corps has stricter age limitations for enlistment, capping enlistment at age 28.[14] In 2014, the Air Force raised the maximum age for enlistment from 27 to 39; the Navy followed suit in 2018. While Navy and Air Force policy allow for older recruits, older recruits are not necessarily a focus of recruiting efforts. Yet the new policies enabled the Navy and Air Force to target the prior service population for enlistment, and possibly facilitate more lateral entry.

TABLE 2.1
Maximum Enlistment Age, by Service

Service	Maximum Enlistment Age
Army	35
Navy	39
Air Force	39
Marine Corps	28

[9] Rostker, Klerman, and Zander-Catugno, 2014.

[10] M. Rebecca Kilburn and Beth J. Asch, *Recruiting Youth in the College Market: Current Practices and Future Policy Options*, Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corporation, MR-1093-OSD, 2003.

[11] Rostker, Klerman, and Zander-Catugno, 2014, p. 30.

[12] Rostker, Klerman, and Zander-Catugno, 2014.

[13] Rostker, Klerman, and Zander-Catugno, 2014, p. 27.

[14] Headquarters Marine Corps, "Age Waivers," webpage, undated.

Between 2013 and 2018, the Navy recruited 314 Navy veterans and 195 veterans from other services onto active duty.[15] Between 2015 and 2018, the Air Force recruited 512 prior-service airmen.[16] The Air Force sees the pool of older recruits as a way to increase the quality of the enlisted force.[17]

While the U.S. Air Force, Navy, and Marine Corps and foreign militaries make accommodations for older recruits, they do not focus on older recruits as a target population. The older population provides a broader opportunity for the Army to meet its recruiting goals, particularly in years when it faces recruitment shortfalls.

Foreign Military Experiences

Other nations do not necessarily target older recruits to meet military requirements. To meet recruiting needs, foreign militaries focus on two populations: younger recruits and foreign national recruits. In the United Kingdom, youth can enlist in the Army beginning at age 15 years, seven months,[18] and recruits must enlist before reaching age 36.[19] Foreign nationals from Commonwealth countries were previously required to maintain residence within Great Britain for five years before enlisting, but a November 2018 policy change removed the requirement. Similar to the U.S. Army recruiting, the British target recruitment population remains youth aged 18 to 24.[20] Similarly, the German Army (*Bundeswehr*) is looking to meet recruiting shortfalls and expanding manpower requirements by recruiting from European Union nationals currently living in Europe.[21]

Chapter Summary

- The limited literature indicates that recruits over age 21 may be more motivated to join the Army for career advancement (occupational) rather than institutional factors (such as a sense of adventure or desire to travel), although factors such as patriotism matter to both younger and older age groups.
- Older recruits are more likely than younger recruits to have families, making benefits, such as job security, health care, and retirement, appealing incentives to join. Some older recruits may have accrued college debt, making LRPs a potentially meaningful incentive.
- Other U.S. services vary in their maximum age for enlistment, with the Marine Corps having a maximum enlistment age of 28 and the Navy and Air Force both having a maximum enlistment age of 39. None of the other services actively focuses on older recruits.
- Foreign militaries have expanded their recruiting efforts to focus on younger individuals (e.g., age 15 and seven months in the United Kingdom) and foreign nationals but do not necessarily target older individuals.

[15] Mark D. Faram, "Navy Sees Recruiting Challenges on the Horizon," *NavyTimes*, November 2, 2018.

[16] Stephen Losey, "Air Force Hits More Modest Recruiting Goals in 2018," *Air Force Times*, October 11, 2018.

[17] Brad Petrishen, "Air Force Opens Doors to Older Recruits," *Telegram*, August 21, 2014.

[18] Steven Morris, "U.K. Minimum Recruitment Age Should Be Raised to 18—Survey," *The Guardian*, July 29, 2018.

[19] Ministry of Defense, "Age," webpage, 2019.

[20] Crown Commercial Service, "Media Buying Brief: Army Capital Campaign," Parliament of Great Britain, 2017.

[21] Christopher F. Schuetze, "German Army Considers Recruiting Foreign Citizens," *New York Times*, December 27, 2018.

CHAPTER THREE

Accession, Attrition, and Reenlistment Trends

In this chapter, we build on previous work examining the Army career trajectories of individuals who enlist above the age of 21 and describe more-recent accession,[1] attrition, and reenlistment trends for this group. We use the Total Army Personnel Database–Active Enlisted (TAPDB-AE) to update previous analyses. We consistently find that individuals above the age of 21 have outcomes that are comparable or favorable relative to those of enlistees below the age of 21, who receive the bulk of targeting for Army recruitment efforts and resources.

Data and Methods

The TAPDB-AE contains information on every active-component enlisted soldier in the U.S. Army. Our population of interest consists of those who entered the Army between FY 2002 and FY 2017, a total of more than one million individuals. We developed several outcomes of interest, including Basic Combat Training (BCT) attrition (three months), early-term attrition (six months), first-term attrition (did not complete their first-term contract), and reenlistment. We relied on past research to guide our development of the outcomes, particularly in the case of the attrition outcomes.[2] Attrition rates are coded cumulatively; therefore, if attrition occurs during BCT, then that soldier is also considered to have attrited at early-term and at first-term limits.[3]

Our analysis of BCT attrition and early-term attrition includes the 2002 to 2017 cohorts; however, our analysis of first-term attrition and reenlistment includes only the 2002 to 2014 cohorts in order to be able to observe a full contract length for each cohort. For BCT and early-term attrition, we condition our attrition outcome on *failure to adapt*, since this accounts for the vast majority of attrition (97 to 98 percent). *Failure to adapt* is determined by looking at separation codes following the previous work done in this area, and it covers a broad range of separation reasons, such as desertions, not meeting the physical training requirements, and misconduct.[4] For first-term attrition, we examined both failure to adapt and first-term attrition for any reason. Information on grouping the separation codes to construct a failure to adapt measure is provided in Appendix A.

[1] Rostker, Klerman, and Zander-Catugno, 2014.

[2] David Buddin, *Success of First-Term Soldiers: The Effects of Recruiting Practices and Recruit Characteristics*, Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corporation, MG-262-A, 2005.

[3] *Attrition* is defined and derived based on past work on the subject (Buddin, 2005). The main difference is that we focus on attrition due to failure to adapt rather than separations generally.

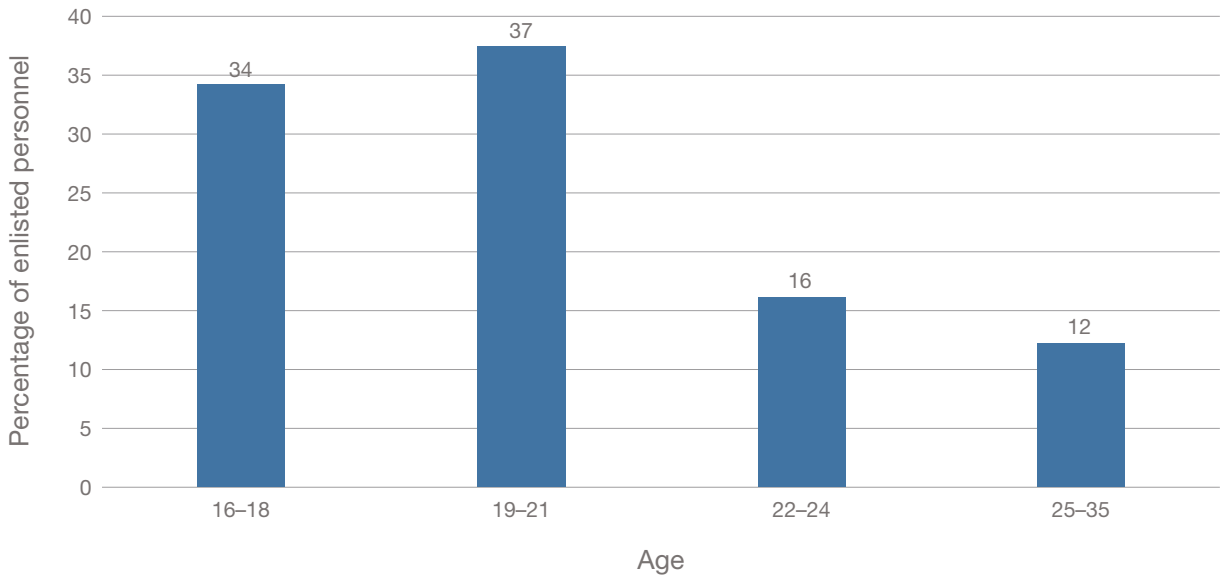
[4] Jennie Wenger, Caolionn O'Connell, Louay Constant, and Andrew J. Lohn, *The Value of Experience in the Enlisted Force*, Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corporation, RR-2211-A, 2018, p. 13.

Defining the Age Categories

Since our variable of interest is age, our discussion in this chapter focuses on the relationship between age at enlistment and the particular outcome we are examining. Initially, we grouped enlistees into age groups of 16/17 to 21 and above 21 based on previous research.[5] However, our early interviews with recruiting leadership and frontline recruiters suggested a somewhat different grouping. The target group for recruitment is age 17 to 24, and recruiters divided members into two distinct groups: (1) seniors, age 16/17–18; and (2) graduates, age 19–24. In general, those 25 and older were not considered an active target recruiting population, though recruiters will gladly accept them into enlistment if they meet all the basic requirements. Based on our early interviews, and to be consistent across our analysis of trends using the administrative data and the survey data discussed later, we grouped our enlisted population into the following categories: 16–18, 19–21, 22–24, and 25–35 years. Figure 3.1 provides the age breakdown for our soldier population from cohorts 2002 to 2017. More than 70 percent of first-time enlistees fall in the 16-to-21 years old age range. However, there are substantial proportions of individuals whose first-term enlistment was completed above the age of 21, including 16 percent in the 22–24 age category and 12 percent in the 25–35 age category.

The number of enlistees has varied over time according to enlistment targets. The ratio of enlisted personnel over the age of 21 has ranged between 24 percent of total enlisted to around 33 percent in 2010 (Figure 3.2). The share of total enlistees above the age of 21 was highest in the period from 2007 to 2010. This was around the same time as the drawdown of U.S. troops in Iraq, which began in 2009, while there was an increase in the number of troops deployed to Afghanistan.[6] Also in the backdrop was the Great Recession of 2007–2009. The unemployment rate in the United States rose to 10 percent in 2009, which also happened to generally coincide with the increase in the share of individuals over the age of 21 enlisting in the Army (Figure 3.2). Total enlist-

FIGURE 3.1
Age Distribution of Enlisted Personnel (2002–2017)

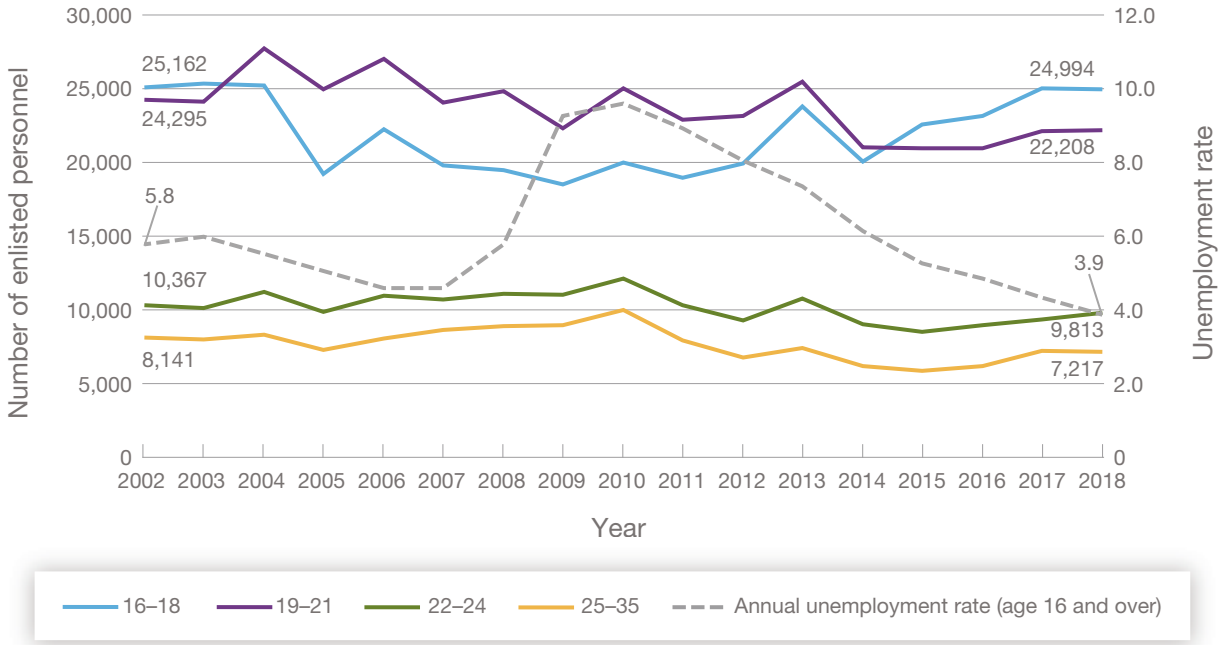


SOURCE: Authors' calculations based on analysis of TAPDB-AE.
NOTE: Total number of enlisted personnel included is 1,019,892, who enlisted between 2002 and 2017.

[5] Rostker, Klerman, and Zander-Catugno, 2014.

[6] Congressional Research Service, "Department of Defense Contractor and Troop Levels in Afghanistan and Iraq: 2007–2020," R44116, Washington, D.C., May 10, 2019.

FIGURE 3.2
Number of First-Term Enlisted Personnel, by Cohort Year (2002–2017)



SOURCES: Authors' calculations based on analysis of TAPDB-AE. Unemployment rate from U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2019.
NOTE: Total number of enlisted personnel included is 1,019,892, who enlisted between 2002 and 2017.

ees started to decline by 2013, consistent with the drawdown timeline announced in 2012. Between 2004 and 2014, individuals aged 19 to 21 were the largest group accessing into the Army. However, beginning in 2015, individuals aged 16 to 18 overtook that group and became the largest group of accessions.

Characteristics of Enlisted Personnel

We examined descriptive information on the demographics, education, enlistment, and attrition outcomes of soldiers by the age group they belonged to.[7] Around 18 percent of enlistees who enter at 16–18 and 25–35 years are female, compared with 15 percent and 16 percent, respectively, of enlistees aged 19–21 years and 22–24 years. The share of enlistees aged 22–24 and 25–35 who enlist with some postsecondary education, including some college, an associate (two-year) degree, or a bachelor's, is 19 percent and 30 percent, respectively. Overall, the rate of non-White enlistees is higher in the 25–35 age group. Not surprisingly, enlistees above the age of 21 are much more likely to be married and have dependents—close to half for those aged 25–35. Whereas just over 60 percent of enlistees in the 16–18 and 19–21 age categories fall in the AFQT Categories I–IIIA, the share is higher for those over the age of 21, at 70 percent or more. There are few differences in the length of the term of service by age, but the older age group is slightly more likely to have received an enlistment bonus. Around one-quarter of recruits above the age of 21 have enlisted in a combat MOS, compared with one-third or more of those aged 16 to 21 years. Older recruits are also less likely to have deployed. Recruits above the age of 21 also come in at higher paygrades but have higher rates of their body mass index (BMI) being outside of the targeted range, usually above. In sum, recruits above the age of 21 are more likely

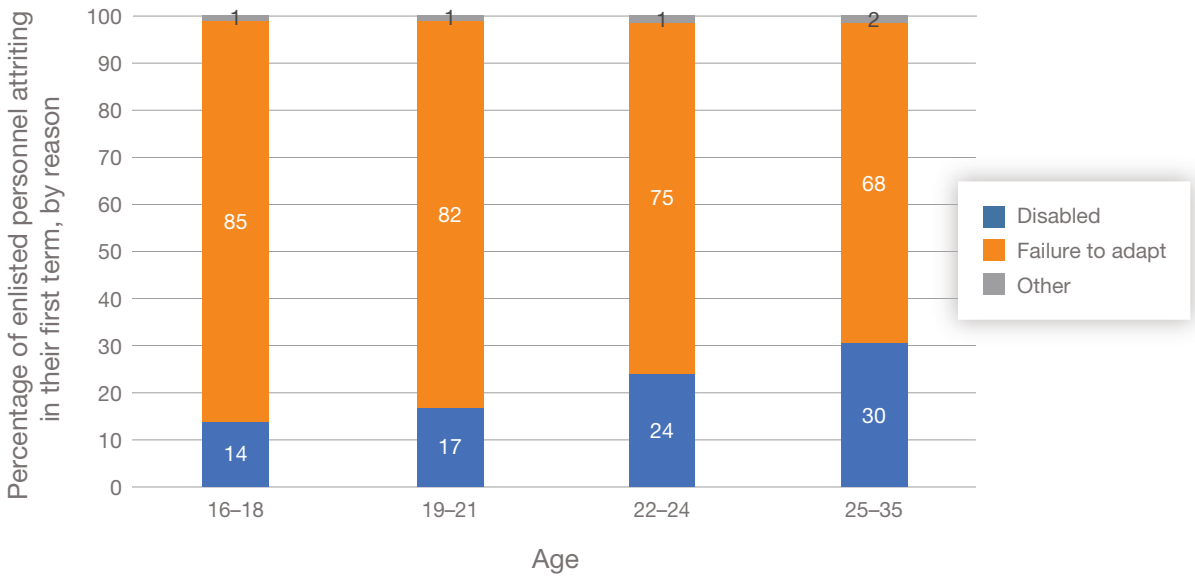
[7] The discussion of key characteristics of enlisted personnel refers to Table A.1 in Appendix A.

to have acquired some postsecondary education, to be married and have dependents, to fall in the AFQT I–IIIA category, to enlist in a noncombat MOS, and to enter at a higher paygrade.

BCT and early-term attrition rates due to failure to adapt are 5–6 percent and 9–11 percent, respectively. In terms of the overall average, both BCT and early-term attrition are slightly higher for the younger age groups. First-term attrition due to failure to adapt is around 29–31 percent for the younger age group compared with 22–23 percent for the over-21 age groups. It is also higher when factoring in disability: 36–37 percent for the under-21 age groups compared with 32 percent for soldiers in the over-21 age group. The overall average reenlistment rate is 36 percent for the under-21 age group and 37–39 percent for the over-21 age groups.

The share of soldiers who separate from service due to disability increases over the course of their first-term enlistment. It is negligible during BCT and the early term and then rises to around 19 percent before the end of the first term.[8] If we look at all reasons for separation by age group, we can see the differences more clearly (Figure 3.3). Among the younger age group, the main reason for attrition before the end of the first term is failure to adapt (85 percent). This is still the case for the over-21 groups; however, the share of soldiers above the age of 21 attriting due to failure to adapt before the end of their first term is lower: 75 percent of those age 22–24 and 68 percent of those age 25–35. In both cases, one-quarter or more of first-term enlistees attrite due to disability.

FIGURE 3.3
Separation Reason for First-Term Enlistees (2002–2014)



SOURCE: Authors' calculations based on analysis of TAPDB-AE.
NOTE: Total number of enlisted personnel included is 293,176, who attrited in their first term between 2002 and 2014.

[8] Separations due to failure to adapt and disability for first-term attrition account for approximately 99 percent of all separations. The other reasons are missing in action, killed in action, receiving a commission, and data errors or inconsistencies.

Older Individuals Generally Perform Better on the Enlistment Outcomes Measured

Building on previous work to examine the factors that influence enlistment outcomes, we examined BCT attrition, early-term attrition, first-term attrition, and reenlistment, and the relationship of these outcomes to age. Our goal was to identify whether there are substantial differences in the attrition of older versus younger recruits; if older recruits are similarly or less likely to attrite than younger recruits, then there is evidence supporting older individuals as a viable population to consider recruiting from.

Our results are presented in graphical form in this section with an accompanying discussion. The details of our analytic approach are provided in Appendix B. We draw on estimates from running logit regressions and present the probability or likelihood of an outcome occurring while taking into consideration the individual characteristics of soldiers and their enlistment circumstances.[9] Our objective is to illustrate variation in predicted attrition or reenlistment by age and cohort. In other words, what is the predicted probability of attrition to occur for soldiers aged 16 to 18 if their cohort year was 2002, and similarly for soldiers in other age groups and cohorts? It is also important to recognize the limitation of this approach in interpreting the results of the models. Predicted probabilities can vary based on conditions placed on the model's covariates, which again depend on the research questions being investigated. As a reminder, our main interest in this part of the project was to see whether we could confirm findings from previous research demonstrating that individuals over the age of 21 are a viable population to recruit from based on their postenlistment outcomes. If we do not observe significant and substantial differences between younger and older soldiers, or if older soldiers perform better than younger soldiers, there is evidence that supports the viability of recruiting older individuals.

With that in mind, our discussion will focus on interpreting the predicted probabilities comparing the different age groups with each other. Our large sample size provides sufficient power to allow us to detect statistically significant effects in most cases, so, to the extent possible, we will discuss whether the differences across our variable of interest (age at enlistment) are substantively meaningful.

BCT Attrition

BCT attrition rates vary by cohort—the rates rose from 2002 to 2004 and then dropped for cohorts 2005 and 2006 before rising again for cohorts 2007 and 2008 (Figure 3.4). Since 2008, BCT attrition has generally dropped. Figure 3.6 illustrates the predicted probability of attrition for soldiers in each age group by cohort. In general, soldiers in the 25–35 age group have a higher predicted probability of attriting during BCT, and there is no detectable statistically significant difference between the 22–24 and 16–18 groups. For the 2008 cohort, the predicted probability of attrition for a 16–18-year-old was around 7 percent, 7.2 percent for 19–21-year-olds, 7.1 percent for 22–24-year-olds, and 7.8 percent for 25–35-year-olds. This translates to a 3-percent difference from the baseline for the 19–21-year-olds and an 11-percent difference from the baseline for the 25–35-year-olds. Importantly, note that while the 11- or 13-percent-higher odds of attrition for the older age group suggest a large difference in attrition rate, the actual percentage-point difference in attrition rates between the two groups is quite small.

[9] Richard Williams, "Using the Margins Command to Estimate and Interpret Adjust Predictions and Marginal Effects," *Stata Journal*, Vol. 12, No., 2, 2012.

FIGURE 3.4
BCT Attrition Due to Failure to Adapt, by Cohort and Age Group

SOURCE: Authors' calculations based on analysis of TAPDB-AE.
NOTE: Total number of enlisted personnel included is 1,019,892, who enlisted between 2002 and 2017. Error bars represent 95-percent confidence intervals.

Early-Term Attrition

The early-term attrition trends are very similar to BCT attrition. Being in the 25–35 age group is associated with a higher probability of attrition due to failure to adapt in the early term. Taking the same cohort year as our previous example (2008), the predicted probability of attrition was 13.0 percent for soldiers aged 16–18 years and 13.8 percent for those aged 25–35. This difference translates to around a 6-percent-higher probability of attrition for the 25–35 age group (Figure 3.5). In percentage-point terms, however, the practical difference between 13.0-percent and 13.8-percent attrition rates is quite small.

When we account for a host of factors, the trends for both BCT attrition and early-term attrition indicate that soldiers in the oldest age group (25–35) have higher predicted probabilities of attrition in the first six months. In general, predicted probabilities of attrition, according to our model estimates, are around 1 percentage point higher than the predicted probabilities of attrition for the younger age groups.

First-Term Attrition

When examining first-term attrition due to failure to adapt, we notice that the differences between the age groups are larger—and in the opposite direction. Being in the 22–24 and 25–35 age groups is associated with statistically significantly lower predicted probability of attriting in the first term due to failure to adapt (Figure 3.6). Conversely, the 16–18 age group has the highest probability, followed by the 19–21 age group. The predicted probability of attrition for a 25–35-year-old soldier in 2008 was 31.6 percent. This compares with a predicted attrition rate of 37.3 percent for soldiers aged 16–18. Using those predicted probabilities, the difference is around a 15-percent lower probability of attrition. However, it is important to note that rates vary from year to year. In 2012, for example, the predicted probability of attrition was 26.9 percent for soldiers aged 16–18 and 21.9 percent for soldiers 25–35. This translates to an 18.6-percent decrease in attrition. The important point is that a 19-percent difference in attrition between the two groups translates to around

FIGURE 3.5

Early-Term Attrition Due to Failure to Adapt, by Cohort and Age Group

SOURCE: Authors' calculations based on analysis of TAPDB-AE.

NOTE: Total number of enlisted personnel included is 1,019,892, who enlisted between 2002 and 2017. Error bars represent 95-percent confidence intervals.

FIGURE 3.6

First-Term Attrition Due to Failure to Adapt, by Cohort and Age Group

SOURCE: Authors' calculations based on analysis of TAPDB-AE.

NOTE: Total number of enlisted personnel included is 834,921, who enlisted between 2002 and 2014. Error bars represent 95-percent confidence intervals.

a 5–percentage point difference in the attrition rate between the older and younger groups at entry; in effect, older recruits are slightly less likely than younger recruits to attrite due to failure to adapt.

When we examine first-term attrition for any reason, which also accounts for separations due to disability and other reasons, we find that there is no statistically significant difference between the 25–35 age group and our reference category of 16–18-year-olds (Figure 3.7). The predicted probability of attrition for any reason in the first term was lowest for the 22–24 age group. In the 2008 cohort, as an example, the predicted probability was 40.3 percent for the 22–24 age group and 42.1 percent for 16–18 age group, or a difference of 4.4 percent from the baseline. This is smaller in magnitude compared with the 10 percent–lower odds of attrition calculated earlier. In terms of percentage points, the differences between the age groups are small, especially compared with the differences in first-term attrition due to failure to adapt.

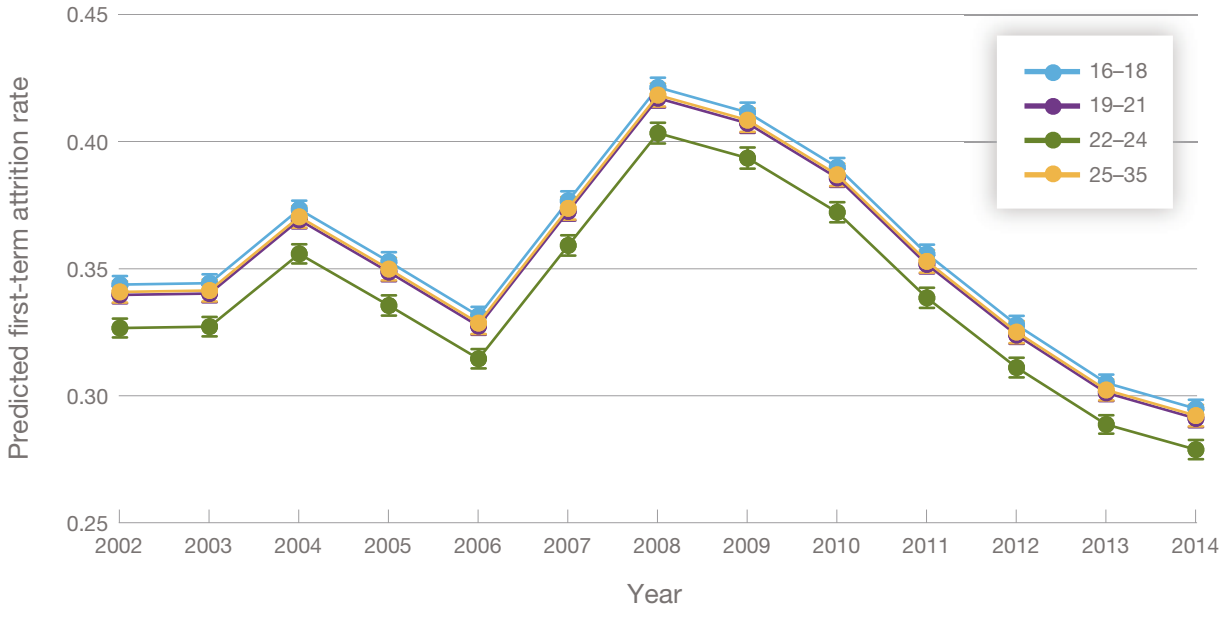
Reenlistment

Figure 3.8 illustrates the effect of age and cohort on reenlistment. Taking the example of the 2008 cohort, the predicted reenlistment rate for 25–35-year-olds was 33.3 percent compared with 31.5 percent for those who enlisted at age 16–18. This is a 5.7-percent-higher enlistment rate for the 25–35 age group compared with the baseline of the 16–18 age group, or a little less than a 2–percentage point difference in the predicted reenlistment rate.

Chapter Summary

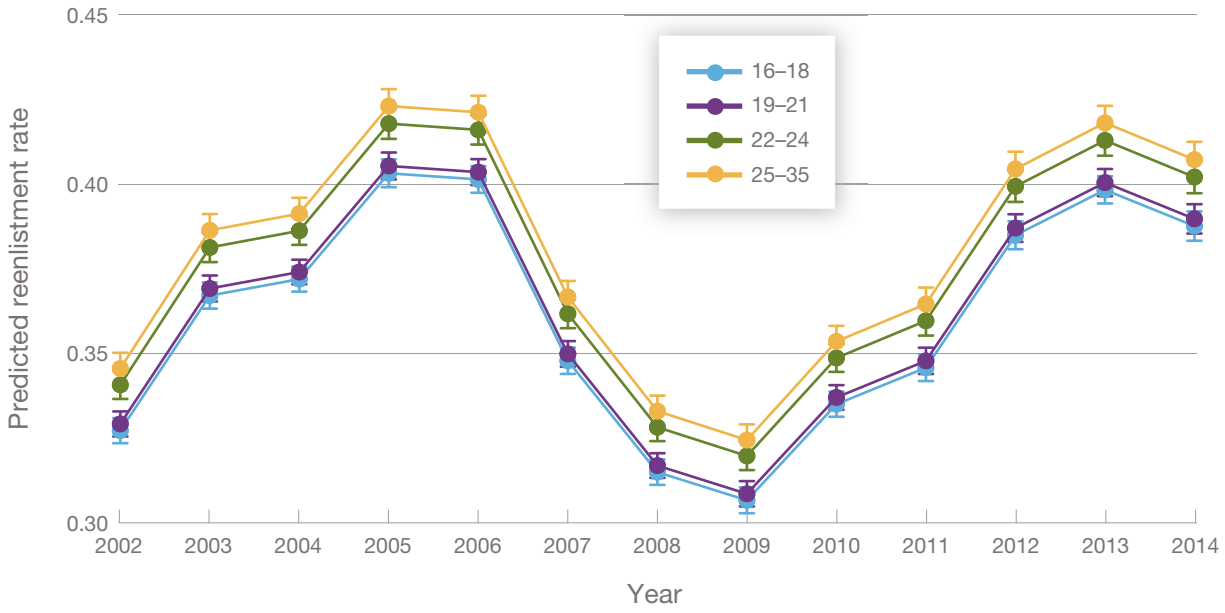
This chapter examined whether there are substantial differences in the attrition rates of older recruits compared with younger recruits; if older recruits are substantially more likely than younger recruits to attrite,

FIGURE 3.7
First-Term Attrition for Any Reason, by Cohort and Age Group



SOURCE: Authors' calculations based on analysis of TAPDB-AE.
NOTE: Total number of enlisted personnel included is 834,921, who enlisted between 2002 and 2014. Error bars represent 95-percent confidence intervals.

FIGURE 3.8
Reenlistment, by Cohort and Age Group



SOURCE: Authors' calculations based on analysis of TAPDB-AE. Total number of enlisted personnel included is 834,921, who enlisted between 2002 and 2014. Error bars represent 95-percent confidence intervals.

then it may not be worthwhile to consider expanded recruitment from this population. We found that, overall, this was not the case. Other key findings are as follows:

- Overall, older recruits are about as likely as, or somewhat less likely than, younger recruits to attrite during their first term.
- First-term enlisted personnel aged 25–35 have higher attrition rates in the first six months of service.
- However, in terms of percentage points, the differences between age groups are quite modest. The largest difference is in first-term attrition due to failure to adapt, which translates to a 5–percentage point–lower rate of attrition for the older group (age 25–35).
- When accounting for disability, however, the oldest age group (age 25–35) has a very similar likelihood of attrition to the 16–18 and 19–21 age groups.
- Older recruits are slightly more likely than younger recruits to reenlist. The over-21 group has reenlistment rates that are 2 percentage points higher than the younger age groups.

The findings suggest that age is an important factor, as is the timing and reason for attrition. The over-21 group is expectedly more susceptible to injuries as a result of the physical requirements of the Army. However, consistent with findings from past research, their age may play an important role in helping them adapt to Army life once past the BCT and early-term phases. The findings are consistent with previous work and support the notion that older individuals are a viable population to recruit from.[10]

[10] Rostker, Klerman, and Zander-Catugno, 2014.

CHAPTER FOUR

Recruiting Opportunities and Challenges

To understand current approaches to recruiting older youth, we conducted interviews with USAREC, the U.S. Army Recruitment and Retention College, recruiting BDEs, recruiting BNs, recruiting companies, and individual recruiting stations. The interviews were conducted between February and June 2019. To capture a geographic distribution, we interviewed representatives from Baltimore, Maryland; Los Angeles, California; Portland, Oregon; Seattle, Washington; and Cincinnati, Ohio recruiting BNs, and representatives from recruiting stations within their footprint. In each location, at the BN level, we surveyed a range of individuals and functional areas, including BN commanders (CDRs) and command sergeants major; BN executive officers (XOs); virtual recruiting teams (VRTs) (where they existed); and market analysts. In all, we interviewed representatives from nine recruiting stations, ranging from company CDRs (typically captains [CPTs], who manage two or more stations) to recruiters.

Our team developed a semistructured interview protocol (Appendix C) including questions regarding the opportunities and challenges presented by older recruits, geographically specific recruiting challenges (for older recruits and the recruiting population in general), available training for targeting older recruits, and current strategies focusing on older recruits. We further asked about broader recruiting practices and challenges to provide context for challenges relating to recruiting older youth.

In this chapter, we highlight themes that consistently emerged across sites and echelons. In the chapter summary, we provide brief additional comments about the implications of COVID-19 for relevant themes.

Themes from the Interviews

Recruiters Do Not Know Where or How to Find Older Prospects

Recruiters define populations as *seniors*, *grads*, and *older recruits*, with *seniors* defined as seniors in high school, *grads* defined as individuals who have graduated from high school but are under the age of 24 (whether in college, employed, or unemployed), and *older recruits* defined as individuals older than 24. According to all our interviews with BN-, company-, and station-level recruiters, older recruits are not considered a target recruiting population.[1] The older recruit population may, therefore, provide the Army with opportunities to expand on current recruitment practices. It will be important that this new target population be integrated into ongoing recruiting activities without loss of focus on existing markets. As one BDE CDR noted,

> In recruiting, each action has an opposite and equal reaction. And it happened with grads. We abandoned the high schools and boy did it show. We went to a station, and said what's the mission? "Abandon the high schools sir." Somehow that narrative got out and they focused on the older population. We lost the high

[1] USAREC interview, February 20, 2019.

> schools. Now I say everything is balanced. Regular Army, reserve, high schools. Recruiters want to focus on one thing 'cuz it's easier. But we need balance. It's hard but we have to.[2]

The older recruit population presents challenges to recruiters. Most notably, recruiters indicated that older recruits are the most difficult to locate, while the senior market provides the best return on investment of time. In fact, data from 2018 indicate that about 40 percent of the 18 to 24 population was receiving a postsecondary education,[3] leaving roughly 60 percent of this core age group effectively without concerted recruiter targeting, as well as all of the 25 to 35 age group.

In prepandemic times, we would expect high school seniors to be physically located in predictable places, such as high schools and at college and career fairs. Recruiters faced some challenges accessing students in certain school districts, depending on the openness of school administrations to military recruiters. Additionally, recruiters from the Pacific Northwest noted that teacher and guidance counselor perceptions of military service impacted recruiters' abilities to influence students' decisions regarding enlistment. Recruiting BNs in the Pacific Northwest and on the East Coast noted that the perception that college is the "next natural step" after high school graduation presented challenges when working with students who had a genuine interest in enlisting but faced social pressure from teachers or parents to pursue college first.[4]

Yet even with the challenges listed above, recruiters reported that the high school senior population in general provides recruiters with the most concentrated pool of potential recruits. The grad market is more dispersed than the senior market. However, the grad market does still coalesce in predictable places, including colleges and universities or at career fairs. Beyond that, many interactions with grads or older recruits who were not in college were described as happening "by chance."[5]

Recruiters face the expectation to maximize the effectiveness of recruiting outcomes when selecting where to host events and meet potential recruits. Given the distributed nature of the potential older recruit population, many recruiters indicated that the effort required to locate potential interested and eligible older candidates was not worth the investment. As one recruiter noted,

> We look at ROI [return on investment]; it comes from places where people concentrate. Once you're out of college, you're a free radical; for us to do a set-up and presentation, it's hard to get them all in the same place.[6]

While recruiters indicated that they did not target older recruits through specific events, multiple recruiters from across geographic regions noted that they pursued opportunities to recruit from the older population as a matter of course, and that there was an undertapped older population:

> It's just harder to reach them, especially if they don't go to college; the only way we run into them is chance encounters or face-to-face. It's not that we're not thinking about them, it's just hard for us to get to them.[7]

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2 Recruiting BDE interview, February 21, 2019.

3 Scott A. Ginder, Janice E. Kelly-Reid, and Farrah B. Mann, *Enrollment and Employees in Postsecondary Institutions, Fall 2017; and Financial Statistics and Academic Libraries, Fiscal Year 2017*, NCES 2019-021rev, Washington, D.C.: National Center for Education Statistics, U.S. Department of Education, 2019.

4 Recruiting BN interviews, February 7, 2019, and April 4, 2019.

5 Recruiting BN interview, February 12, 2019.

6 Recruiting BN interview, February 12, 2019.

7 Recruiting BN interview, June 5, 2019.

One technique that recruiters cited was bringing business cards with them to leave with particularly motivated service-sector employees whom they encountered during the normal course of their day, such as at airports, rental car agencies, grocery stores, gyms, or malls. While these activities were not a focused effort, such places of employment would provide access to potential older recruits.[8] In the words of one recruiting company recruiter, "sometimes we go to more dead-end, part-time jobs, like fast-food joints. We try to find people in their mid-20s working at pizza parlors that are looking for a change."[9] For the most part, the strategy that recruiters employed for recruiting older individuals mostly relied simply on older recruits coming to them.

Recruiters in all locations also mentioned that having a presence at local events, such as sporting events, conventions, and public fairs, offered the potential to interact with older individuals, although tracking the effectiveness in recruiting outcomes from these types of events was difficult—and the payoff might come long after the event itself. Planning attendance at large events also posed scheduling challenges related to the long lead times for participants required by some events that often did not match recruiter FY funding cycles.

Recruiters, speaking prior to the pandemic, universally noted that virtual recruiting, both via job search websites and social media, was becoming a useful approach for prospecting in general. Most station-level recruiters did not have extensive training in the use of social media and were learning as they went.

Recruiters noted that data and information regarding the population of potential older recruits were more difficult to come by. JAMRS, the authoritative source for information on propensity to serve, focuses its survey efforts on youth up to the age of 24.[10] As a recruiting BN CDR indicated, "it takes more market analysis to reach them [older recruits]."[11] While some recruiting BNs and companies may benefit from more targeted analysis of the potential for older recruits in their recruiting footprint, it would require an investment of time and resources that CDRs may think are better applied elsewhere.

College campuses were viewed as a potential location to recruit older individuals, but access to campuses was commonly described by recruiters across echelons as something that needed to be facilitated at a local, rather than top-down, level. For example, a recruiting BDE S3 officer found success through an informal relationship with a university:

> I kept in contact with some professors, and I got them involved in an "education tour" (brigade education tour). We were able to get a jump with the Golden Knights. He didn't believe that from an email and phone call we made all that happen. That steamrolled to training, to allowing us in, and now they allow "micro marketing" based on that relationship alone. That was all based on me and my relationship I maintained over the years. That's a private school. I had to kick the door open to that school; I called the professor, I said we're legally allowed. Even if it's private. If they take any federal funding, they legally have to allow us on. There's a court ruling. Cops said I couldn't be there. I said I'm an alumni. I am here personally. I went there and they allowed us in the school because the administration knew me. Those stopgaps aren't always known.[12]

8 Recruiting company interview, April 4, 2019.

9 Recruiting company interview, February 7, 2019.

10 See, for example, Office of People Analytics, "Fall 2018 Propensity Update," briefing slides, Joint Advertising Market Research and Studies, 2018.

11 Recruiting BN interview, February 7, 2019.

12 3rd BDE interview, February 21, 2019.

Lack of Training for Recruiting Older Individuals

USAREC provides training for recruiters through the Army Recruiting Course (ARC), a 47-day course at Fort Knox, Kentucky.[13] During the course, recruiters learn key strategies for making the Army's recruitment mission. Interviews with USAREC indicate that, in the course of recruiter training, ARC does not provide a specific curriculum for recruiting individuals over the age of 24.[14] Interviews with recruiting companies reinforced the issue; as one recruiter noted, "There are no Army programs or training that assist us in targeting recruits over 21. Everything we do to bring them on board is based on our experiences."[15]

Recruiters at multiple locations indicated that targeted training for older recruits might be beneficial in aiding their ability to meet mission. In particular, comprehensive education about the range of benefits available to service members would be desirable, given the role that such benefits such as loan repayment and health care play in older recruits' decisions to enlist. During interviews with ARC instructors, our team was told that, during ARC, students choose a benefit that they are interested in from a list, learn that benefit in detail, and make a presentation to the class. However, a common sentiment among recruiters in the field was that, while they learned about the benefit they studied at the ARC, they did not feel well informed about the broader range of benefits that other students had presented, as one recruiter stated:

> We learned about prospecting and the admin part [at the ARC]. There's so many programs that I don't even know about. The [blended] retirement too . . . I didn't care. . . . We didn't talk about retirement at all. And I don't know about it at all for the reserves.[16]

Marketing Resource Issues

Recruiters noted some challenges with current marketing materials. Existing posters, fliers, commercials, and other advertising campaigns tend to feature individuals who "all appear like they're somewhere in their early 20s."[17] The "Warriors Wanted" campaign, while praised in some interviews, was also specifically referenced in many of the interviews as not targeting a broad audience, or even as being counterproductive.[18]

> [Warriors Wanted] is good for kids looking for excitement. We should do job-specific ones, like "nurses wanted."[19]

> You've probably seen the Warriors Wanted commercials. Those people got one place they want to go: the U.S. Army. That's not the market we need to convince to join. Those people are already coming because they don't have another place to go. Those people are going to walk into your office no matter what. What you

[13] U.S. Army Human Resources Command, "Recruiter Common Questions," *Army.mil*, August 23, 2019.

[14] USAREC interview, February 20, 2019.

[15] Recruiting company interview, February 7, 2019.

[16] Recruiting company interview, April 4, 2019.

[17] Recruiting company interview, February 7, 2019.

[18] It should be noted that the "Warriors Wanted" campaign has been replaced by "What's Your Warrior?" launched in November 2019 and after our interviews and analysis for this project. The new campaign focuses more on the range of roles and careers in the Army, leveraging many different types of skills and interests (USAREC, "U.S. Army Announces New Ad Campaign 'What's Your Warrior?' Introduces Breadth and Depth of Army Careers to New Generation," press release, November 9, 2019).

[19] Recruiting company interview, June 6, 2019.

> need to sell is someone who likes to work on computers and offer every certification there is in networking, and you can go out later and get jobs. Those are the people we need to sell a lot more than infantrymen.[20]
>
> We hate the Warriors Wanted commercial. Parents say, "thank you for your service, but not my child." We worry about influencers.[21]

More recent campaigns targeted toward educating parents and influencers on the benefits of military service further reinforce a message that the Army recruits heavily from the senior and grad markets, not older recruits.[22]

Additionally, recruiters reported that, while more efforts had been made to engage potential recruits through digital platforms, outreach strategies at the time tended to engage potential recruits through social media platforms more popular among younger recruits (such as Facebook, YouTube, Instagram, SnapChat, and TikTok, among others).[23] However, some recruiting BNs reported that they were pursuing additional funding to use job-seeking platforms that resonated more with older recruits, such as Indeed, Monster, and LinkedIn.[24]

VRTs use marketing and demographic data to target specific types of individuals in a given area. This approach is used to attract both Gen Z, younger recruits, and older recruits on the job market. Recruiters on VRTs noted that targeted job ads posted to job-search websites were particularly effective with older individuals using those job sites. One method that recruiters were using was to post a regular job ad describing an MOS with Army benefits to a job-search website such as Indeed or LinkedIn without making specific reference to the position being an Army job. An example would be for a food specialist position. The VRT would place a job ad on Indeed or LinkedIn for a cook or food specialist position with all the regular Army benefits included in the advertisement. The potential applicant would see the typical requirements for the food specialist MOS along with pay, education, and health insurance benefits provided by the Army. After the applicant expressed interest in the job and submitted an application, the VRT recruiter would reach out to them indicating that the position is in the Army. This method allowed recruiters to prescreen applicants more easily to learn whether they met the basic Army requirements. One VRT recruiter noted that the applicants are usually surprised to learn about all the benefits offered by the Army.[25] The key drawback that this recruiter noted was that it is difficult to determine over the phone whether the potential recruit makes the height-weight standards for the Army—a distinction that had been easier to do in person (prior to the pandemic).

Another common marketing concern brought up throughout the interviews was an unmet desire for more localized marketing. One individual with XO and S1 experience stated,

> The best ROI would be localizing, either radio ads, YouTube, all within those ZIP codes. You want to have something personalized that links you to the community, like a picture of [local landmark]; definitely a personalized domain. . . . Getting a [BN-specific] advertisement on streaming media on Hulu or Netflix.

[20] Recruiting company interview, June 6, 2019.

[21] Recruiting BN interview, February 7, 2019.

[22] Recruiting BN interview, April 3, 2019.

[23] Recruiting company interview, April 4, 2019.

[24] Recruiting BN interview, February 13, 2019.

[25] Recruiter interview, Los Angeles recruiting BN.

> They told us to leave the advertising to the big Army, pretty much. Could be a matter of dollars; it might cost a lot of money to localize it.[26]

A station-level recruiter noted, "Rolling ads on Facebook should send people directly to our specific stations, based on GPS."[27]

Another common perception among recruiters was that the local area marketing information they received from USAREC could be improved. Our interviews with marketing and research staff at USAREC indicated that there was significant data and analysis available on local markets, but this information did not appear to be well communicated down to the BN or company level. One BN-level interviewee responsible for marketing and public affairs noted that they would receive ZIP-code-level segmentation information with a broad messaging theme,[28] such as "adventure," but a common sentiment at the company level came from a company CPT from within that same BN who stated,

> The only real intel stuff we get is breakdown by ZIP code of how many contracts should be there. I'm an intel officer. I can do that. But marketing strategy? No. . . . I get data [from BN level] is what I would say I get. I don't get: "here is what I advise you to do in order to get the result."[29]

Perceptions of Positive Aspects of Older Prospects

Better-Quality Recruits

Recruiters from BN, company, and station levels all perceived that older recruits made better-quality soldiers. Recruiters depicted older recruits as being more "focused," more "mature" and having "more motivation" and "their priorities in line."[30] A similar perception was that older recruits "are more career-oriented. They're looking for a career they want to stay in."[31] One recruiting company CDR who previously commanded an operational unit noted the following:

> I always appreciated the older ones. They have more of a drive. I promoted them quicker. The will for them is different too; they want to get out of the barracks. . . . They get to staff sergeant quickly when possible.[32]

One recruiter stated,

> The 20-plus range, maybe until about 26: They're premium quality. They know what life is like, and they've seen the world. They can make better sense of the opportunities we have. . . . You don't have to supervise them tediously. In my opinion, the older kids are the ones we should be looking for.[33]

As was also noted in the focus group interviews (Chapter Six), the perception that older prospects bring more maturity and motivation to the Army persists through basic training and into soldiers' units.

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[26] Recruiting BN interview, June 5, 2019.

[27] Recruiting company interview, June 6, 2019.

[28] Recruiting BN interview, June 5, 2019.

[29] Recruiting company interview, June 6, 2019.

[30] Recruiting BN interview, February 13, 2019.

[31] Recruiting company interview, June 6, 2019.

[32] Recruiting company interview, April 4, 2019.

[33] Recruiting station interview, June 5, 2019.

More Committed to Enlisting

Recruiters across geographic locations noted that older recruits, while a less efficient market, were generally more committed to enlisting if they made contact with a recruiter. One recruitment BN recruiter noted that older recruits "do their own research prior. They know what the Army has to offer."[34] Another recruiter noted that seniors may "just stumble in" to a recruiting station, but a "grad may have already made a good portion of their decision."[35] Recruiters also noted that recent grads and older recruits alike shared a common experience of having graduated from high school with a plan, and then "that plan disappears, and they remember the Army."[36] While motivations may vary (for example, some may seek a steady paycheck and benefits out of necessity; others may return to the possibility of joining the Army after previously dismissing the idea), recruiters reported that the likelihood of an older recruit being ready and willing to sign a contract upon first entering a recruiting station was higher than that of their younger counterparts.[37]

Recruiters also reported that older recruits were more likely to approach a recruiting office after spending a significant amount of time researching their options before visiting a recruiter. Younger recruits were more likely to be considering Army enlistment as one of many options, while older recruits were more likely to come in with specific questions ("the older ones ask a lot more questions"),[38] but largely knowing that they want to join. Recruiters reported that older recruits were more likely than younger recruits to be seeking validation for a decision they had already largely made.[39]

Recruiters in relatively highly educated regions noted that older recruits were less likely to be negatively affected by traditional influencers (parents and teachers) in their decision to join the Army.[40] In particular, recruiters in regions that they described as having high income, high education levels, and/or social and political views regarding such issues as gun ownership stated that, in some cases, they faced more challenges in "winning over" the parents of a potential recruit than the recruit.[41] However, recruiters reported that older recruits were more likely to be influenced by a spouse or partner, whether positively or negatively (a perception that was also supported in analysis of recruit survey data, Chapter Five). For some individuals with spouses and or families, the benefits and stability provided by the military provided compelling incentives for a spouse's support of the decision. For others, a spouse's fear of danger or deployments was a discouraging factor for enlistment. Therefore, recruiters reported their encouragement of married recruits to involve their spouses from the beginning of the process and were prepared to answer questions and concerns spouses might have.[42]

Ready to Ship to Basic Training Quickly

Recruiters reported that they face pressure to meet mission on monthly, quarterly, and annual timelines. They indicated that, while the senior market provided them with significant numbers of new recruits on an annual basis, those recruits were not able to ship to basic training until after graduation. Recruiters noted that older recruits, particularly those looking for a steady paycheck, were committed and ready to leave for

[34] Recruiting BN interview, February 7, 2019.

[35] Recruiting BN interview, April 3, 2019.

[36] Recruiting station interview, April 4, 2019.

[37] Recruiting station interview, April 3, 2019.

[38] Recruiting company interview, June 6, 2019.

[39] Recruiting instructor interview, February 20, 2019.

[40] Recruiting BN interview, February 7, 2019.

[41] Recruiting BN interviews, February 7, 2019; April 3, 2019; April 4, 2019.

[42] Recruiting company interview, February 13, 2019.

basic training as soon as possible. While some challenges may arise specific to older recruits during the Military Entrance Processing Station (MEPS) process, those older recruits who do not need waivers or who are able to obtain necessary waivers quickly were able to ship to basic training on a short timeline and assisted recruiting stations in meeting their short-term goals.[43]

Perceptions of Challenges Among Older Prospects and Recruits

More Waivers Required

Recruiters said that older recruits are more likely than their younger counterparts to need waivers to enlist. Recruiters in all geographic areas described the waiver process as a challenge, noting "more life equals more hurdles";[44] "disqualifying factor rates go up as they [recruits] age";[45] older recruits "face more disqualifications based on their circumstances";[46] and "it's more work for a recruiter to find 'em and fix 'em."[47] Some geographic differences were reported. Recruiters in higher socioeconomic areas, facing challenges in recruiting from the senior market, reported an openness to pursuing new strategies for recruiting from the older eligible population.[48] Recruiters in states where marijuana is legal faced additional judgment calls when considering waivers, particularly if an individual was convicted of a minor drug possession charge before marijuana became legal. Recruiters further indicated that they had to communicate frequently with recruits in states where marijuana is legal, reminding their recruits in process that marijuana use is still a violation of Army policy.[49]

Recruiters noted two specific categories in which older recruits are more likely to need waivers: medical waivers and legal/moral waivers. Medically, older recruits were more likely to have poor eyesight or hearing, or to have suffered injuries or required surgeries that might render them unqualified for military service. As one recruiting company commander noted, "generally speaking, the older they are, the more difficult it is to get them medically cleared."[50]

While it is possible for recruits to obtain waivers for certain medical issues, recruiters in all locations reported a belief that the medical waiver process took too long. Compounding the issue was that "if the recruiter doesn't understand how to file [waivers], then the recruiter doesn't bother. It's a matter of a recruiter's knowledge base."[51]

Additionally, recruiters across recruiting stations indicated that older recruits were more likely to have a disqualifying legal event in their history. While recruiting BN CDRs are able to review some files on a case-by-case basis and provide waivers, the demands on recruiting BN CDRs' time (particularly travel schedules) can, at times, hinder CDRs' ability to review files on a quick timeline.[52] Recruiting company CDRs in at least two locations recommended that, for certain issues requiring a waiver (such as tattoos), it might be benefi-

[43] USAREC interview, February 20, 2019.

[44] Recruiting station interview, April 4, 2019.

[45] Recruiting company interview, February 7, 2019.

[46] Recruiting company interview, February 7, 2019.

[47] Recruiting BDE interview, February 21, 2019.

[48] Recruiting BN CDR interview, February 7, 2019.

[49] Recruiting station interview, April 3, 2019; recruiting BN CDR interview, April 4, 2019.

[50] Recruiting company interview, February 7. 2019.

[51] Recruiting station interview, June 5, 2019.

[52] Recruiting BN interview, April 3, 2019.

cial to delegate authority from the recruiting BN CDR to recruiting company CDRs, while maintaining the authority for more serious issues at the recruiting BN CDR level.[53]

Several recruiters specifically claimed that they lost prospects, sometimes to other branches, because of the wait times for waivers.

> A year ago, marijuana waivers were at the Battalion Commander's office. Within two weeks we could have them in the Army. Now it goes up to the Department of the Army, and it's about four to six weeks' turnaround, and they're usually disapproved. In that time, the kids go to other branches.[54]

> Tattoo exception to policies go all the way up. It's not gang–affiliated, a lot of times it's religious. Sometimes it takes 60 days. For us to even submit that paper, we have to make sure the recruits are already qualified in every other way. We lose some of them to the Navy, which doesn't have a tattoo policy.[55]

> I just waited 62 days because this girl had a tiny kitty pawprint behind her ear. When approval finally came through she had already moved on.[56]

> We have a kid right now we can't put in the Army. Went to a hotel, took a Benadryl, then came up positive on the test for something of a sleeping aid or whatever. It's been a year. We had to wait a year to submit the waiver. He's been at MEPS three times, never positive.[57]

Recruiter perceptions of waiver differences by age were generally accurate. According to our analysis of MEPS data,[58] active-duty Army soldiers in 2018 who were over age 21 when they originally enlisted had a 60-percent-higher rate of requiring waivers than did those who originally enlisted at younger ages; 8 percent of those over the age of 21 and 5 percent of younger soldiers required waivers of some kind. The most-common types of waivers also differed by age. Older recruits were substantially more likely to require waivers for the number of dependents, serious traffic offenses, and major misconduct offense(s) in which the adverse adjudication resulted in the charges being dropped. Further, older recruits were about twice as likely to have had their waivers adjudicated at the highest level of authority, rather than a lower level, such as BN or BDE.

Challenges for Single Parents

Recruiters reported that older recruits have a higher probability of being single parents, which brings enlistment challenges for older recruits. Single parents must provide a robust Family Care Plan to enlist in the Army National Guard or Army Reserve and require a waiver.[59] Single parents wishing to enlist in the Active-Duty Army face even greater challenges, requiring them to transfer custody of their children to enlist.[60] One recruiting BN CDR noted that the policy unintentionally discriminated against older female recruits, who

[53] Recruiting company CDR interview, April 2, 2019; recruiting company CDR interview, April 4, 2019.

[54] Recruiting company interview, June 6, 2019.

[55] Recruiting station interview, June 5, 2019.

[56] Recruiting station interview, June 5, 2019.

[57] Recruiting company interview, April 4, 2019.

[58] MEPS data are reported in the RA Analyst database and hold information on soldiers who have signed a contract. Each record is unique and represents the most current data associated with the soldier and contract date. RA Analyst provides information collected at MEPSs, including basic demographics, education and training, accession date, and waivers.

[59] Army Regulation 601-201, "Regular Army and Reserve Components Enlistment Program," Washington, D.C.: Headquarters, Department of the Army, August 31, 2016.

[60] Army Regulation 601-201, 2016.

were more likely than their male counterparts to be single parents.[61] Further, while individuals cannot enlist in the Army as a single parent without making significant plans and adjustments, similar planning is not required of individuals who become single parents while on active duty. This policy may be under review with the Army's recent push to "review all policies, procedures, and programs for potential biases."[62]

General Issues with Recruiters and Recruiting

In addition to the themes related specifically to improving recruitment among individuals over the age of 21, there were several broader recruiting issues that were consistently identified during the recruiter interviews. While these concerns are largely beyond the purview of this report, addressing them may improve recruitment outcomes for prospects of all ages. There is currently an Army Research Institute working group focusing on broader recruitment issues, and we encourage future work to consider these matters.

Recruiting is a sales job. A brigade commander summed it up simply by stating, "It's a sales job, unfortunately."[63] One BN XO described recruiting in more detail: "Recruiting is about customer service and giving people attention. You need to build rapport with people to be successful. You need to help show people what the Army can do for them."[64] Common complaints from recruiting leaders were that many of the recruiters simply did not have the personality for sales, and that most recruiters did not want to be there but were selected by the Department of the Army (DA).[65] A recruiting BN XO said,

> Someone with a successful recruiting job should have certain traits. A certain amount of people who are recruiters and are introverts may not be the best match. But we're stuck with them for three years. Maybe while at the schoolhouse if they don't show the personality to recruit, we should not let them recruit. If I put the wrong guy at the career fair, we won't get the right thing out of it.[66]

One recruiting company first sergeant summed it up thus: "Recruiting is a personality thing. You either got it or you don't."[67]

Relatedly, recruiting leaders also consistently remarked that there was virtually nothing they could do to get rid of poor performers among their recruiting staff. Recruiting leaders are given a set number of recruiters to work with, and being assigned one or more who were not good at their jobs was perceived to greatly limit effectiveness. Poor performers were described as taking up time and space, hurting company recruitment goals, and being primarily useful only as someone to drive prospects around. Another leader noted that there are performance standards for every MOS except for recruiters.

Another common concern among recruiting leaders was the continual turnover in staff. Most recruiters spend three years at a post, and then move to a new post or return to regular service. Although the ARC was seen as providing the basics of recruiting, many recruiters noted that there was a long learning period after the ARC and that they did not really learn how to recruit until they had been in the field for several months,

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[61] Recruiting BN CDR interview, April 2, 2019.

[62] For more information about this review, see U.S. Army, "Army People Strategy: Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Annex, 1 September 2020," webpage, 2020a, p. 13.

[63] Recruiting BDE interview, February 21, 2019.

[64] Recruiting BN interview, February 12, 2019.

[65] A *DA-selected recruiter* is a soldier nominated by the particular branch they serve in to fill a recruiting position. For more details, see "Recruiter Frequently Asked Questions," undated.

[66] Recruiting BN interview, February 12, 2019.

[67] Recruiting company interview, June 6, 2019.

effectively shortening their potential productivity. Further, a significant aspect of recruiting involves establishing connections with individuals and organizations in the community—but with continual turnover in recruiting staff, the civilian connections are lost and need to be constantly rebuilt. One BDE S3 training officer noted that "We move, the civilian is still there, and the relationship is gone forever."[68] While the option to become a permanent recruiter (MOS 79R) exists, which can help retain the most effective recruiters over the long term, their local knowledge and connections are still lost when they relocate to new posts every few years. Revisiting the option to homestead 79R recruiters in one location over a lengthier period may be beneficial.

One 79R commented,

> Our big competition is the National Guard. If the National Guard recruiter becomes a recruiter in X location, he's there till he requests to move. And now a station commander is moving every three years. So, your objective is to become part of that community. So, first year you're trying not to drown, second year you get it down, and third year you're like, "guess what, I'm PCS'ing." So, you're getting one year of good work. But the National Guard is on the Chamber of Commerce, coaching things, part of the community.[69]

Relatedly, officers do not have an equivalent to 79R. One BDE XO stated that he was a career infantryman of several decades "with no recruiting experience, knowledge, or understanding, but now I'm the XO. . . . Even now I can't talk to you about the intimate details of recruiting in terms of first you do this then you go do that."[70] The learning process for recruiting leaders was similarly noted to have a substantial learning curve, which could shorten the time leaders can be most effective.

Finally, recruiting was often described as totally different from any other Army job, which presented specific challenges to recruiters and their families. A recruiting BN soldier and family assistance worker noted that

> The biggest thing with spouses is just how different recruiting is than being on an installation. They feel like the hours are long, the stress level for them is a lot higher, having to make mission and numbers, and I think that the spouses are just, like, "I hate recruiting," just because they feel like they are gone all the time, they are working all the time. And because we are so geographically dispersed—on the installation everything is right there.[71]

A BDE XO went further, likening recruiters and their families to being deployed in unfriendly territory:

> There's no clinic, hospital, commissary—all the things you associated with a military installation providing support to that military installation does not exist for each of our battalion HQ. For each of our company HQs, it's even worse. Maybe three or four hours from our nearest installations. I look at those as company outposts in Iraq and Afghanistan.[72]

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68 Recruiting BDE interview, February 21, 2019.

69 Recruiting BDE interview, February 21, 2019; PCS = permanent change of station.

70 Recruiting BDE interview, February 21, 2019.

71 Recruiting BN interview, February 12, 2019.

72 Recruiting BDE interview, February 21, 2019.

Chapter Summary

Interviews with recruiters, USAREC leaders, and the Army Recruitment and Retention College provided valuable insights on the experiences of recruiters prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, and on issues related to recruiting older individuals. While the Army officially focuses recruitment on individuals ages 18 to 24, in practice, new recruits are typically at the younger end of this range and come from high schools or, to a lesser extent, from colleges.

- Recruiters across geographic areas consistently indicated that they did not know where or how to effectively locate these undertapped populations, nor were they trained to do so. At the time of data collection, recruiters commented that Army marketing tended to appeal to younger individuals who are already likely to join the Army, but not to older individuals who needed to be persuaded. However, since the time of the interviews, the new "What's Your Warrior?" campaign was launched, explicitly showcasing a more diverse array of Army careers and, thus, potentially engaging a broader population.
- Recruiters noted that they were not trained specifically on how to market to older individuals. Many commented on older recruits' interest in Army benefit programs but admitted that they were not well informed about many of these programs.
- Recruiters reported that older recruits needed more waivers than younger recruits and were more likely to have family and dependent concerns. Some noted the judgment call that they had to make with respect to seeking waivers for minor drug possession charges in a recruit's history, considering the number of states where marijuana is legal.
- Recruiters consistently reported that they perceived older recruits to be of better quality than younger ones, more committed to completing the recruitment process, and able to ship to BCT on shorter timelines.
- There was a general perception that a large group of high-quality older prospects exists, but that finding them is a critical challenge in an environment that focuses on meeting recruiting mission numbers.
- Virtual recruiting was an emerging tool that appeared to have promise for broadening recruiter ability to prospect older individuals through social media and other online locations.

Overall, interviews with USAREC and recruiting BNs, companies, and stations indicate that the older recruit population presents a growth opportunity for the Army. However, the emergence of COVID-19 and subsequent social distancing and other mitigation strategies have, at least temporarily, fundamentally changed the environment for recruiters. In prepandemic times, older recruits presented a recruiting challenge partly because they were widely dispersed. Under pandemic conditions, this description may also apply to younger recruits. Similarly, the viability of in-person recruiting activities, such as at interviews at stations, is temporarily in question. These challenges mean that the Army must develop creative ways to continue recruiting. Thus, because of the pandemic, an emergent approach for engaging with older recruits through the virtual recruiting centers presents an even greater opportunity to address these challenges for recruits of all ages.

CHAPTER FIVE

Perceptions of the Army and Motivations to Join: Findings from the Youth Poll and New Recruit Survey

In this chapter, we explore survey data on perceptions of the Army and motivations to enlist to identify factors that are more or less salient to older recruits. We examine survey data collected by the JAMRS Program within the Department of Defense. Specifically, we analyze data from two ongoing JAMRS studies: the Youth Poll and the Army New Recruit Survey–Active Duty. The Youth Poll collects attitudinal data from a nationally representative sample of civilian individuals ages 16 to 24, and the Army New Recruit Survey collects data from active-duty military new recruits (ages 16 to 35) as they entered the Delayed Entry Program at all of the MEPSs throughout the country and Puerto Rico.[1] Note that the data were all collected in 2008–2018 and do not necessarily reflect perceptions during the context of COVID-19.

Civilian Perceptions of Army Service

In this section, we focus on civilian youth self-reports of propensity to serve in the Army, their perceptions of the reasons to enlist or not to enlist, and their experience with Army recruiters. Propensity can be thought of as "an overall measure that summarizes the influence of a variety of factors on youth's initial interest in joining the military. This includes the attitudes of key influencers (such as parents and friends), youth labor market conditions, and recruiting resource levels and allocation."[2] Most of our analysis is based on Youth Poll 40 (spring 2018), which collected information from 6,073 individuals ages 16 to 24 (roughly 50-percent male and 50-percent female). More than half (53 percent) of the sample are seniors (ages 16–18), with the remainder being graduates: 26 percent 19–21, and 21 percent ages 22–24. Data are weighted to match population benchmark values from the U.S. Census Bureau's Current Population Survey.

Propensity to Serve 2008–2018

A key indicator of future recruitment cohort size is propensity to serve among the civilian population. In each wave of the Youth Poll, respondents are asked "In the next few years, how likely is it that you will be serving in . . ." each of the military services. Response options include *definitely*, *probably*, *probably not*, or *definitely not*. Substantial criterion-related validity evidence exists for this intention-to-enlist measure,[3] and

[1] DoD, Office of People Analytics, Joint Advertising, Market Research and Studies, Youth Poll, survey, multiple iterations.

[2] Bruce R. Orvis, Narayan Sastry, and Laurie L. McDonald, *Recent Trends in Enlistment Propensity and Conversion of Potential Enlisted Supply*, Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corporation, MR-677-A/OSD, 1996, p. 2.

[3] See, for example, Jerald G. Bachman, David R. Segal, Peter Freedman-Doan, and Patrick M. O'Malley, "Does Enlistment Propensity Predict Accession? High School Seniors' Plans and Subsequent Behavior," *Armed Forces & Society*, Vol. 25, No. 1,

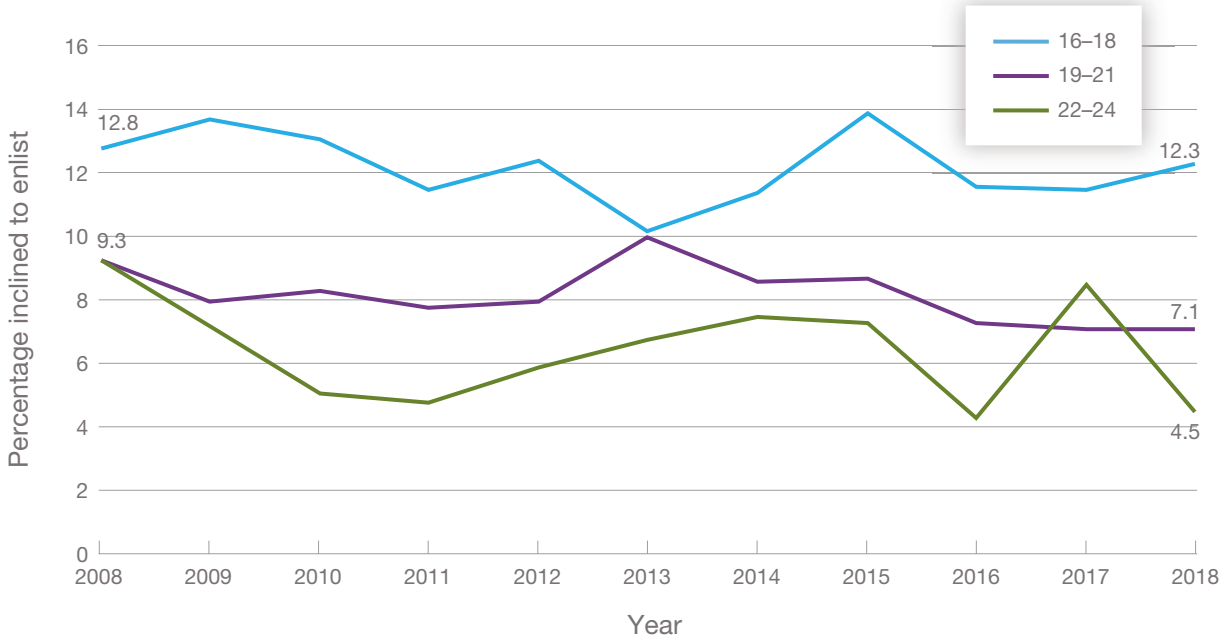
it is considered to be the best single predictor of enlistment.[4] For example, among male high school seniors, 70 percent of those who expressed a "definite" likelihood of serving eventually entered the military within six years of high school graduation, while a further 30 percent of those who expressed that they "probably" would did so in the same time frame.[5]

In Figure 5.1, we present the combined "definitely" and "probably" responses for males, by age, from Youth Polls between 2008 and 2018 to estimate overall propensity to serve. To minimize the potential for seasonal variation in propensity reports, we present propensity from 2013–2018 Spring Youth Polls (collected December–June), and from polls conducted during similar time frames in earlier years prior to the establishment of the "Spring Poll" fielding cycle. Note that Youth Polls prior to 2008 included only ages 16 to 21.

From Figure 5.1 we observe that propensity (as measured here) among males ages 16 to 18 remained relatively stable between 2008 and 2018, declined slightly for males ages 19 to 21 between 2008 and 2018, and declined substantially for males ages 22 to 24 from 2008 to 2010, after which it generally slowly increased until another decline in 2018. The decline for ages 19 to 21 is not statistically significant (i.e., 95-percent con-

FIGURE 5.1

Percentage of Males Reporting "Definitely" or "Probably" Serving in the Army in the Next Few Years, by Age, 2008–2018



SOURCE: Authors' calculations based on analysis of JAMRS Youth Poll data from 2008 to 2018.

1998; Jerald G. Bachman, Peter Freedman-Doan, and Patrick M. O'Malley, "Should US Military Recruiters Write Off the College-Bound?" *Armed Forces & Society*, Vol. 27, No. 3, 2001; Bruce R. Orvis, Martin T. Garhart, and Alvin K. Ludwig, *Validity and Usefulness of Enlistment Intention Information*, Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corporation, R-3775-FMP, 1992; and Michael J. Wilson, James B. Greenlees, Tracey Hagerty, D. Wayne Hintze, and Jerome D. Lehnus, *Youth Attitude Tracking Study: 1998 Propensity and Advertising Report*, Arlington, Va.: Defense Manpower Data Center, July 2000.

[4] Michael T. Ford, Jennifer L. Gibson, Brian K. Griepentrog, and Sean M. Marsh, "Reassessing the Association of Intent to Join the Military and Subsequent Enlistment," *Military Psychology*, Vol. 26, No. 1, 2014.

[5] Jerald G. Bachman, David R. Segal, Peter Freedman-Doan, and Patrick M. O'Malley, "Who Chooses Military Service? Correlates of Propensity and Enlistment in the US Armed Forces," *Military Psychology*, Vol. 12, 2000.

fidence intervals overlap for 2008 and 2018), but it is sizable and significant for the oldest age group, despite substantial volatility in recent years.[6] Between 2008 and 2010, propensity of the 22–24 age group halved, then slowly rebounded until 2018, when it fell back to the 2010 low. While propensity to enlist may be affected by contextual factors, such as current military engagements and likelihood of deployment, another key factor that is likely linked to youth propensity between 2008 and 2010 was the Great Recession and associated downturn in the civilian labor market; the young adult (16–24) unemployment rate hit a peak in September 2009 of 19.2 percent—the highest level since 1948.[7] Previous research has identified increases in high-quality enlistments during periods of civilian unemployment,[8] which might suggest that propensity would also increase rather than decrease during this period—but we note that during this same period, college enrollment also increased, which may have provided competing intentions at the older ages.[9]

While this suggests that the size of the propensed population ages 22 to 24 has shrunk relative to the propensed population at younger ages, it is important to acknowledge that many individuals with no stated propensity to join the military eventually change their minds and join.[10] In a study by Ford et al., 2014, among respondents who said they definitely would not enlist in the Army, 1.9 percent eventually did. In fact, because the nonpropensed population represents large numbers of people, they are still an important source of enlistees. Orvis, Garhart, and Ludwig, 1992, found that, while most young people have no plans to join the military, people who previously had no plans to join made up almost half the population of individuals who eventually enlisted. Woodruff, Kelty, and Segal, 2006, found similar results more recently in a smaller study.[11] Thus, while declines in propensity may demand an increase in the effort required to recruit individuals, successfully recruiting even a small percentage of those with no propensity (which has consistently been achieved over the years) yields substantial numbers of enlistees.

Motivations to Join and Not to Join the Military Are Similar Across Age

We might expect that the reasons why older individuals would or would not be interested in joining the military are different from those of younger individuals—advanced schooling, family, and economic obligations become more salient as individuals age. The 2018 Youth Poll includes a checklist of 19 reasons why individuals would consider joining the military, and 21 reasons why they would not; respondents could select all that apply.[12] In Tables 5.1 and 5.2, we present the top seven reasons for joining and not joining the military, as reported by males across age groups. Both men and women reported an average of about five reasons to join, with those ages 22 to 24 reporting significantly fewer (one less on average) than 16-to-18-year-olds. Regard-

[6] A similar figure for civilian women suggests no significant changes in propensity from 2008 to 2018. Women ages 16 to 18, 19 to 21, and 22 to 24 report relatively stable propensity percentages averaging 5.4, 3.6, and 2.4 throughout the period (respectively).

[7] Kathryn Anne Edwards and Alexander Hertel-Fernandez, *The Kids Aren't Alright—A Labor Market Analysis of Young Workers*, Economic Policy Institute Briefing Paper No. 258, 2010.

[8] For example, Beth J. Asch, Paul Heaton, James Hosek, Paco Martorell, Curtis Simon, and John T. Warner, *Cash Incentives and Military Enlistment, Attrition, and Reenlistment*, Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corporation, MG-950-OSD, 2010.

[9] Bridget Terry Long, "The Financial Crisis and College Enrollment: How Have Students and Their Families Responded?" in Caroline Hoxby and Jeffrey Brown, eds., *How the Financial Crisis and Great Recession Affected Higher Education*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2014.

[10] Bachman et al., 2000; Bruce R. Orvis and Beth J. Asch, *Military Recruiting: Trends, Outlooks, and Implications*, Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corporation, MR-902-A/OSD, 2001; Orvis, Sastry, and McDonald, 1996.

[11] Todd Woodruff, Ryan Kelty, and David R. Segal, "Propensity to Serve and Motivation to Enlist Among American Combat Soldiers," *Armed Forces & Society*, Vol. 32, No. 3, 2006.

[12] The rest of this chapter draws heavily on DoD JAMRS, Youth Poll 40, Spring 2018.

TABLE 5.1

Most-Commonly Reported Reasons to Join the Military, by Age, Civilian Males 2018

Rank	Age 16–18 (%)	Age 19–21 (%)	Age 22–24 (%)
1	To pay for future education (47.3)	To pay for future education (40.2)	Pay/money (38.7)
2	Pay/money (41.9)	Pay/money (40.2)	To gain experience/work skills (37.4)
3	To gain experience/work skills (41.9)	Travel (39.1)	Travel (36.5)
4	To help others (41.5)	To gain experience/work skills (38.2)	To help others (31.9)
5	Travel (37.4)	To help others (35.7)	To pay for future education (31.4)
6	Duty (34.1)	Duty (28.1)	Health and medical benefits (28.4)
7	Adventure (32.6)	Adventure (27.9)	Adventure (28.2)

SOURCE: Authors' calculations based on analysis of JAMRS Spring 2018 Youth Poll data.

NOTE: *N* = 3,072: 1,596 ages 16–18, 841 ages 19–21, 564 ages 22–24.

TABLE 5.2

Most-Commonly Reported Reasons Not to Join the Military, by Age, Civilian Males 2018

Rank	Age 16–18 (%)	Age 19–21 (%)	Age 22–24 (%)
1	Possible injury/death (59.6)	Possible injury/death (53.5)	Possible injury/death (55.3)
2	PTSD/psychological issues (45.2)	PTSD/psychological issues (42.3)	PTSD/psychological issues (42.4)
3	Leaving friends and family (42.9)	Leaving friends and family (39.4)	Leaving friends and family (39.7)
4	Other career interests (38.4)	Other career interests (38.9)	Other career interests (37.8)
5	Interference with college education (31.6)	Interference with college education (30.2)	Required to live in places I don't want to (26.2)
6	Don't believe I would qualify (21.5)	Dislike military lifestyle (25.6)	Dislike military lifestyle (25.0)
7	Dislike military lifestyle (21.3)	Don't believe I would qualify (20.1)	Family obligations (24.6)

SOURCE: Authors' calculations based on analysis of JAMRS Spring 2018 Youth Poll data.

NOTES: *N* = 3,072: 1,596 ages 16–18, 841 ages 19–21, 564 ages 22–24. PTSD = posttraumatic stress disorder.

less of age, men reported an average of about four reasons not to join, while women reported an average of about six. Contrary to expectations, at least for individuals ages 16 to 24, motivations to join the military and reasons not to were very similar across age. The Youth Poll does not include respondents over the age of 24, but in a subsequent section, we will examine the reasons for enlisting among new recruits up to age 35 in the New Recruit Survey data. As we will see, enlistees' reasons for joining the Army have also generally been similar across age (16 to 35).

Based on 2018 data, the top reasons to join the military are remarkably similar across age: pay, work experience, travel, to help others, adventure, and to pay for future education. Younger ages also rated duty as a top motivator, while older individuals placed health and medical benefits among the top reasons to join. The most common responses for women (not shown) were similar to those for men, with the primary exception that "duty" and "adventure" are replaced on the list by "health and medical benefits" and "to make a positive difference in my community." Note that "unable to find a job" was among the least commonly selected reasons to join the military at any age for both men and women.

As with the most-common reasons to join the military, the most-common reasons not to join the military were highly similar across ages 16 to 24 and similar for both men and women (not shown). While possible "interference with college education" is a common concern for those ages 16 to 21, "family obligations" appears on the list for the male respondents over the age of 21, and for female respondents at a slightly younger age (19 to 24).

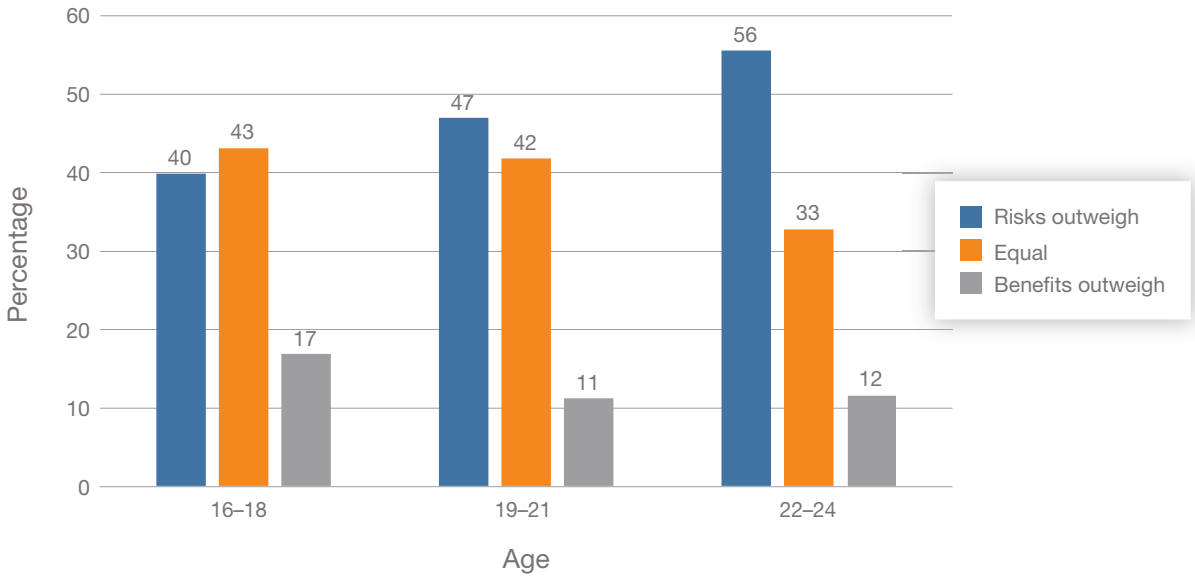
Although the reasons why civilians said they would and would not join the military are generally similar across age and sex, the overall perception of risks versus benefits to military service do vary significantly with age. Figure 5.2 presents reports of the risks versus the benefits to serving in the military for males 16 to 24 from the 2018 Youth Poll. The percentage of male respondents who perceived the risks to outweigh the benefits increases significantly at each age grouping (i.e., the 95-percent confidence intervals do not overlap). For women, the trends are similar, but increases are not significant and start from a higher baseline, with more than half of females ages 16 to 18 having indicated that "risks outweigh the benefits."

Key Points from the Civilian Surveys

The Youth Poll data provide three key insights related to recruiting individuals ages 22 to 24, relative to younger individuals.

FIGURE 5.2

Perceptions of Risks Versus Benefits of Military Service, by Age, Civilian Males 2018



SOURCE: Authors' calculations based on analysis of JAMRS Spring 2018 Youth Poll data.
NOTE: *N* = 3,072: 1,596 ages 16–18, 841 ages 19–21, 564 ages 22–24.

- Propensity to serve in the Army declined substantially between 2008 and 2018 for individuals ages 22 to 24, but not for younger individuals. In 2008, 9.8 percent of males ages 22 to 24 indicated that they "definitely" or "probably" would serve in the Army, but this declined to 4.3 percent by 2018. Younger individuals did not experience similar declines over the same period. However, while declines in propensity suggest that more effort will be required to recruit future cohorts, recruitment from the substantially larger population of individuals who express no intention to join the military has traditionally been a significant component of those who ultimately enlist.
- Among individuals ages 16 to 24 there are striking similarities in views of the top reasons why individuals would and would not join the military. The main reasons to join include pay, work experience, education benefits, travel, and adventure—regardless of age. The main reasons not to join include concerns about physical and psychological injury, other career interests, and leaving family and friends. Compared with younger people, older individuals ranked health and medical benefits more highly as a motivation to join, while family obligations were increasingly salient reasons not to enlist.
- Older individuals perceived greater risks versus benefits to military service, suggesting that challenges to recruiting this population are not limited to locating and engaging with the older population, but also include varying the types of messaging needed. The civilian data offer a few suggestions for differential motivations and incentives to enlist, but the limited survey age range precludes assessment of motivation and likely incentives at ages beyond 24.

New Recruit Perceptions of Army Service

Youth Poll data provide information about why civilians 16 to 24 might choose to join the Army but do not include people over the age of 24. Individuals over the age of 24 are a key demographic for consideration; 12 percent of active-duty enlisted personnel contracts in 2018 were signed after the age of 24, according to the administrative data analysis in Chapter Three. JAMRS conducts the Active Duty New Recruit Survey for all active-duty new recruits who enter the Delayed Entry Program (DEP) for the Army, Navy, Marine Corps, or Air Force. In this section, we examine the Spring (April–September) 2016 New Recruit Survey data for Army recruits to identify motivations and barriers to enlistment of individuals of all ages (16 to 35).[13] The New Recruit Survey fills the data gap on older civilians' perceptions of military service. While new recruits are a select population, information about motivations will highlight factors that were most salient to older recruits that the civilian Youth Poll cannot. Specifically, we examine New Recruit Survey information on influencers (e.g., parents, friends, significant others) in recruits' lives, motivations and concerns related to enlistment, attitudes toward Army incentives and benefits, the recruitment process, and military career expectations. In the summary of New Recruit Survey results, we also briefly consider the impact of COVID-19 on the findings where relevant.

The Spring 2016 Army New Recruit Survey includes 16,953 respondents (52-percent response rate).[14] All analyses have been weighted to adjust for nonresponse. Note that 25 percent of the responses are from individuals over the age of 21; 10.5 percent are from individuals over the age of 24.

The New Recruit Survey begins by asking recruits when they first started thinking about serving in the military and specifically about serving in the Army. For most recruits, including those over the age of 21,

[13] JAMRS, *Active Duty New Recruit Survey–Spring 2016 Technical Report*, JAMRS Report No. 2017-03, Alexandria, Va., March 2017.

[14] JAMRS, 2017.

enlisting was not a quick decision; 44 percent of recruits ages 25 to 35 said that they had "always wanted" to serve in the military, and 25 percent of them had always wanted to serve in the Army specifically. A further 22 percent had started thinking about serving in the Army within the past five years. This suggests that, for many older recruits, there had been an ongoing underlying potential for service, but that some recent change or event triggered conversion of intent to enlistment.

Table 5.3 presents the status of Army new recruits prior to accession by age. While a sizable proportion of recruits reported that they were unemployed, the majority of those over the age of 21 reported that they were working.[15] Although poor civilian employment prospects have previously been identified as a key driver of recruitment among older individuals (e.g., during the Great Recession),[16] it is not the only one. In addition, a sizable portion (more than 10 percent) of the 21+ recruits were currently attending college—including those over the age of 24. This indicates that college campuses were already providing a significant number of older recruits and, as we discuss later, that they may potentially be leveraged to greater effect.

Influencers Identified by Older Enlistees Increasingly Focus on Significant Others

New recruits are asked about whom they discussed the possibility of serving in the Army with, as well as who they thought was most influential in their decision to enlist. Information on potential influencers is important in that it expands the group of people who should be considered throughout the recruitment process. This means not only that influencers could encourage or discourage potential recruits once the recruit expresses interest, but also that they may be conduits of information to potential recruits themselves. Broadly, our analysis indicates that the importance of significant others grows, taking primacy with age, while the

TABLE 5.3
Status of Army New Recruits Prior to Accession, Spring 2016

Status	16–18 (%)	19–21 (%)	22–24 (%)	25–35 (%)
High School	53.4	3.6	0.2	0.3
Work (full-time)	8.9	29.7	41.8	49.3
Work (part-time)	28.9	23.6	19.9	16.5
College (full-time)	1.6	8.6	9.5	8.0
College (part-time)	1.4	4.2	4.0	3.4
Unemployed	23.7	34.4	29.0	24.5
None of the above	3.2	3.3	2.4	2.6

SOURCE: Authors' calculations based on analysis of JAMRS, 2017, data.

NOTE: *N* = 16,953: 7,197 ages 16–18, 5,622 ages 19–21, 2,369 ages 22–24, 1,765 ages 25–35.

[15] Note that these measures from the New Recruit Survey are self-reports, and respondent interpretations of each status may not conform to standard measures of unemployment. For example, it is possible that some respondents who reported being "unemployed" may have been out of the labor force altogether (i.e., had not been looking for work). Also note that respondents could select multiple statuses, so columns do not necessarily total 100 percent.

[16] Rostker, Klerman, and Zander-Cotugno, 2014.

influence of parents, grandparents, teachers, and counselors grows weaker with age. This pattern is consistent with a large body of research on attachment hierarchies across the life-course.[17]

Recruits over the age of 21 reported discussing the possibility of service with others less often than did younger recruits, but the discussions older recruits did have were primarily with their mothers, significant others, and close friends. Further, older recruits reported significantly more-frequent discussions with significant others overall than did younger recruits. In terms of people who recruits believed were most influential to their decision to enlist, the prominence of significant others again emerges with age. For recruits under the age of 22, parents and Army veterans were the most significant influencers. For those over the age of 21, significant others become the second most influential person, and for those 25 and up, the significant other becomes the most influential person. Results are summarized in Appendix D, Tables D1 and D2, respectively.

Enlistees' Primary Motivations for and Concerns About Joining the Army Increasingly Focus on Providing for the Family

The New Recruit Survey asks recruits to identify the main reasons they wanted to join the Army, and their most significant concerns when deciding to join, replicating the "reasons to join" and "not to join" items from the Youth Poll questions but extending them to respondents up to age 35. In addition to the checklist format from the Youth Poll, the New Recruit Survey also asks recruits to identify the No. 1 reason that they wanted to join and No. 1 concern. Tables 5.4 and 5.5 present the most common No. 1 reasons to join and concerns, respectively.

The most common reasons that people joined the Army are largely consistent across age: to better their lives, pride, duty, and to gain experience and work skills. The salience of providing for a family grows with age, eventually taking second position for those ages 25 to 35. Comparing the motivations of enlistees with the reasons that civilians would consider joining the Army (Table 5.1), we see that, while there is substantial

TABLE 5.4
The No. 1 Reason Recruits Wanted to Join the Army, by Age

	Age 16–18 (%)	Age 19–21 (%)	Age 22–24 (%)	Age 25–35 (%)
1	Duty/obligation to my country (17.8)	Better my life (17.6)	Better my life (15.6)	Better my life (17.6)
2	Pride/self-esteem/honor (15.0)	Pride/self-esteem/honor (13.5)	Pride/self-esteem/honor (12.5)	Provide for my family (14.1)
3	Better my life (11.1)	Duty/obligation to my country (12.5)	Duty/obligation to my country (12.1)	Pride/self-esteem/honor (13.8)
4	Pay for future education (7.4)	Provide for my family (7.2)	Provide for my family (11.5)	Duty/obligation to my country (8.7)
5	Travel (6.0)	Travel (5.6)	Gain experience/work skills (6.5)	Gain experience/work skills (6.4)
6	Gain experience/work skills (5.2)	Gain experience/work skills (5.3)	Pay for future education (4.9)	Belong to something elite (4.9)
7	Pay/money (4.9)	Pay for future education (5.1)	Belong to something elite (4.9)	Educational opportunities within service (3.5)

SOURCE: Authors' calculations based on analysis of JAMRS, 2017, data.

NOTE: *N* = 16,953: 7,197 ages 16–18, 5,622 ages 19–21, 2,369 ages 22–24, 1,765 ages 25–35.

[17] See, for example, Stacy R. Friedman and Carol S. Weissbrod, "Work and Family Commitment and Decision-Making Status Among Emerging Adults," *Sex Roles*, Vol. 53, 2005; and S. J. Trinke and K. Bartholomew, "Hierarchies of Attachment Relationships in Young Adulthood," *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships*, Vol. 14, 1997.

TABLE 5.5
The No. 1 Concern When Deciding to Join the Army

	Age 16–18 (%)	Age 19–21 (%)	Age 22–24 (%)	Age 25–35 (%)
1	None (20.2)	None (21.5)	None (19.4)	None (17.3)
2	Leaving family and friends (17.4)	Leaving family and friends (16.1)	Physical injury/death (15.5)	Physical injury/death (16.7)
3	Physical injury/death (15.9)	Physical injury/death (15.5)	Leaving family and friends (15.5)	Leaving family and friends (16.1)
4	Assignment of job/MOS (7.9)	Assignment of job/ MOS (8.4)	Assignment of job/ MOS (8.7)	Assignment of job/ MOS (9.4)
5	Boot camp/basic training (6.0)	Going into combat (5.8)	Going into combat (4.9)	Going into combat (5.2)
6	Going into combat (5.3)	Meeting enlistment standards (3.2)	Boot camp/basic training (3.8)	Family obligations (4.0)
7	PTSD/psychological issues (4.0)	PTSD/psychological issues (3.1)	Meeting enlistment standards (3.7)	Location where will be stationed (3.7)

SOURCE: Authors' calculations based on analysis of JAMRS, 2017, data.

NOTES: *N* = 16,953: 7,197 ages 16–18, 5,622 ages 19–21, 2,369 ages 22–24, 1,765 ages 25–35. PTSD = posttraumatic stress disorder.

correspondence between the lists for civilians and enlistees 21 and under, there is less correspondence for those over the age of 21. This may partly reflect findings from other studies that have linked the motivations of low-propensity soldiers more to occupational and financial drivers, while higher-propensity soldiers were strongly motivated by patriotic drivers and plans for the future.[18] Selection of the most-propensed into the Army at younger ages leaves older civilian populations with a greater proportion of lower-propensed individuals, while older enlistees are higher-propensed than their older civilian counterparts; older enlistees rate pride and duty as prime reasons for enlisting, while neither appears in the reasons why older civilians would enlist, for example.

The No. 1 concerns about joining the Army (if recruits had any) are strikingly similar across age, and there is generally correspondence between enlistee concerns and the most-common reasons that civilians say they would not join the military (Table 5.2). For enlistees, roughly 20 percent at each age reported "no concerns," followed primarily by risk of physical injury or death, leaving friends and family, assignment of job, and going into combat. Among the 25–35 group, "family obligations" also emerged as the sixth most common concern, albeit reported by only 4.0 percent of respondents; "location where will be stationed" may be an additional family-related concern. (Results are presented in Appendix D.)

Older Enlistee Experiences Highlight Dissatisfaction with Civilian Life, New Information About Army Opportunities, and Efforts to Contact Recruiters

The New Recruit Survey data provide a description of the recruitment process enlistees experienced: experiences that led to their first recruiter contact, who initiated contact, where the first interaction took place, and how enlistees requested additional information before making their decision to enlist. Overall, the results indicate that, compared with younger recruits, older recruits more often reported responding to learning new information about Army jobs and benefits and what Army life was like. Older recruits were more likely than younger ones to initiate contact with a recruiter, usually by going directly to a recruiting station, and,

[18] See, for example, Woodruff, Kelty, and Segal, 2006.

prior to applying to serve in the Army, they either did not provide their contact information anywhere, or they asked for more information on an Army website.

Table 5.6 presents the most frequently identified experiences that triggered recruits' first conversation with recruiters (from a list of 13 "check all that apply" items). Recruits ages 16 to 18 reported that they were contacted by a recruiter as the most frequent experience, but those over the age of 18 did not place recruiter contact in the top seven triggering experiences. Rather than being approached by a recruiter, older recruits indicated that they were largely unhappy with what they were doing and noted increasingly with age that they learned new information about military jobs and benefits and what life was like in the Army.

Figure 5.3 summarizes how the first interaction with an Army recruiter was initiated and, consistent with Table 5.6, shows that older enlistees were significantly more likely to initiate contact with recruiters than younger recruits. Nearly 30 percent of recruits ages 16 to 18 indicated that their first interaction with a recruiter was initiated by the recruiter, rapidly declining with age. Conversely, the proportion of recruits who approached the recruiter first rises rapidly with age to above 80 percent for those over the age of 21. The vast majority of older recruits were obtained through their own motivation to seek out recruiters rather than being actively prospected.

Table 5.7 summarizes where the first interaction with an Army recruiter took place. Those ages 16 to 18 typically met at high school, while older recruits were primarily and increasingly likely to first interact with Army recruiters at a recruiting office—roughly 70 percent over the age of 21. Also note that the proportion of first interactions over the telephone was consistent at around 10 percent across age. At each age, most of these initial telephone calls were initiated by the recruit (rather than getting a cold call from a recruiter), but the proportion increases rapidly with age; among recruits over the age of 21, more than 80 percent of the initial calls were made by the recruit rather than the recruiter (analysis not shown). This further reinforces that the vast majority of older recruits were obtained through their own initiative.

Table 5.8 summarizes the most-commonly identified ways that recruits requested more information about the Army by providing their contact information (from a list of nine "check all that apply" options).

TABLE 5.6

Most-Common Experiences Leading to First Recruiter Contact

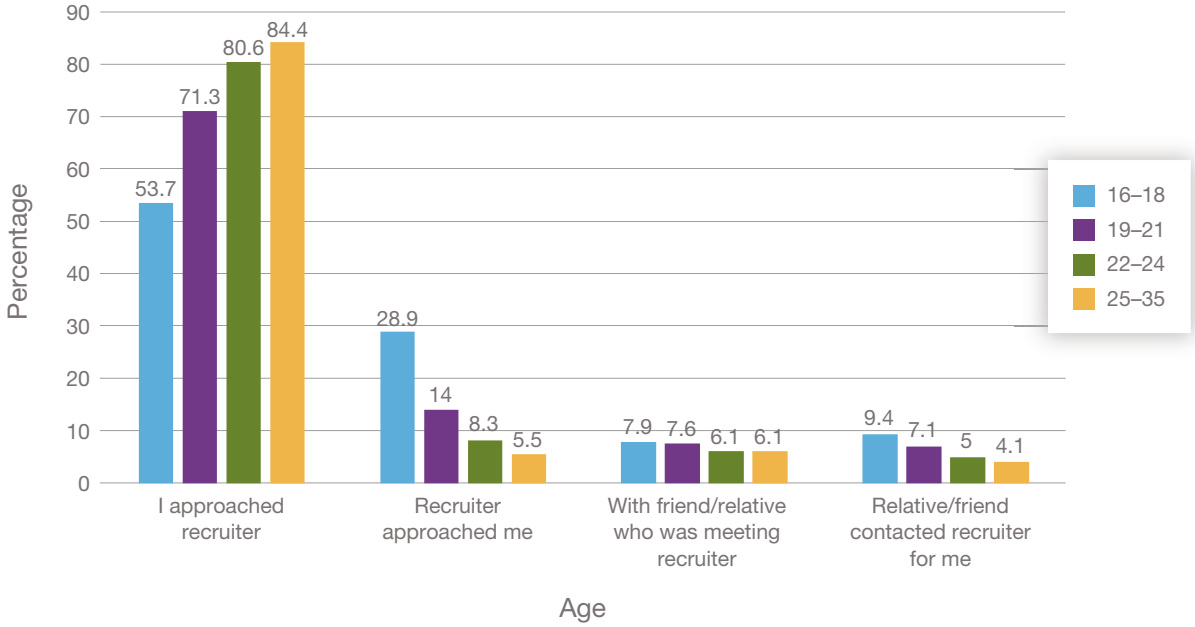
	Age 16–18 (%)	Age 19–21 (%)	Age 22–24 (%)	Age 25–35 (%)
1	Contacted by a recruiter (23.6)	Unhappy with what I was doing (23.1)	Unhappy with what I was doing (27.9)	Unhappy with what I was doing (28.1)
2	Talked with family about my future (20.8)	Talked with family about my future (22.0)	Talked with family about my future (22.3)	Learned new information about military jobs and benefits (21.3)
3	Someone close to me joined (16.2)	Graduated high school/ college (18.8)	Learned new information about military jobs and benefits (16.3)	Talked with family about my future (19.8)
4	Learned new information about military jobs and benefits (15.6)	Someone close to me joined (17.1)	Someone close to me joined (15.8)	Talked with a friend about my future (14.4)
5	None of the above (14.0)	Talked with a friend about my future (13.6)	Graduated high school/ college (15.5)	Someone close to me joined (13.5)
6	Talked with a service member about my future (12.7)	None of the above (11.5)	Talked with a service member about my future (12.5)	Learned new information about what life is like in the Army (11.2)
7	Graduated high school/ college (12.6)	Talked with a service member about my future (10.5)	None of the above (12.1)	Graduated high school/ college (10.7)

SOURCE: Authors' calculations based on analysis of JAMRS, 2017, data.

NOTE: *N* = 16,953: 7,197 ages 16–18, 5,622 ages 19–21, 2,369 ages 22–24, 1,765 ages 25–35.

FIGURE 5.3

Older Recruits Usually Initiated First Interaction with Recruiter



SOURCE: Authors' calculations based on analysis of JAMRS, 2017, data.
NOTE: *N* = 16,953: 7,197 ages 16–18, 5,622 ages 19–21, 2,369 ages 22–24, 1,765 ages 25–35.

TABLE 5.7

Where the First Interaction with Recruiter Took Place

	Age 16–18 (%)	Age 19–21 (%)	Age 22–24 (%)	Age 25–35 (%)
1	High school (50.1)	Recruiting office (54.2)	Recruiting office (66.1)	Recruiting office (71.3)
2	Recruiting office (28.9)	High school (24.1)	Phone (11.3)	Phone (11.0)
3	Phone (8.6)	Phone (9.2)	High school (10.0)	High school (5.5)
4	At home (4.1)	Other (2.8)	College (3.3)	Other (3.2)

SOURCE: Authors' calculations based on analysis of JAMRS, 2017, data.
NOTE: *N* = 16,953: 7,197 ages 16–18, 5,622 ages 19–21, 2,369 ages 22–24, 1,765 ages 25–35.

TABLE 5.8

How Recruits Requested More Information About the Army

	Age 16–18 (%)	Age 19–21 (%)	Age 22–24 (%)	Age 25–29 (%)
1	High school event (46.4)	Never did (51.3)	Never did (58.0)	Never did (55.0)
2	Never did (35.3)	High school event (24.2)	Army website (24.6)	Army website (30.4)
3	Army website (14.8)	Army website (18.0)	High school event (13.4)	High school event (6.5)
4	Army social media (2.7)	College event (3.8)	College event (5.0)	Army social media (4.7)
5	College event (1.7)	Army social media (2.9)	Army social media (3.8)	College event (4.3)

SOURCE: Authors' calculations based on analysis of JAMRS, 2017, data.
NOTE: *N* = 16,953: 7,197 ages 16–18, 5,622 ages 19–21, 2,369 ages 22–24, 1,765 ages 25–35.

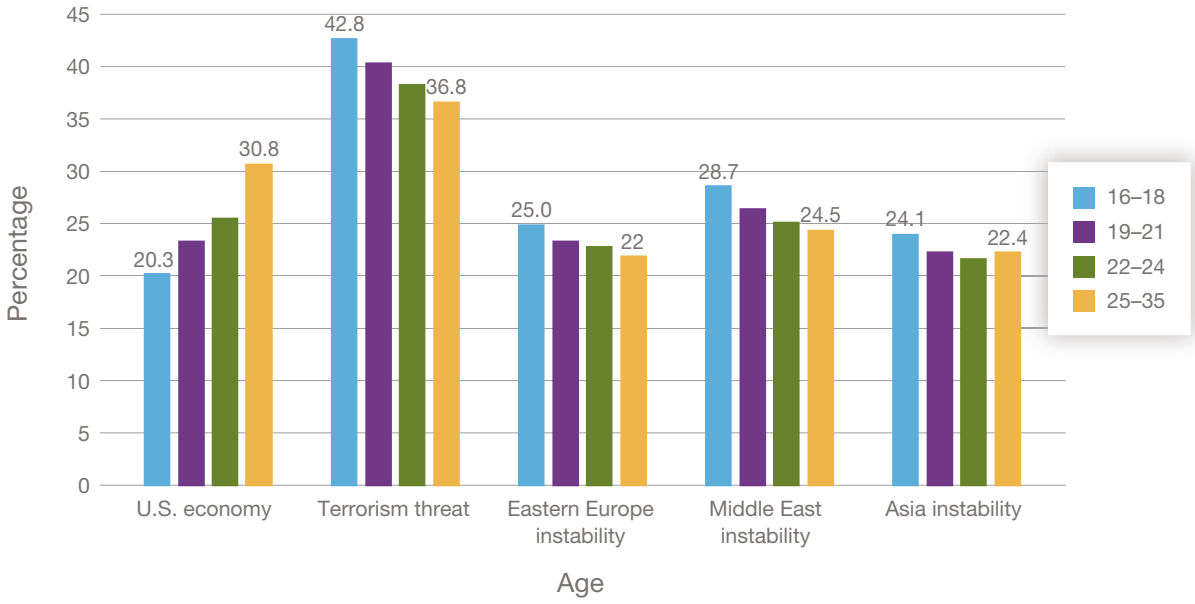
While recruits ages 16 to 18 primarily requested information at a high school event, most recruits over the age of 18 never provided their contact information to request more information about the Army. Among those who did, the Army's official website was the most common way contact information was obtained. For recruits over the age of 21, Army social media pages approximated the same level of obtaining contact information as college events.

The U.S. Economy Influences Older Recruits More Than Younger Recruits

Recruits were asked whether events at the time (including "the state of the U.S. economy," "the threat of terrorism," and instability in the Middle East, Asia, and Eastern Europe) made them more or less likely to apply to serve in the Army. Figure 5.4 presents the percentage by age who indicated that events at the time made them more likely to apply. Events related to home compared with those abroad were more salient to older recruits: the threat of terrorism and the state of the U.S. economy. The threat of terrorism was identified most as making recruits more likely to apply at all ages, although with a significant decline across age in the percentage of respondents who said so. In contrast, "the state of the U.S. economy" steadily increased in importance with age, increasing by 50 percent from age 16–18 to 25–35 (from 20.3 percent to 30.8 percent), ranging from the least salient driver on this list for the youngest group to the second–most important driver for the oldest group. Instability in different regions around the world was of similar importance across age.

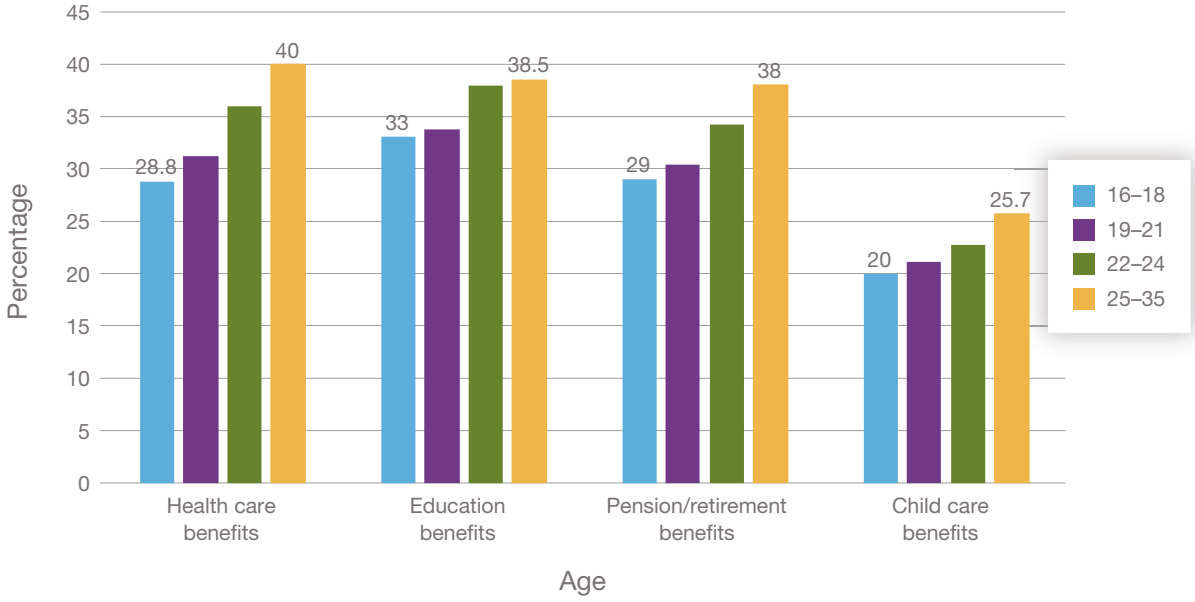
Recruits were asked how influential different types of benefits were to their enlistment decision, including health care, education, pension/retirement, and child development/child care. Figure 5.5 presents the percentage by age who rated each type of benefit as "extremely influential" on a scale of "extremely," "very," "a little," and "not at all" influential. A substantial proportion of recruits of all ages indicated that each of the benefits was influential, although the importance of each grew significantly with age. (i.e., 95-percent confidence intervals for each age group did not overlap in almost every comparison). Substantive differences were

FIGURE 5.4
Factors Recruits Said "Made Them More Likely to Apply to Serve in the Army"



SOURCE: Authors' calculations based on analysis of JAMRS, 2017, data.
NOTE: *N* = 16,953: 7,197 ages 16–18, 5,622 ages 19–21, 2,369 ages 22–24, 1,765 ages 25–35.

FIGURE 5.5
Benefits Were "Extremely Influential" to the Enlistment Decision



SOURCE: Authors' calculations based on analysis of JAMRS, 2017, data.
NOTE: *N* = 16,953: 7,197 ages 16–18, 5,622 ages 19–21, 2,369 ages 22–24, 1,765 ages 25–35.

greatest for health care benefits (39-percent increase from age 16–18 to age 25–35) and for pension/retirement benefits (31-percent increase).

Older Recruits Are More Likely to Intend to Continue Service in the Reserve or Guard

Recruits were also asked to assess the expected impact of Army service on future outcomes, including their ability to pursue higher education, postmilitary career opportunities, and their financial situation (positive impact, negative impact, no impact). Similar proportions across age reported a "positive impact" (roughly 85 percent for each, shown in Appendix Figure D.1).

Finally, the New Recruit Survey indicates that, while older recruits expect to serve similar years in the Army as younger recruits (shown in Appendix Figure D.2), they are significantly more likely (by 50 percent) to say that they plan to serve in the U.S. Army Reserve or Army National Guard after completing their active-duty service, as shown in Figure 5.6.

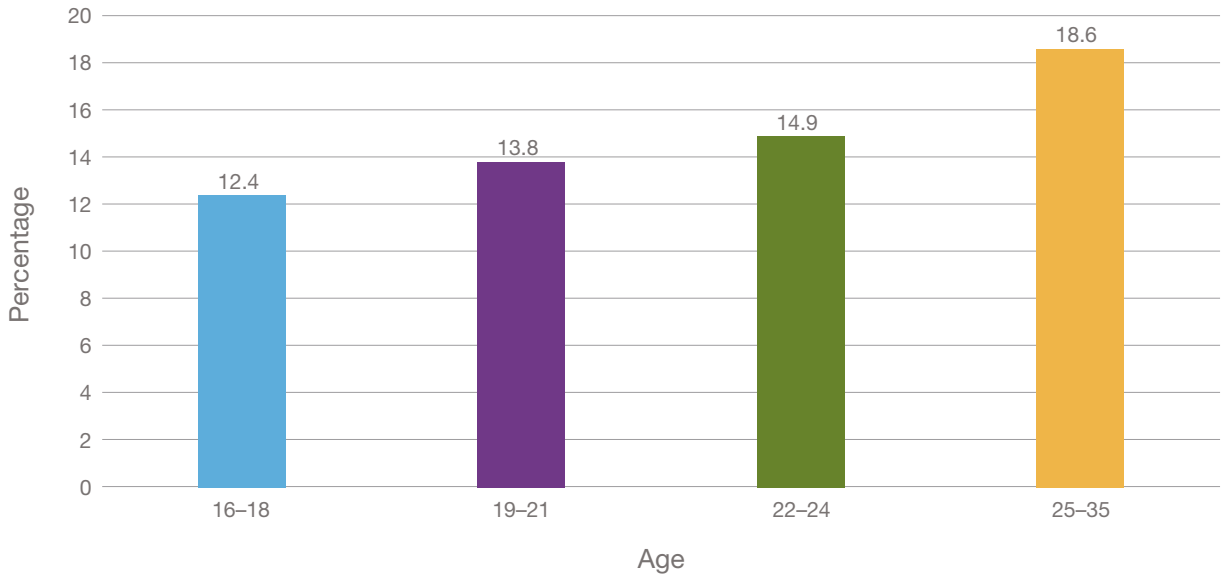
Key Points from the New Recruit Survey

The New Recruit Survey provides five key insights about recruits over the age of 21 relative to younger recruits.[19]

- **The analyses are consistent with the notion that older recruits tend to be unsatisfied with what they are currently doing, may have limited job market options, are more sensitive to the state of the economy, and may have been considering joining the Army for at least several years.** While a minor-

[19] JAMRS, 2017.

FIGURE 5.6
Percentage Planning to Continue Service in U.S. Army Reserve or Army National Guard After Active Duty, by Age



SOURCE: Authors' calculations based on analysis of JAMRS, 2017, data.
NOTE: *N* = 16,953: 7,197 ages 16–18, 5,622 ages 19–21, 2,369 ages 22–24, 1,765 ages 25–35.

ity of new recruits over the age of 21 reported being unemployed (ranging from 29 percent ages 22–24 to 24 percent ages 25–35), the most common reason recruits over the age of 21 decided to enlist was to "better their life," and they were most commonly prompted to contact a recruiter because they were "unhappy with what they were doing." The spike in unemployment from the economic shutdown in response to COVID-19 and the long-term implications to sectors that have been particularly hard hit, including food and restaurant services, tourism, and other sectors where job losses may be longer lasting, could affect the number of people looking to the Army as an option.

- **Families, and the need to support them, become increasingly important reasons to enlist with age, and significant others become the primary influencer in the enlistment decision.** Recruits over the age of 21 discussed their potential service with others less than younger recruits did, but the one type of person that older recruits reported talking to more than younger recruits was their significant other. Further, recruits above the age of 21 said that their significant other was one of the most influential people in the decision to enlist, and the significant other was the most influential person for recruits ages 25–35. Recruits over the age of 21, especially ages 25–35, were also more likely than younger recruits to cite the need to provide for their family as the No. 1 reason to enlist, and to cite family obligations as a concern about enlisting.
- **Older recruits, especially those ages 25–35, were more likely to indicate that their first conversation with a recruiter was prompted by an interest in learning new information about the career opportunities and benefits available in the military and about what life is like in the military.** Even though many older recruits had thought about joining the Army for a significant amount of time, and many were unhappy with their current situation, the addition of new information was what led to contact with a recruiter.
- **Older recruits have been far more likely to seek out recruiters themselves than to be approached by recruiters.** They were also less likely to provide their contact information to obtain additional informa-

tion than younger recruits, but if they were to share their contact information, they were most likely to do so on the Army website. Similar proportions of older recruits provided contact information via social media and at college events. Finally, older recruits primarily went directly to recruiting stations for their first interaction with recruiters or initiated contact by telephone. Despite noting above that the current economic situation, as well as job losses concentrated in particular sectors due to COVID-19 shutdowns, may have implications for the number of people looking to enlist the Army, this needs to be balanced against the reality of new challenges with in-person recruiting in the current environment. Thus, new and creative ways will be needed to encourage individuals, including older recruits, to reach out to the Army.

- **While the different types of benefit programs were important for recruits of all ages, they were significantly more important for older recruits.** Compared with younger recruits, older recruits were more likely to indicate that education and child care benefits, and especially health care and pension and retirement benefits, were extremely influential in their decision to join the Army.

Chapter Summary

Analysis of civilian and new recruit data provides several insights into opportunities to recruit individuals over the age of 21.

- Civilian data indicate a significant decline in propensity among the 22–24 population between 2008 and 2010[20] (but not the younger population), with propensity generally flat for all age groups after. At the same time, a significant portion of new recruits have typically been obtained from the population who report no intention to join; thus, despite lower propensity at older ages, a sizable population remains undertapped.
- Older civilians perceive greater risks versus benefits to military service, suggesting that challenges to recruiting this population may not be limited to locating and engaging with the older population, but also that messaging will need to vary to mitigate the higher levels of concern.
- Certain types of economic messages are likely to resonate with older prospects. These include messaging that is consistent with the notion that older recruits are likely to be unsatisfied with what they are currently doing in civilian life, that they may have limited job market options and are more sensitive to the state of the economy, and that they may have been considering joining the Army for at least several years. Further, families, and supporting them, are increasingly important reasons to enlist, and significant others become the primary influencer in the decision to enlist.
- Messaging might also focus on health and medical benefits, work experience, and support for family obligations. Older individuals ranked health and medical benefits and pension and retirement benefits more highly as motivation to join and as influential to enlistment decisions. Pay, gaining work experience, pride, and bettering one's life were also salient to the older population, as were family obligations and concerns about where individuals will be stationed. Preparing advertising campaigns that highlight the ways in which the Army can provide for families and mitigate or minimize family disruptions caused by relocation, while offering job skills and other ways to better a soldier's life in the long term,

[20] It would be valuable to expand the ages of the population currently covered by the Youth Polls. To better understand propensity and motivations among civilians over the age of 24, data need to be collected.

may thus be more successful with older prospects than campaigns focused on action, adventure, and "Warriors Wanted."[21]

- Locating prospects and initiating contact is another challenge. Older recruits have almost entirely been responsible for initiating contact with recruiters. In the postpandemic environment, the college and trade school market is likely to be the closest analogue to high schools as a recruiting location for older populations, where large numbers of the target population would be present in an area at the same time. Additional efforts to establish and maintain a presence on more campuses would place recruiters directly in contact with prospects and facilitate recruiter-led contact. Even under COVID-19 conditions, postsecondary institutions may be a viable high-density source of prospects through the use of online outreach to students by the VRTs discussed in Chapter Four.
- Given the challenges of establishing and maintaining a presence on college campuses, social media may also hold high growth potential as a recruiting and information dissemination tool for older individuals, through contact with either prospects or influencers (particularly significant others). As of 2016, similar proportions of older and younger recruits provided contact information via social media and at college events, and these data may underestimate current levels of social media use. As of this writing, wide approval to use social media for recruiting had not yet been given to recruiters.

[21] The Army recently replaced the "Warriors Wanted" campaign with "What's Your Warrior?" which focuses on the breadth and depth of roles offered in the Army, including those that do not involve direct combat. The new campaign is consistent with the recommendations in this report.

CHAPTER SIX

Experiences of Enlisted Personnel

In this chapter, we describe the results of 19 focus groups conducted from June to late July 2019 with U.S. Army enlisted soldiers. These soldiers were from three different divisions across three different installations: the 101st Airborne Division at Ft. Campbell, Kentucky; 1st Cavalry Division at Ft. Hood, Texas; and the 3rd Infantry Division (ID) at Ft. Stewart, Georgia. The goal of the focus groups was to hear the perspectives of soldiers who enlisted at a later age and to explore both the circumstances that led to the decision to enlist and whether they had considered enlisting out of high school, as well to explore the role that age played in their enlistment experience.

Providing a voice for soldiers in our research complemented the perspectives we gathered from recruiters, the results of the administrative and survey analyses, and the literature review. Although the time frame for the focus groups was during late spring and summer 2019, and thus does not take into account current experiences under COVID-19, where appropriate, we discuss implications of our findings given the COVID-19 environment.

Approach and Geographic Coverage

While the research team identified the population criteria for selection, we had limited choice regarding which units or installations would be included because U.S. Army Forces Command tasked units to participate in the project. Since soldiers assigned to units come from all over the country, we expected that the population would be geographically diverse. Population criteria for the focus groups included participants who had enlisted in active duty after the age of 21, both female and male soldiers, a broadly representative mix of MOSs, and including, but distinguishing between, soldiers within the first year of enlistment and those with longer service experience. We expected that the race and ethnic diversity of the groups would reflect the diversity in the Army (about 40 percent non-Hispanic White) but were concerned that we would not receive sufficient participation by women without specifically requesting them, given that they make up only 17 percent of recruits ages 22 to 35 (see Appendix A, Table A.1). We provided our criteria to our point of contact (POC) at each unit and installation. The POC coordinated with unit commanders to communicate the opportunity to participate in the focus groups on a voluntary basis, which we reiterated before the start of each focus group.

Almost 100 soldiers participated in the focus groups, which comprised 13 groups with males and six with females. The characteristics of the focus group participants are summarized in Table 6.1. Though the research team focused on the perspectives of recruits who entered the service after the age of 21, many of the participants in the focus groups enlisted at an earlier age—some as early as 17—which helped balance discussions on age-related issues. Some participants enlisted far later than 21, with a few joining the Army as late as their late 30s or early 40s. Most focus group sessions consisted of five to six participants, though some groups had as few as two service members, and others had as many as 13. On average, researchers spent about 90 minutes with each group. Note that the focus group interviews were not intended to be generalizable to Army recruits overall but rather were used to provide further details and examples of many of the JAMRS

TABLE 6.1
Characteristics of Focus Groups, by Military Installation

	Ft. Campbell	Ft. Hood	Ft. Stewart
Gender	*Male:* 31 *Female:* 10	*Male:* 15 *Female:* 9	*Male:* 26 *Female:* 10
Age at enlistment	*Under 21:* 10 *Over 21:* 31	*Under 21:* 12 *Over 21:* 12	*Under 21:* 10 *Over 21:* 26
MOSs represented	12D; 12N; 92A; 11B; 88M; 89B; 92W; 19D; 12B; 92Y; 91B; 13B; 68W	91F; 19K; 92F; 91B; 25U; 92G; 19D; 15T; 68W; 42A; 91M; 92W; 88M; 15U; 91E; 15P	13B; 19K; 12B; 11C; 11B; 19D; 25U; 68W; 42A; 91B; 25N; 92Y; 35F; 91A; 92F; 91F; 32J
Rank	*E3 or below:* 21 *E4:* 12 *NCO:* 8	*E3 or below:* 13 *E4:* 11 *NCO:* 0	*E3 or below:* 15 *E4:* 21 *NCO:* 0
Time in service	*One year or more:* 30 *Under one year:* 11	*One year or more:* 20 *Under one year:* 4	*One year or more:* 33 *Under one year:* 3

NOTES: See Table F.1 in Appendix F for the complete titles of Army MOSs. NCO = noncommissioned officer.

survey analyses and to supplement the other data collected, as well as to identify converging and diverging themes related to a soldier's experience in the Army.

To facilitate the focus groups, we developed a semistructured discussion guide that included questions related to background, motivations for enlisting, experiences in the Army—including with recruiting, MEPS, basic training, Advanced Individual Training (AIT), and current duty station—as well as questions related to social groups on and off duty and future plans. Although the guide provided structure for the focus group discussion, we left time for additional topics that would come up during the discussions. The guide is provided in Appendix D.

Overall, participants were candid in discussing age-related issues per their experiences, as well as broader matters related to their service. Typically, the focus groups were led by one researcher, with one or more designated notetakers taking detailed notes. We carefully reviewed the notes and developed a list of findings, which were then aggregated to generate a short list of themes. Below, we provide the key takeaways from the focus group discussions followed by a more-detailed delineation of the themes, supporting evidence from the notes, and illustrative quotes.

Key Takeaways from the Focus Groups

The insights gleaned from conducting these focus groups enhanced our understanding of how age influences the experiences of junior enlisted service members in the U.S. Army and provided additional context to information gleaned from other sources, such as recruiters and other interviewees. The following list provides the overall takeaways:

- Soldiers noted that age was an ancillary concern compared with other factors at the various stages of their enlistment and accession process.
- A confluence of circumstances typically led to later enlistment of older recruits.
- Attributes of the job, family support, and leadership interactions were the key concerns expressed among current enlistees regardless of age.
- While age was less of a concern, female soldiers noted a greater level of scrutiny in terms of their performance compared with males.

We discuss each of these takeaways in more detail below.

Age Is an Ancillary Concern Among Enlisted Compared with Other Factors

Age seemed to matter far less to enlisted service members in the groups compared with other factors, chiefly job performance, maturity, and dedication. Although the physical aspect of basic training and the physical training (PT) requirements of Army life in general could conceivably put older people at a disadvantage, the main determinant of success, according to the focus group participants, was "mental and physical toughness," especially during basic training. Though age was not highlighted during the focus groups as the most important determinant of those factors, some of the focus group participants suggested that the life experience that comes with age may provide an advantage over a younger recruit right out of high school. The wider perspective may prove to be helpful in weathering the challenges of Army life. Individuals with prior life experience can also place the challenges of Army life within the broader context of challenges in work, education, and life in the civilian world, in many cases having tried and found lack of fulfillment in the latter.

Soldiers Reported Few Issues with Recruiters Concerning Age

It was consistently reported across focus groups that recruiters seemed to care far less about age and more about issues that could slow down or stymie the accession process. These might include concerns about the need to obtain waivers, selecting an MOS that a potential recruit desires but is not a high priority for the Army, or other delays in contract signing and "shipping" out. Some of the focus group participants reported that they had originally attempted to enlist in one or more of the other branches of the military but ultimately chose the Army because they were either turned away or wanted the flexibility to choose their MOS, which they understood could only be done in the Army. In one case, a soldier who enlisted at 27 reported that a 35-year-old recruiter's age "made him easier to talk to because he had all these experiences; he was closer to my age and I could relate to him better."[1] Another soldier, who was approached by a recruiter while working in a store, stated the following:

> I think a recruiter a couple years later came into my store; I told him I was too old, but he told me otherwise; I just kind of brushed it off but thought about it more seriously a year later.[2]

Since we were able to speak only with soldiers who successfully accessed into the Army, we do not have the perspectives of recruits who attempted to enlist but were turned away or discouraged because of their age or because of their age and a combination of other factors. Thus, the focus groups do not indicate the extent to which recruiters consider age an important screening factor and whether that varies by geography or characteristics of the local recruiting stations and the recruiters working in those stations. However, recall from the recruiter interviews that all recruits are processed the same way, regardless of age, though older recruits faced more disqualifications, and their options were more limited than those of younger recruits.[3]

Soldiers also mentioned that, after expressing interest in a particular MOS, they were often referred by their recruiters to videos on the Army website. The recruiters were able to speak broadly about different branches of the Army and their roles but unable to address more-specific concerns or questions about day-to-day functions of a given MOS.

[1] Focus group, Ft. Hood, July 2019.

[2] Focus group, Ft. Campbell, June 2019.

[3] Recruiting company interview, April 2019.

Attitude Was Deemed More Important Than Age During Basic Training and AIT

Although many participants expressed the belief that younger recruits generally presented more problems for leadership and peers in basic training, almost as many said that they felt that older recruits also created problems in training. In every focus group that discussed this issue, the consensus was that the age of recruits mattered far less than how they were raised and their attitude toward leadership in training. This was exemplified by the following quote from a soldier who first enlisted at age 23 and was stationed at Ft. Hood:

> In my bay, we had a diverse group of people; there were 18-year-olds that took charge and gained respect; there were people my age and caused a lot of problems. I don't know how much age influenced it versus how different people were raised.[4]

Some participants, however, insisted that older recruits were better suited to military life because of their maturity. As one recruit described it, over half of his platoon in basic training was over the age of 25, which made them better than a "normal" platoon.[5] This trend, for the most part, extended into participants' accounts of negligible differences in physical training between older and younger recruits. One participant said that the older recruits in his basic training company performed better during physical fitness tests than younger ones (focus group, Ft. Hood, July 2019). A recruit who enlisted at 32 and claimed to be in consideration for Ranger school explained, "Ten years ago, I couldn't do a push-up to save my life . . . but nowadays I smoke the younger ones."[6] A quote from a soldier who enlisted at age 29 expressed this point:

> I went to Benning for basic. It was everything I expected. They're smoking the brakes on you. My drill sergeant was 26 and I was 29. I didn't get too much about my age. I tried to hold my own the whole time. Mentally, I was probably better off than a lot of the other dudes. There was a guy who quit on the first day. The first day was the shark attack and a bunch of pushups. I'm sure all the older dudes would agree that mentally we were better off than the rest of our platoon.[7]

Some recruits, however, said that their age negatively affected their initial phase in basic training or their peers' experiences. For example, one participant stated that he had just reached the age when "people started treating [him] as an adult," only to find that drill sergeants in basic spoke to him "like [he] was a child again," and he added that the experience probably would have been easier if he had enlisted at a younger age.[8] Similarly, a participant claimed that a 34-year-old recruit in her basic training class was chaptered out because he "couldn't stand being told what to do" by his drill sergeants.[9]

Older Recruits with Families Reported Struggling to Balance Work and Family Life Post-AIT

Age issues became slightly more apparent for older enlisted service members after their initial entry training. One participant explained that he occasionally had difficulties relating to his younger peers, who failed to

4 Focus group, Ft. Hood, July 2019.

5 Focus group, Ft. Stewart, July 2019.

6 Focus group, Ft. Campbell, June 2019.

7 Focus group, Ft. Stewart, July 2019.

8 Focus group, Ft. Hood, July 2019.

9 Focus group, Ft. Campbell, June 2019.

understand that his family obligations prevented him from socializing after work.[10] Older recruits were more likely to be married and have a family compared with high school graduates. Some of the more common concerns expressed centered on balancing family and work life. Married soldiers reported challenges spending enough time with their spouses, and soldiers with children, especially single parents, discussed difficulties managing child care responsibilities. A common concern for older soldiers with children was the unpredictability of their workday and their ability to place their children in day care and pick them up on schedule. This would be exacerbated when they were assigned to go on training exercises without sufficient advance warning to make child care arrangements. There was variation in how well this was managed by the unit and the leadership, according to reports from the enlisted focus group participants. One soldier who enlisted at age 25 said the following about a coworker with a child:

> It's really hard, especially with kids; I had a coworker: Every time her daughter was sick, they wouldn't let her go home; they told her to pick up her kid at daycare and bring her to work.[11]

According to one soldier, most older soldiers were NCOs and had the flexibility in their positions to adapt to child care needs, an option unavailable to older soldiers among the lower enlisted ranks.[12] Although some soldiers claimed that their units necessitate family care plans, including for potential deployments, these seemed to amount to a perfunctory task that left issues unresolved and were seldom updated.

Some Aspects of Military Life Can Be More Challenging for Older Recruits

There were also specific challenges that came up with respect to older recruits. Some participants explained that serving in a combat MOS was more difficult at an older age. One participant stated that ruck marches forced older soldiers into seeking medical profiles, which exempted them from duty, and that his squad had only two soldiers available for full duty at any given time.[13] Several older recruits described difficulties taking orders from younger NCOs, though most recognized that rank outweighed age. As one participant explained, "Some sergeants are younger than I am, and it's maybe from joining the Army older, but why are you telling me what to do? But they've been in longer. . . . There's a reason to respect the rank."[14] According to most participants, factors like experience, personality, and ability mattered far more than age. One soldier claimed, "I'm not sure what age my NCOs are. . . . It's more about experience than age."[15] Overwhelmingly, participants agreed that their unit's leadership outweighed virtually all other factors in determining their experiences in the Army—and age, as it related to either poor or good leadership, was seemingly insignificant, according to participants' accounts of life in their current units.

Later Enlistment Typically Resulted from a Confluence of Circumstances

There were two broad areas that emerged as drivers of later-age enlistment. One had to do with college and career, and the desire to try both after high school. The other had to do with influencers, in many cases

[10] Focus group, Ft. Campbell, June 2019.

[11] Focus group, Ft. Campbell, June 2019.

[12] Focus group, Ft. Stewart, July 2019.

[13] Focus group, Ft. Campbell, June 2019.

[14] Focus group, Ft. Stewart, July 2019.

[15] Focus group, Ft. Hood, July 2019.

family who advised a potential recruit either to enlist or not to enlist, as well as concern about the effect of enlisting on an existing personal relationship. However, individuals said that they ultimately chose to enlist later in life because of changes to those personal circumstances, such as the personal relationship not working out or, conversely, the need to care for dependents; unsatisfying college or work experiences; or a change in influencers or their becoming less important as the enlistee matured. Soldiers stated that reasons for enlisting included a steady paycheck and benefits, but also the opportunity to serve the country. While it may be too soon to reflect on the effects of COVID-19 on both recruitment and early experience in the Army, it is important to note these, as they could have an important effect on future enlistment.

Many Soldiers Expressed Dissatisfaction with College and Career

Fewer than half of the focus group participants who enlisted after 21 completed college or had some college education by the time they shipped for basic training. Soldiers who did not complete college generally expressed feeling that they were not prepared for it at the time, and that joining the Army would help them make the most of a college experience down the road. The issue of repaying college loans came up frequently during the focus group discussions. Another consistent theme in the focus groups was older recruits' claims that they were tired or bored with their jobs or felt they were underpaid or lacked appropriate benefits prior to their decisions to enlist in the U.S. Army. These discussions expand on similar findings from the New Recruit Survey data in Chapter Five and are explored in more detail below.

Repaying College Debt Was a Major Driver for Enlistment

Repaying debt accumulated during college was an important factor cited by both those who completed a degree and those who did not. Along those lines, a focus group participant at Ft. Campbell who joined at 25 stated,

> I had $65,000 in debt, and someone told me about the National Guard repaying loans. I went to talk to the National Guard recruiter, but the Army recruiter snuck into the office and told me he could offer more in repayment. Loan repayment is only offered for certain MOSs nowadays; a lot of my friends from college are still indebted.[16]

Focus group participants with college degrees had various reasons why they chose enlisted contracts over officer training. An NCO stated that the reason he elected enlisted service over officer training is that the latter failed to provide student loan repayment.[17] According to the same participant, recruiters have a "poor understanding" of officer opportunities because recruiting positions are almost exclusively for enlisted personnel. Another recruit claimed that his recruiter avoided him despite his interest in going to Officer Candidate School (OCS), and he was able to get in touch with the recruiter only after asking about enlistment.[18] According to that participant, recruiters "can enlist ten people" in the time it takes to process an OCS packet.

Interestingly, one participant claimed that extensive student debt actually delayed his plans to join the Army, as he needed immediate civilian employment to cover monthly payments.[19] That same participant was advised to enlist first, for the important experience enlistment offers over the officer route:

[16] Focus group, Ft. Campbell, June 2019.

[17] Focus group, Ft. Campbell, June 2019.

[18] Focus group, Ft. Stewart, July 2019.

[19] Focus group, Ft. Campbell, June 2019.

> My main motivation for joining beside patriotism was traveling and new life experience. I only got to see the Army secondhand through my parents. I took care of college debt through civilian employment. My dad told me to go in enlisted first, so you experience it all first, then you can become an officer. I'm still implementing that plan.[20]

There were several indications that recruiters may not know enough details about officer training to suggest loan repayment to eligible candidates during recruitment. One soldier summed it up by saying, "recruiting is an NCO function. They [recruiters] don't have a great understanding of what the officer route requires. It's an NCO-focused environment."[21]

Unhappy with Career Prospects, With or Without a College Degree

Most participants said that they chose to enlist to improve their long-term employment prospects, regardless of whether they had pursued college or not. One participant explained that job prospects, even with a college degree, were scarce in his hometown, which influenced his decision to enlist.[22] Another participant in the same group described his decision to join the Army after graduating from college as a mostly spontaneous decision to sign a three-year contract, after which he plans to pursue civilian employment.[23] More frequently, participants mentioned using education benefits in the military, primarily the G.I. Bill, to pursue further education while still serving or after they left the ranks. One soldier expressed the hope to pursue her master's degree while in her current duty station through tuition assistance, which she said would help her find federal employment after her contract expired.[24] Another participant claimed that he would enter the reserve after his current active-duty contract elapses so that he could continue serving while finishing his degree.[25]

Among those who were already working at the time of their enlistment, several explained that they believed that a career in the military would be more meaningful than the positions that they then held. Some said that they thought that the benefits provided by military service would outweigh those in the civilian job market, and this was an especially salient concern for both male and female older recruits with families. The following quote from a soldier in Ft. Stewart who enlisted at age 23 illustrates this sentiment:

> I was 23, worked at UPS for 4 years. Tired of working the same 9 to 5. I had friends from high school in the Marine Corps and Air Force. It was kind of a long process for me. [. . .] I figured if I was going to join the military, it had to be now. I went to the recruiter myself. My dad was in the military; my uncle is retired.[26]

The perceived stability found through military service was especially important for one focus group at Ft. Campbell, with five of ten participants—all of whom joined after 21—pointing to the instability found in retail, seasonal, or temporary employment as a key factor driving their decisions to enlist.[27] Even for those comfortable with their wages and benefits, several older recruits saw an opportunity to add meaning to their lives and accomplish professional goals in a way that was unavailable to them in civilian life. Interestingly, only two participants claimed that a recruiter approached them at their day jobs to talk about opportunities

[20] Focus group, Ft. Campbell, June 2019.

[21] Focus group, Ft. Campbell, June 2019.

[22] Focus group, Ft. Hood, July 2019.

[23] Focus group, Ft. Hood, July 2019.

[24] Focus group, Ft. Stewart, July 2019.

[25] Focus group, Ft. Campbell, June 2019.

[26] Focus group, Ft. Stewart, July 2019.

[27] Focus group, Ft. Campbell, June 2019.

in the Army.[28] One older recruit, who had worked at a "great job" for five years, decided to enlist in the military after the Pulse Nightclub shooting in Orlando, Florida, in 2016.[29]

Family, Friends, and Relationships Influenced the Decision to Enlist

Like their younger peers, older recruits are subject to the influence of their peers, family, and personal relationships when it comes to deciding to enlist in the military. For older recruits, the source of influence can change as they transition into more adult roles, including marriage and family formation, and further evolves with greater independence after high school. Several participants mentioned that reconnecting with friends who had served in the military sparked the idea to enlist at a later age, as their friends told them about benefits and opportunities obtained through military service. Many participants raised the fact that their immediate and extended family members had served, which—to varying degrees—influenced their decision to join. In one case, a recruit was reluctantly steered toward enlistment after graduating from college by a mother who was a longtime soldier.[30] In at least a few cases, family members provided critical support to older recruits that facilitated their enlistment.

A female recruit who joined at 25, for instance, stated that her father helped care for her child and represented her in custody hearings that allowed her to meet those obligations while going through her enlistment process.[31] Similarly, another participant instituted joint custody of her child with her sister and established the sister as the primary caregiver to further her enlistment.[32] Other accounts, however, indicate that family influence may have less significance for at least some participants. In one focus group at Ft. Stewart, three participants mentioned that family influence over the decision to enlist was mostly negligible, including one who came from a "pretty antimilitary" family.[33] At least some older recruits seemed susceptible to influence from coworkers and friends who had military service. Former-military influencers were noted as being particularly informative in setting expectations about soldier life, explaining benefits, and even providing encouragement and support.

Being in a serious relationship also played a role for some in the reason not to enlist right after high school. In some cases, these relationships did not work out, and relationships later in life became more important drivers behind the reason to ultimately enlist. For example, one of the biggest drivers for those with families was the level of benefits that enlisting would provide to spouses and children, particularly medical insurance. Just under half the participants in a group that consisted almost exclusively of NCOs mentioned enlisting at a later age because of children, including the need to find insurance for them.[34]

Regardless of Age, Soldiers Expressed Many of the Same Concerns

Both older and younger recruits were concerned about many of the same issues, including the monotony of daily tasks, not doing what they expected to in terms of their MOSs, poor experiences and interactions with senior leaders, and intense demands on their personal lives. Older recruits did benefit from a wider perspec-

[28] Focus group, Ft. Hood, July 2019; focus group, Ft. Campbell, June 2019.

[29] Focus group, Ft. Stewart, July 2019.

[30] Focus group, Ft. Hood, July 2019.

[31] Focus group, Ft. Campbell, June 2019.

[32] Focus group, Ft. Stewart, July 2019.

[33] Focus group, Ft. Stewart, July 2019.

[34] Focus group, Ft. Campbell, June 2019.

tive from their civilian life experiences. They generally understood that civilian work life can also be monotonous and unfulfilling; pursuing college right after high school requires a lot of discipline and perseverance; current experiences are not indicative of an entire Army career; and leaders were playing specific roles, and their interactions were not necessarily personal. As one soldier at Ft. Campbell who enlisted at age 25 said,

> Life experience matters; most of the younger recruits want to leave the Army when their time is up and don't realize what the real world is like. They don't know how good the Army is, like, show up to work late in the Army, and you get a counseling statement; do that in the civilian world, and you're fired; those just living with Mom and Dad before the Army take it for granted.[35]

Soldiers also expressed a desire to be led by example, and this was expressed regardless of whether the leader was older or younger than the new recruit. Age was deemed less important than the effectiveness of leadership, particularly in terms of role modeling and demonstrating what it means to be a good soldier. When asked what made for a good leader, a female soldier at Ft. Hood, who joined at the age of 22, said,

> They lead by example. . . . We had this thing that was all hands on deck working, but it's only junior enlisted. A few officers helped, the 1SG and CDR just sat and watched. . . . Officers don't do PT with us, nor do E7 and up. My NCO doesn't show up to PT.[36]

Another female soldier in the same focus group, who joined at age 17, added,

> If I was leading someone and don't have anything pressing, I will probably work next to you. Someone sweating outside like I am instead of inside in the Annex. Willing to get their hands dirty.[37]

A male soldier at Ft. Campbell, who enlisted at age 26, offered similar comments:

> I was a leader in the civilian world, where I learned some good lessons. Working with your soldiers is important. There's a difference between a boss and a leader. When NCOs help out with tasks, it makes a difference. People want to know their leaders work with and for them.[38]

Specific Observations by Older Female Soldiers

Gender was an important factor for some enlisted females, particularly the level of scrutiny placed on them by leadership relative to their male counterparts. These sentiments were largely expressed across the various stages of enlistment—from interaction with recruiters to MEPS processing, basic training, AIT, and adapting to Army life in the first duty station. Throughout the focus groups, female participants who enlisted at older ages raised several issues specific to their gender and age group that provided invaluable insights into the challenges they face in integrating into the Army. This was especially true for those assigned to combat units. Perhaps one of the most significant issues affecting these soldiers' experiences was the heightened attention placed on their performance by their units' leaders alongside the scrutiny that they received from peers, which appeared to exceed that of younger male soldiers. One participant, the first female infantry specialist assigned to her brigade combat team, explained that no one would talk to her when she first arrived at

[35] Focus group, Ft. Campbell, June 2019.

[36] Focus group, Ft. Hood, July 2019.

[37] Focus group, Ft. Hood, July 2019.

[38] Focus group, Ft. Campbell, June 2019.

her unit, adding, "everyone watches you and talks about you, even people from other units. . . . everyone talks about female PT scores and everyone knows how well you do."[39] According to one participant, her unit's leadership applied different standards to male and female soldiers that favored the former; as she claimed, "a male soldier could fail his PT test four times, and they'll work with him, but a female in our company didn't meet tape and they told her to leave the Army or get liposuction."[40] Other female participants described situations during training that they considered sexual harassment, such as comments from drill sergeants, but felt they were powerless to report it, much less change such activity. As one female recruit put it, "[the drill sergeants] just say, 'you're older, you know how it is.'"[41]

Chapter Summary

The focus groups provided several key findings:

- Age seemed to have limited effect on the experiences of the soldiers, either in training or at their duty stations. There were examples of older recruits who had difficulty adapting to leadership structure, but also cases of older recruits who had little concern with younger soldiers in charge.
- Soldiers across the age spectrum expressed general concerns about military life, such as communication challenges with leadership and the unpredictable schedule of field exercises.
- Far more important to the participants in these focus groups were maturity, professional competence, the ability to cooperate, and—for NCOs and officers—the willingness to lead by example. Almost unanimously, participants across all the focus groups at different installations respected a soldier's rank irrespective of that soldier's age.
- Some participants mentioned physical limitations facing older soldiers versus younger ones, but almost as many raised cases when older recruits or soldiers were top performers in physical fitness tests at a given unit.
- Postsecondary education factored into several participants' decisions to join the military, though their circumstances were highly distinct and failed to show any discernible trend, as was the case with other aspects, such as career and family. Although some participants regretted joining at an older age and said that they would have joined earlier given the opportunity, most older recruits expressed the opinion that the experience that they gained between high school and enlistment made them better soldiers.
- In the sense that older recruits are more likely to have child care and family concerns, age mattered, both in training and at their duty stations. According to participants, however, these issues could be better mitigated by providing recruiters, first-line supervisors, and recruits themselves with better information on benefits and methods of child care for active-duty soldiers. This issue has become more important during the COVID-19 pandemic, as child care options have narrowed.

[39] Focus group, Ft. Campbell, June 2019.

[40] Focus group, Ft. Campbell, June 2019.

[41] Focus group, Ft. Stewart, July 2019.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Conclusions and Policy Implications and Recommendations

The Army is facing a challenging and evolving recruiting environment. In the year that this project began, 2018, the Army missed its recruiting goal for the first time in more than a decade.[1] As this report is being readied for publication, the nation continues to face a global pandemic, which has had widespread impacts on public health, the economy, and the activities of everyday life. COVID-19's long-term effects, including what it will mean for Army recruiting, are uncertain.

In the coming years, devoting more resources toward recruiting older individuals may help in the Army's effort to reach its targeted end-strength goals. In this chapter, we review key findings from our research and outline a set of recommendations with a doctrine, organization, training, materiel, leadership, personnel, facilities, and policy (DOTMLPF-P) framework that crosswalks recommendations with examples from our data, the organization best suited to make actionable changes, and the area to which the recommendation pertains. Although our research and analyses were conducted prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, we add considerations, where relevant, on ways in which findings and recommendations may be affected by the new context.

Key Findings

Our research identified several key findings that may be of interest to senior policymakers in the Office of the Secretary of Defense, DA, and USAREC, as well as researchers interested in manpower, force management, and personnel issues.

Older Individuals Represent a Potential Growth Area for Army Recruiting

Our research confirms that individuals over the age of 21 are a viable population to recruit from. The data indicate that propensity levels among potential recruits were relatively stable between 2008 and 2018, except for a significant decline in propensity among the 22–24 population between 2008 and 2010, the period of the Great Recession. Despite lower propensity at older ages, the overall size of the older population means that successfully recruiting even a small proportion of this population can contribute significantly to overall recruitment.

[1] Lolita C. Baldor, "The Army Has Missed Its Recruiting Goal for the First Time Since 2005," Associated Press, September 21, 2018.

The Quality of Older Recruits Is Generally High

Army administrative data show that, once through BCT, older recruits tend to perform better than their counterparts on a range of metrics. During interviews, recruiters noted that older recruits are typically more committed than younger recruits once they become involved in the recruiting process. That is, they are less likely than younger recruits to wash out or lose interest, perhaps in part because older recruits are more likely to initiate contact with a recruiter, thus signifying their commitment to the process. After recruits complete BCT, they are more likely to complete their first-term contract and to reenlist for an additional term.

During interviews, recruiters noted several other positive aspects of older recruits, such as a perception that they are higher-quality, more focused, and more motivated, as well as being ready to ship to basic training more quickly.

Age, in Itself, Does Not Appear to Pose a Significant Barrier to Accession

During focus groups, age was reported to be an ancillary concern compared with other factors at the various stages of recruits' enlistment and accession process. This was particularly the case for female soldiers, who described being subjected to a greater level of scrutiny in terms of their performance compared with males, but not in relation to their age. Far more noteworthy to the participants in these focus groups were maturity, professional competence, the ability to cooperate, and—for NCOs and officers—the willingness to lead by example.

However, There Are Some Differences in Accessing Older Recruits

Analysis of administrative data indicates that older recruits attrite at higher rates than younger ones during basic training. While the precise reasons for this attrition during BCT are unknown, it is possible that the early experience does not match up well with their expectations, and so they are more likely to attrite. Older recruits are more susceptible to injury, but this factor might interact with failure to adapt rather than attrition due to disability.

Older recruits may also require more time to access. During interviews, recruiters noted that members of the over-21 population are more likely to require a waiver (e.g., for minor drug possession charges). These waivers add to the amount of time and resources required to access the individual.

Recruiters Typically Do Not Specifically Target Older Recruits

Although recruits over the age of 21 make up a nontrivial amount of the total recruiting population each year, our interviews suggest that less attention is devoted to developing strategies to purposefully recruit older individuals compared with high school recruits. In the prepandemic environment, this was largely because of the comparative difficulty of locating older individuals compared with those in high school, who account for the lion's share of a recruiter's time and energy. However, the shift to virtual recruiting during COVID-19 may result in challenges to recruiting high school students that are similar to those for recruiting older individuals, implying greater spillover benefits to younger recruits for some of our recommendations.

In addition, consistent with new recruit survey data from 2016, soldiers reported during focus groups that older recruits are far more likely to seek out recruiters themselves than to be approached by recruiters, although it is not clear whether this has been the case during the pandemic.

Recruiting of Older Individuals Requires Targeted Approaches and Messaging

VRTs offer a potentially useful option for engaging with older recruits, although recruiters noted a general lack of training in how to use these teams effectively. Shifting personnel from direct recruiting to VRT-like functions could potentially avoid increases in BN size while expanding recruiter reach—if recruiters are provided with adequate training.

Analysis of new recruit survey data from 2016 provides takeaways on what motivates older recruits, which can be important in developing messaging for this audience. First, survey data are consistent with the notion that older recruits are unhappy with what they were doing in their civilian life, and that they may have had limited job market options. Second, families and supporting those families become increasingly important reasons to enlist. Finally, while benefit programs were important for recruits of all ages, they were reported to be significantly more important for older recruits. In survey data, compared with younger individuals, individuals ages 22 to 24 ranked health and medical benefits more highly as reasons to join, while family obligations were increasingly salient reasons not to enlist. During the soldier focus groups, repaying college loans came up often and was reported to be a major driver of enlistment. Civilian survey data showed that paying for future education was also one of the top reasons to join, and it appeared in the new recruit data for those ages 16 to 24.

During focus groups, soldiers noted that a confluence of circumstances typically led to later enlistment of older recruits; changes in personal or economic circumstances were highlighted. In general, older recruits were able to place their Army experience in a broader life perspective than younger recruits, which may have helped them see beyond the difficult stages of Army life.

At the same time, focus groups suggest that there are some similarities that cut across age groups. Key concerns expressed by soldiers that were similar across age included attributes of the job, family, support, and leadership interactions. The full range of themes should be kept in mind when developing appropriate messages to target older individuals.

Finally, since older recruits tend toward combat support and combat service support MOSs, recruiting campaigns that focus only on combat roles may have limited appeal. The primary reason civilians reported not wanting to join the Army was possible injury or death, and it was high on the list of concerns for new recruits, taking top position for those ages 22 to 25, along with "going into combat." Since the research for this project was completed, the Army rolled out its "What's Your Warrior?" recruiting campaign, which describes a wide variety of roles for potential recruits. Other campaigns of this sort may be effective in recruiting older individuals.

Recommendations

We identified several recommendations for the Army that will help to attract and recruit older individuals. Recommendations are sensitive to the need to integrate efforts to recruit older individuals into ongoing recruiting activities without losing focus on existing markets; moreover, as we highlight below, most recommendations will have spillover benefits for younger recruits as well. For example, leveraging social media and electronic communications, tailoring marketing campaigns to appeal to different age groups, and training recruiters to make more direct links between MOS and civilian careers are all likely to reap benefits across the age spectrum. Leveraging social media, electronic communications, and even virtual meetings, in particular, has gained new importance with the social distancing restrictions imposed in response to COVID-19.

Like other large enterprises, the Army faces both challenges and opportunities in adjusting to these new requirements. The Army is particularly well positioned to leverage the greater emphasis on college and career readiness, as well as skills required in a postpandemic world, by extending opportunities to acquire state-of-

TABLE 7.1
Recommended Strategies to Improve Recruitment of Individuals Above the Age of 21

Recommendation	Data/Example	Organization(s)	DOTMLPF-P Element(s)
Expand the Army student LRP and educate recruiters more on its specific policy requirements	Older recruits are more likely to have accumulated some form of student loans, but the program is not heavily marketed as an incentive by recruiters.	DA, USAREC	Training, Policy
Allow certain waivers to be managed at echelons below BDE (e.g.. tattoo waivers)	Older recruits are more likely to have waivers, and therefore their enlistment packages tend to take longer to process; tattoo and other trivial waivers pushed to Army G-1 for approval lengthen this timeline.	DA, G-1	Doctrine, Policy
Expand market research and share data more widely with station-level recruiters	Recruiters noted lack of access to data that might aid in targeting specific demographics.	USAREC	Doctrine, Policy
Expand social media and virtual recruiting teams at the BN-and-below level	VRTs noted success with older recruits, but BN-level teams are small and have limited resources. Expanding this capability will be critical, particularly given social distancing requirements under COVID-19 and uncertainty around the ability to relax restrictions.	USAREC	Personnel, Training
Continue to broaden recruiting and marketing campaign messaging to appeal to a wider audience	Older recruits tend toward combat support and combat service support MOSs[a] and identified benefit programs as important; a more targeted ad campaign might resonate more with them.	USAREC	Policy
Enhance recruiter knowledge of MOS options	In focus groups, soldiers noted that their recruiters had little knowledge of certain MOSs and relied only on Army videos.	USAREC	Training
Expand virtual recruiting while strategizing the Army's long-term presence on college and private school campuses	College stop-outs and dropouts represent a viable pool of older individuals to recruit, and many can benefit from Army-specific benefits (e.g., LRP)	DA, USAREC	Doctrine, Policy

[a] Note that in Table A.1 in Appendix A, around one-quarter of the oldest age group (25–35) is in combat MOSs compared with one-third or more of soldiers in the younger age groups.

the-art, occupationally focused and digital skills that could lead to well-paying careers in middle-skill jobs and jobs that could replace those that were permanently lost or reduced due to the pandemic. The opportunity to gain college benefits after completing an enlistment term may be particularly appealing to individuals of all ages who may be looking to develop new skills that are more likely to be in higher demand in the future.

The framework in Table 7.1 crosswalks recommendations with examples from our data, the organization best suited to make actionable changes, and whether the recommendation pertains to DOTMLPF-P. We chose the DOTMLPF-P approach and linked organizations with recommendations so that senior policymakers can view potential recommendations in a framework widely used by the military and defined in

joint doctrine.[2] Two key organizations identified as best suited are the DA G-1 (including the Chief of Army Enterprise Marketing, which falls under the responsibility of the Army G-1), and USAREC. Doctrine and Policy, two mechanisms to drive the solutions, while training is also noted in a few areas.

Expand the Army Loan Repayment Program

The need to repay college loans came up often during focus groups and was reported to be a major driver of enlistment. Civilian survey data show that paying for future education was one of the top reasons for enlisting (Chapter Five, Table 5.1), as do the new recruit data for individuals ages 19 to 24 (Chapter Five, Table 5.4).

Unlike other service branches, the U.S. Army has a special incentive program for certain highly qualified individuals seeking to enlist that will repay previously accrued student loans; however, the program has strict regulations that could limit the pool of applicants eligible and willing to become involved.

The College LRP is available to select enlistees entering the RA on active duty, as well as National Guard and reserve soldiers.[3] Each component has varying degrees of stipulations for enrolling in the program, but the general guidelines are that the enlistee (1) score highly on the Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery (ASVAB) (over 50 for RA active duty, National Guardsmen, and reservists); (2) enlist into a specified MOS that qualifies for the LRP; (3) agree to a three-year minimum term of service; and (4) decline enrollment in the Montgomery G.I. Bill in writing (using DD Form 2366). There are also other requirements pertaining to the nature of the loan, the soldier's enlistment period and separation type, and prior service experiences.

One matter of consequence is that the MOSs eligible for the LRP fluctuate, and the MOSs are not clearly defined. The official U.S. Army benefits website instructs readers that "Local Army recruiters have the current list, which changes quarterly."[4] Another important point is that an enlistee must disenroll from receiving Montgomery G.I. Bill benefits after separating from the Army. That is, a prospective soldier must weigh the costs and benefits of giving up one enlistment incentive for another. The LRP will not cover any amount previously paid on an individual's debt, so, if their debt seems minimal, then they may choose to forgo the LRP in favor of a future educational benefit.

These regulations combined might make the program seem complex to an individual seeking to enlist in the Army, and the specific points may seem too cumbersome a task for either the enlistee or recruiter to surmount. Along with an expansion of the program, opportunities to further enhance its use can be studied concurrently to understand who chose or did not choose to enroll in the program and why. While other branches of service no longer offer a loan repayment program like this, it may still serve as a good incentive to recruiting individuals over the age of 21 who have undertaken student loans to further their higher education. Similarly, the LRP may appeal to younger recruits who have dropped out of college.

One recommendation for the LRP is that the Army loosen the restrictions imposed on potential recruits, such as the MOS restriction or ASVAB requirement. When soldiers select the loan repayment program and opt out of the G.I. Bill, it could, in many cases, save DoD dollars in future G.I. Bill payouts. Depending on which school and program a former service member chooses, the G.I. Bill can pay well over the $65,000 limit of the LRP, thus incentivizing the Department to pay a smaller sum on LRP costs in the interim and save G.I. Bill dollars in the long term. Nonetheless, while our research points to advantages in expanding the program, any expansion should be accompanied by a careful examination of its effects to ensure that it is achieving both the desired use and cost savings discussed here.

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[2] Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Instruction 3010.02E, *Guidance for Developing and Implementing Joint Concepts*, Washington, D.C., August 17, 2016.

[3] U.S. Army, "College Loan Repayment Program: My Army Benefits," webpage, 2019a.

[4] U.S. Army, "College Loan Repayment Program, Regular Army: Active Duty," webpage, 2019b.

It would be prudent to conduct a study to assess the impact of offering revised versions of the LRP. Specifically, a controlled experiment could be conducted in which a revised LRP is offered in select regions of the country for a limited time. This would enable the Army to test the option before committing a substantial investment to an untested program, as well as to develop and pilot recruiting materials and strategies for reaching older cohorts. RAND conducted a similar series of experiments in the early 1980s, testing the impact of increases in education assistance benefits, and showed that increased noncontributory education benefits substantially increased enlistments.[5]

A related recommendation is to educate recruiters more thoroughly on other benefits that appeal to older recruits: health care benefits, pension and retirement benefits, and family and child care benefits. In civilian survey data, health and medical benefits were among the top reasons why older individuals (22–24) reported that they would join (Chapter Five, Table 5.1), and these benefits were similarly highly rated in new recruit data, particularly for older enlistees (Chapter Five, Figure 5.5). Many recruiters indicated that they did not understand these benefits in detail, despite ARC training.

Allow Certain Waivers to Be Managed at Echelons Below Brigade

The Army should continue to reevaluate the types of waivers requiring the highest level of adjudication and determine which might be more suited for BDE-and-below levels of approval to shorten processing time and reduce numbers of prospects lost to competing services or careers. Requiring a waiver for certain medical, legal, or other issues (such as a tattoo) is not necessarily a disqualifying factor to enlist in the Army. Analysis of 2018 MEPS waiver data showed that 1.85 percent of all recruits ages 16 to 20 in that year required a waiver, compared with 5.92 percent of recruits 21 and older. Among those who required a waiver, 4.47 percent of the 16–20 age group's waivers were adjudicated at the highest authority, compared with 8.71 percent of the older group's waivers. These numbers do not include waiver requests that may have been initiated but not completed before prospective recruits lost interest or otherwise ended their Army application process and are thus potentially a fraction of all prospective recruits affected. While waivers are of particular salience to older recruits, streamlining the process will have benefits for younger recruits as well. Focus group discussions with soldiers highlighted that waiver concerns prior to enlisting are common across ages.

Certain factors that may be disqualifying can be waived on a case-by-case basis, and, depending on the seriousness of the waiver, can be adjudicated at various levels. Waivers for dismissed traffic offenses might be adjudicated at the BN-or-below level, while others must be adjudicated by the Headquarters, Department of the Army (HQDA) G-1 level for more serious issues, such as a drug-related offense. A common criticism in various recruiting regions was that, often, trivial waivers require HQDA G-1 adjudication. The timeline for processing these requests can sometimes exceed 30 days. While certain issues require this level of scrutiny, others do not. In the time it takes to process these waivers, older recruits who are ready to enlist in the Army and ship to basic training seek other avenues to support themselves and their families, ultimately leading to the loss of future soldiers. One recruiter noted that a prospective soldier had a tattoo of his mother's name on his body, and a waiver had to be adjudicated at the highest level to ensure that the tattoo was not gang-related. An instance like this may be one of the areas in which the Army can reevaluate its policies to determine which waivers require G-1 approval, allowing for BDE-and-below CDR's approval, and speeding the enlistment process for those individuals.

[5] J. Michael Polich, Richard L. Fernandez, and Bruce R. Orvis, *Enlistment Effects of Military Educational Benefits*, Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corporation, N-1783-MRAL, 1982.

Existing data on waivers and the level at which they are adjudicated can be examined to identify types of waivers that can be adjudicated at lower levels without sacrificing other performance measures, such as substance use during active-duty service, other negative behavioral issues, or discharges.

Expand Market Research and Share Data More Widely with Station-Level Recruiters

JAMRS Youth Poll data, containing vital information on propensity and motivations for enlistment, currently do not include people over the age of 24. To better understand propensity at older ages, the motivations of older individuals, and the incentives that appeal to an older population, expanding the ages surveyed—not just as influencers, but as potential recruits—would be highly beneficial. This report confirms that older individuals are a viable population to recruit from, but the lack of data poses a serious constraint to expanding recruitment of this demographic.

Recruiters, particularly at the Company level, expressed discontent with the amount and type of market research data and associated marketing strategies they received. While discussions with Marketing and Research personnel at USAREC indicated that detailed data on area demographics and segment analysis were available, recruiters described the data they actually received as simply identifying how many expected contracts were still unsigned in specific ZIP codes. They also noted that they did not receive information about how to tailor recruitment messaging to their target markets. Station and BN leaders also commonly noted that they were understaffed, and that, even if they could receive more-detailed data, there would be nobody to analyze the data at their level. To provide recruiters with more-relevant and useful local information, a study may be warranted to determine the most-relevant data and metrics for recruitment and the most-effective methods of presenting the data to recruiters. Such a study would involve both quantitative analyses and focus groups with recruiters. Once the metrics and their delivery method are identified, standardized, and validated, a system could be developed to continually update the information over time. The system would potentially require relatively minimal effort to maintain, once established, and could be staffed through a college student internship program.

Expand Social Media and Virtual Recruiting Teams at the Battalion-and-Below Level

In 2019, USAREC officially stood up VRTs, two- to six-person teams at the BN level, which use social media platforms to prospect and recruit individuals into the Army. At the time of data collection and analysis in 2019, the VRTs were poised for expansion but still in their emerging stages. However, with the onset of COVID-19 and social distancing restrictions, we anticipate that the VRTs have taken added importance and experienced Army investment and growth.

In further staffing and resourcing these teams, the Army should consider both its short-term and its long-term needs in terms of the balance of VRT personnel at the BN, company, and station levels and their associated skills and capabilities. Social media and the internet continue to be an increasingly relevant means of communicating with both Generation Z and older prospects—even more so in a pandemic context. In the short term, with social distancing requirements in place and depending on location, virtual recruiting is a necessary and perhaps the only means of recruiting. In the long term and in a postpandemic context, virtual recruiting could help mitigate the challenges of finding physical locations where large numbers of both younger and older individuals congregate. Younger and older alike are increasingly gathering in large numbers virtually on social media platforms.

New recruit survey data indicate that older recruits overwhelmingly initiated the first contact with a recruiter (Chapter Five, Figure 5.3) and that social media was one of the top ways in which recruits requested

more information about the Army (Chapter Five, Table 5.7); expanding social media use by recruiters would make establishing contact easier in both directions. Continuing to work on increasing and strategically placing VRT positions and improving training for recruiters in these positions could benefit recruitment efforts for all ages. Over the long term, virtual recruiting could be an effective complement to in-person recruiting by bridging geographic distances between the knowledge and expertise of recruiters (for example, who have specialized knowledge of certain MOSs or benefits programs) and potential recruits who may be anywhere in the country.

An option for USAREC to avoid increasing the size of the BN would be to shift personnel from direct recruiting to VRT-like functions. Not all recruiters desire or have the right aptitudes for the traditional model of recruiting individuals in person or over the phone. With adequate training and authority, allowing some recruiters to shift their focus to virtual recruiting can help to increase the pool of individuals who would not otherwise be recruited and free recruiters to pursue other avenues beside traditional recruiting techniques. With respect to VRT training, those coded in these billets should receive more-formalized training through the Recruiting and Retention College and in continuation training at the BN level. The virtual recruiting program was piloted in the year leading to this report, with some BNs only recently being staffed with VRTs. Their lessons learned should continue to be codified at the Recruiting and Retention College and built into formalized training modules for individuals entering the 79R pipeline and for recruiters assigned at the BN-and-below levels. USAREC Pamphlet 601-3 mentions a VRT Information Portal with training support packages and supplemental materials.[6] This should be maintained for current VRT recruiters and station recruiters alike to gain social media and influencer training. Improved training and expanded numbers of VRT positions can enhance efforts to recruit individuals of all ages.

In a pandemic context, virtual recruiting offers an important way for recruiters to continue in their roles. Personnel assigned to VRTs did note, however, that virtual recruiting should not be a replacement for in-person recruiting and that recruiters "should not be able to spend their whole day on Facebook saying they are recruiting,"[7] and thus in-person recruiting should continue to serve a vital role when conditions allow. They also mentioned that more measures of performance and of success are required to know more about the effectiveness of virtual recruiting.

Continue to Broaden Recruiting and Marketing Campaigns to Appeal to a Wider Audience

Previous campaigns have been aimed at particular audiences (for example, the "Warriors Wanted" campaign launched in 2018 was aimed at Generation Z), but that messaging may be less appealing to older audiences.[8] Campaign ads and videos that project images evoking the warrior ethos and adventure and combat leave out a large part of the Army experience that could be more appealing to other audiences, including potential older recruits. Our analysis of the recruiting population found that, compared with younger recruits, older ones tend toward combat support and combat service support MOSs.[9] They veer away from jobs in the infantry and cavalry, for instance, in favor of those in the medical and intelligence fields. Focus groups with soldiers mentioned that serving in combat MOSs was more difficult at older ages. The primary reason that civilians reported not wanting to join the Army was the possibility of injury or death (Chapter Five, Table 5.2),

6 USAREC, "Virtual Recruiting," USAREC Pamphlet 601-3, November 17, 2017.

7 Recruiter interview, Los Angeles Recruiting BN.

8 Matthew Cox, "Army Launched New 'Warriors Wanted' Campaign Aimed at Generation Z," *Military.com*, October 19, 2018.

9 See Table A.1 in Appendix A.

and it was high on the list of concerns for new recruits (Chapter Five, Table 5.5), taking top position for those ages 22 to 25, along with "going into combat."

In November 2019, the Army launched a new ad campaign using the slogan "What's Your Warrior?" with the intent of highlighting a range of MOSs, including those that do not involve direct combat, which is consistent with this concept. Similar broader marketing campaigns may suit older recruits better, including campaigns that both acknowledge combat MOSs and highlight the Army's need for a variety of MOSs or careers with civilian counterparts, such as "Aircraft Electricians Wanted" or "Anesthesiologists Wanted."

Many older recruits noted benefits as a major factor in their enlistment. A campaign highlighting the education, retirement, and family health care benefits could appeal more to the older population. Given the strong dissatisfaction that new recruits expressed with their civilian career prospects, as reflected in both the JAMRS New Recruit data and the focus groups, promoting the Army as an educational and career pathway and as a vehicle for socioeconomic mobility and financial stability may be particularly appealing to older prospects. These programs and benefits may be especially important during COVID-19, when civilian career prospects are less certain and family health care and child care are in high demand.

Enhance Recruiter Knowledge of MOS Options

In interviews with soldiers who enlisted over the age of 21, an emergent theme was that recruiters often knew little about the specific MOSs to which they enlisted. The recruiters were able to speak broadly about different branches of the Army and their roles but unable to address more specific concerns or questions about day-to-day functions of a given MOS. Staffing a recruiting station and company with a diverse pool of MOSs would help to address this issue so that, if one recruiter in a company is in a particular MOS, that recruiter can field an individual's specific questions. However, because the range of MOSs in the Army is so vast, it is impossible to have every MOS represented in a recruiting company.

Given the wide range of MOSs, there are several approaches that could be taken. For example, more-specific education and training on the different jobs in the Army may be a beneficial investment for recruiters. This could be in the form of training modules at the Army Recruiting and Retention College. Additionally, more tools, such as videos, could be made available to help train recruiters and recruits on specific MOSs.

Importantly, a collaborative virtual USAREC network of recruiters could be developed that links recruits with recruiters whose MOS is one of interest to them. Critical to fostering this collaborative network is follow-up. If a potential recruit has a question about an MOS that cannot be addressed at the recruiting station, a prompt follow-up should come from another recruiter at a different recruiting station who does have the MOS knowledge. The collaborative network would foster that connection by helping to link demand for MOS-specific knowledge to a source that could supply the requested information.

This could be complementary to the long-term plans for the VRT, whereby a recruit can access recruiting resources beyond their local recruiting station to acquire the knowledge or experience of a particular MOS they are interested in. This could also help to form a personal connection outside the immediate station and improve knowledge of MOS options that would be beneficial to recruiting in general. Training recruiters to make more direct links between MOS and civilian careers is also likely to reap benefits across the age spectrum.

Expand Virtual Recruiting While Strategizing the Army's Long-Term Presence on Campuses

Prior to COVID-19, university campuses represented a rich environment where the Army could capitalize on large numbers of high-quality recruits in a single setting. Individuals who were not currently in high school or attending college were generally not targeted by recruiters. Data from 2018 indicate that about 40 percent

of the 18-to-24 population was attending postsecondary education,[10] leaving roughly 60 percent of this core age group effectively without concerted recruiter targeting, as well as all of the 25-to-35 age group. Contemporaneous data from the National Center for Education Statistics indicate that 20 percent of all undergraduate students at four-year public and private nonprofit colleges and universities, more than 30 percent of students at public two-year colleges, and nearly 70 percent of students at for-profit institutions were over the age of 25.[11] The new recruit survey indicated that a substantial proportion of recruits was attending college immediately before joining the Army, all the way up to age 35 (Chapter Five, Table 5.3). However, this has changed with college campuses around the country grappling with the complexities of offering education during a global pandemic. For the short term, this may mean more of an emphasis on virtual recruiting combined with the expansion of VRTs. For the long term, there are more opportunities for USAREC units to enjoy mutually beneficial partnerships with ROTC programs on college campuses to attract and recruit older individuals into the Army.

The Army should consider having university Reserve Officer Training Corps (ROTC) programs establish more-formal communications with local recruiting BNs or companies. Staff of one ROTC program that the project team interviewed found success in an informal relationship built with a local recruiting BN. Local recruiters were able to partner with soldiers assigned to the university ROTC program to assist one another in various ways. One recruiting company commander noted, "we use ROTC as Trojan horse to get in. We help ROTC meet mission as well, and they help us." He described the arrangement as "beneficial on both sides. They're usually undermanned. When we have applicants curious about OCS, they can go talk to ROTC folks."[12] In the rare case that an ROTC student loses their scholarship, they can either pay back money lent to them through the program or choose to enlist in the Army. While infrequent and small in number, these enlistments do deliver older individuals.

ROTC and recruiter presence on a college campus also help to bring awareness to students and faculty alike to attract and recruit individuals into the Army. The BDE S3 whose persistence and alumni status forged a relationship with a university mentioned that the mathematics department of the same university now refers students failing out of school to Army recruiters as a potential option when departing academia. A greater presence on university campuses increases the likelihood that a potential recruit will come in contact with a service member who can positively influence them to join. This will likely have to be a virtual presence for the short term, while the COVID-19 pandemic is still underway. However, for the long term, the Army may consider a hybrid approach combining virtual and in-person recruiting.

In addition to four-year universities, two-year technical schools and community colleges present rich opportunities for identifying and recruiting older youth into the Army. Students going through these programs might be more interested in taking advantage of the Army LRP to cover costs in the short term, or they might also aim to use G.I. Bill benefits to complete a four-year degree after their time in service. These individuals may include high-quality recruits and will be able to enlist at a higher rank than their counterparts. Further, their advanced schooling will speed their rank progression in the Army, as postsecondary education and college credits are valued more highly toward promotion points.[13]

A challenge identified across various interviews with recruits was that some community colleges or four-year universities are not welcoming or are even hostile toward the Army's recruiting efforts on campus. If a college or university accepts any form of federal funding, it is obligated to allow military recruiters on cam-

[10] Ginder, Kelly-Reid, and Mann, 2019.

[11] Hamilton Project, "Age Distribution of Undergraduate Students, by Type of Institution," data visualization, Brookings Institution, Washington, D.C., 2017.

[12] Seattle recruiting BN interview, April 2019.

[13] Jim Tice and Michelle Tan, "Changes for NCOs: New Requirements and Promotion Points," *Army Times*, August 17, 2015.

pus.[14] Some institutions were reported to allow only the bare minimum required by law or made it difficult for recruiters to engage with students on campus. Other institutions were noted as having stronger, positive relationships with recruiting organizations. One recruiting BN CDR found success in engaging with local community leaders to bridge the divide and build a stronger relationship with a historically hostile community college. Again, for the short term, this may mean more of an emphasis on virtual recruiting combined with the expansion of VRTs.

It is important to understand all relevant laws and regulations pertaining to recruiting in sensitive arenas, but more important are the relationships that commanders and recruiters can build that will foster mutually beneficial relationships between civil and military institutions. For instance, the Army can be a viable option for some struggling students. After their time in service, they may be more prepared for the academic rigors of college. Also, if students are struggling financially with their education, the Army Reserve or Army National Guard have options to help pay for school while being in the Army in a part-time role. These educational benefits can help to keep students enrolled, pursuing higher education, who otherwise would have to stop out for financial reasons. Further, the Army is particularly well positioned to leverage the greater emphasis on college and career readiness by extending opportunities to acquire occupational skills that could lead to well-paying careers in middle-skill jobs, as well as providing education benefits that facilitate the pursuit of college after the enlistment term ends, regardless of age.

The Army and USAREC should pursue and facilitate persistent engagement with academic institutions and community leaders alike, educating them on relevant laws and the mutual benefits that recruiting can have on college campuses. Forming these relationships should be codified in doctrine, and company and BN leadership teams should receive training on best practices in engaging community leaders. Continuity at the recruiter level is important as well. While National Guard recruiters are able to remain in one location for extended periods, active-duty recruiters stay no longer than two to three years. Allowing recruiters to remain at one station or area for a longer period might also help to maintain relationships with the community and local organizations.

In addition to expanding physical presence on campuses when conditions allow, greater use of college stop-out[15] lists and high school student lists could also aid recruiters in locating and reaching out to older prospects. While high school student lists and college stop-out/dropout lists are routinely used by recruiters, revisiting those same lists several years later to check in on individuals again when they are older was not a common approach. One reason may be that contact information for high school students becomes outdated quickly. In contrast, the portability of cell phone numbers means that college student telephone contact information may remain valid for years, even if individuals have relocated. Following up with college stop-outs from previous years' lists could lead to contact with individuals who initially may not have expressed an interest in the Army, but whose opinions may have changed following a year or two in the labor market. As with a VRT, after initial contact, a prospect could be connected with a recruiter in their local area.

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[14] Congressional Research Service, *Military Recruitment on High School and College Campuses: A Policy and Legal Analysis*, R40827, Washington, D.C., December 17, 2010.

[15] *Stop out* refers to withdrawing temporarily from enrollment at a college or university. While some stop-outs may intend to return to college later, they may ultimately become permanent dropouts.

APPENDIX A

Description of the Administrative Data

TAPDB-AE contains detailed administrative information about each soldier, including basic demographics (age, gender, race, marital status, number of dependents), education (highest degree attained), and characteristics of their enlistment (AFQT score, contract length, whether they received a bonus, MOS/Career Management Field [CMF], whether they were ever deployed, and paygrade upon entry). We also create a cohort variable to represent the year they accessed. These characteristics are captured both at accession and over time; however, we primarily draw on characteristics at accession for the analysis presented in Chapter Three. Our population of interest is individuals who enlisted in the Army during the years 2002 to 2017.

To construct our outcome variables of interest, we examined separation codes that indicate the reason a soldier separated. Drawing on previous work,[1] we examined the detailed separation codes to identify separation due to failure to adapt prior to completion of the first term. Failure to adapt subsumes a wide range of separation codes that includes desertion, conscientious objection, parenthood, not meeting physical standards, poor performance, and a large class of codes classified as *misconduct* involving drugs and alcohol. Table A.1 provides information on first-term enlistment outcomes.

Constructing the Outcomes of Interest

The data set that we use is a summary data set at the soldier level. The data were summarized from detailed administrative data collected on every soldier across the period of their enlistment. For each soldier, we construct an attrition outcome and a reenlistment outcome. If soldiers attrite before completing their first term, they are coded as 1. We also have information for when that attrition occurred. Thus, if they attrited in the first three months after accession, then they are coded as 1 for BCT attrition, 0 otherwise. If they attrited in the first six months after accession, they are coded as 1 for early-term attrition, 0 otherwise. If they attrited at any point before completing their first term, they are coded as 1, 0 otherwise. The same scheme applies for the reenlistment outcome that we construct. If a soldier reenlists during their first term, they are coded as 1 for reenlistment, 0 otherwise. Thus, whether a soldier attrites during their first term or completes their term and does not reenlist, they are coded as 0 for the reenlistment variable.[2]

[1] Wenger et al., 2018.

[2] We also created a reenlistment variable that conditions on a soldier completing their first term (i.e., not attriting). Soldiers who attrite during their first term are dropped from the analysis. The results are very similar to the results for the unconditional reenlistment outcome.

TABLE A.1
List of Variables, by Age

Variable	16–18 (%)	19–21 (%)	22–24 (%)	25–35 (%)
Number of observations	349,107	381,650	164,531	124,604
Gender				
Female	18	15	16	18
Education level at accession				
Less than high school/GED	1	1	1	0
High school diploma	97	95	79	68
GED or test-based diploma	1	1	1	1
Some postsecondary	1	3	19	30
Race/ethnicity				
White	64	63	63	58
Black	17	19	18	19
Hispanic	14	13	12	14
Other	5	5	6	9
Marital status				
Single, never married	97	89	74	50
Married	3	11	24	44
Other	0	0	2	6
Number of dependents				
None	97	88	74	52
One or more dependents	3	12	26	48
AFQT category				
AFQT (I–IIIA)	63	61	70	72
Contract term of service				
1 or 2 years	1	1	1	1
3 or 4 years	80	81	79	79
5 or 6 years	19	18	20	20
Received bonus	42	41	44	45
CMF group				
Combat	37	37	33	26
Medical	7	7	9	12
Information operation	8	7	7	7
Supply and maintenance	20	22	21	23
Administrative and legal	3	3	3	4
Other	24	24	27	28

Table A.1—Continued

Variable	16–18 (%)	19–21 (%)	22–24 (%)	25–35 (%)
Deployed in first term	42	42	41	38
Entry paygrade				
E1	56	56	40	31
E2	29	26	20	18
E3 or higher	15	18	40	51
BMI flag (high or low)	39	44	49	53
First-term enlistment outcome				
BCT attrition (failure to adapt)	6	6	5	6
Early-term attrition (failure to adapt)	11	11	9	10
First-term attrition (any)[a]	37	36	32	32
First-term attrition (failure to adapt)[b]	31	29	23	22
Disabled[c]	5	6	8	10
Completed first term, did not reenlist[d]	27	27	30	28
Completed first term, reenlisted[e]	36	36	37	39

SOURCE: Authors' calculations based on analysis of TAPDB-AE.

NOTES: Total number of enlisted personnel included is 1,019,892 persons who enlisted between 2002 and 2017. Note that the number of observations varies depending on the variable.

a, b, c, d, e First-term attrition due to any reason, first-term attrition due to failure to adapt, disabled, completion of term, and reenlistment apply to cohorts 2002 to 2014 (838,456 soldiers) to be able to observe those outcomes within the time frame for which we have data (up to 2018).

APPENDIX B

Methods and Detailed Results

Methodological Approach

In this appendix, we describe in greater detail our approach to analyze the TAPDB-AE administrative data to examine the relationship between age at enlistment and soldier outcomes. We estimate the simple linear logit regression expressed as the relationship between the odds of attriting or reenlisting and a set of covariates:

$$\text{logit}(Y_i) = \alpha + \beta X_i + \gamma Z_i + \varepsilon,$$

where Y for soldier i is a binary outcome with $Y_i = 1$ if the soldier attrites due to failure to adapt or reenlist and 0 otherwise. We estimate the probability of attriting or reenlisting, logit(Y_i), as a function of a set of covariates including X, which represents the age category the soldier falls into; Z, a set of covariates that describe each soldier i; and ε, a random error term. For BCT and early-term attrition, our attrition outcome of interest is coded as $Y_i = 1$ for anyone who has a separation code under the column labeled "failure to adapt" by the time relevant to that attrition outcome (three months for BCT attrition and six months for early-term attrition). For first-term attrition, we construct two variables—a failure to adapt variable, as described earlier, and a variable that captures attrition due to failure to adapt *or* for any other reason. Thus, for our attrition variables, individuals whose separation code falls under "completed term" or "missing in action/killed in action," or who do not separate and reenlist, are coded as $Y_i = 0$. In our reenlistment equation, $Y_i = 1$ if the soldier reenlists, 0 otherwise. Our coefficient of interest is β, which represents the likelihood of attrition based on the age at which the soldier enlisted. We provide the full results from estimating the logit equations of soldier outcomes as a function of their demographic, education, and military enlistment characteristics. While we estimate the equations using both a subset of the variables and the full set of variables listed in Table A.1 in Appendix A to test for sensitivity across specifications, we primarily discuss the results from the full model. The findings across specifications are generally consistent with each other.

Computing Odds Ratios

To assist with interpreting the relationships between the covariates and the attrition or reenlistment outcomes, the results are shown in odds ratios. Odds ratios represent the odds of the event occurring—attrition or re-enlistment—relative to it not occurring, and it is shown for each covariate and its associated categories (e.g., female or male for gender). As an example, for the variable gender, the odds ratio is interpreted as the odds of the outcome occurring for a gender category (e.g., female) compared with the odds of it occurring for an excluded category for that same variable (e.g., male). The excluded category is typically set to 1, and the other categories are interpreted relative to 1. If the odds ratio for that category (e.g., female) is greater than 1, then there is a higher odds of the outcome occurring (attrition or reenlistment) for that category compared

with the excluded category (in this case, male). If the odds ratio is less than 1, then there are lower odds of the outcome of interest occurring associated with that category.

Computing Predicted Probabilities

Another approach, which we rely on to review our key findings in Chapter Three, is to compute a predicted probability of the outcome occurring (attrition or reenlistment) for each category of a variable of interest while setting the other covariates in the model at their individual means or alternatively at representative or fixed values.[1] Typically, both odds ratios and predicted probabilities are used together to interpret the findings. It is important to note that a large difference in odds may not necessarily translate to a substantively meaningful difference if the odds of the reference group are small, for example. Thus, combining the odds ratio and predicted probability results gives a fuller picture. Since our model relies on covariates that are all categorical, it may not make as much intuitive sense to set the covariates at their individual means. Thus, our approach is to present the predicted probability of the outcome (attrition or reenlistment) occurring for a soldier who is in a particular age category (16–18, 19–21, 22–24, or 25–35) at fixed or representative values of their cohort (i.e., 2002, 2003). Rather than set the remaining variables at their means or at representative values, we compute predictions using the actual values for the other variables.

Overall Results

We first review the detailed results in tabular form across all the variables in the model and then examine the relationship between the key variable of interest, age, and soldier outcomes, in graphical form. Table B.1 provides the results from BCT attrition due to failure to adapt; Table B.2 provides the results of early-term attrition due to failure to adapt; and Tables B.3 and B.4 present the results from examining first-term attrition due to failure to adapt and then for failure to adapt or disability. Finally, Table B.5 presents the results for reenlistment. In each table, we present the results while including the following covariates: (1) age; (2) age and the full set of demographic characteristics; and (3) age, the full set of demographic characteristics, and military enlistment characteristics. Each of the specifications 1–3 includes dummies for cohort year. The results are provided in odds ratios. At the same time, we consider whether being in a particular age category increases or decreases the odds of attrition or reenlistment relative to a reference category controlling for all other variables, and by roughly how much.

Below, we describe our overall findings across all the variables.

- Overall, across the attrition outcomes, while the soldier's individual characteristics including gender, demographics, education, and marital status are important drivers, the characteristics associated with their enlistment (term of service, whether they received a bonus, CMF, whether they deployed in their first term, and entry paygrade) add explanatory power to the model. This is noted in the pseudo-R^2 results. However, pseudo-R^2 should be interpreted with caution, because it approximates the same statistic as an R^2 in the case of ordinary least squares but also has limitations in the case of a logit model that is estimated using maximum likelihood estimation techniques.[2]

[1] To generate the predicted probabilities, we use the margins command in Stata (Stata Press, *Stata Base Reference Manual: Release 16*, College Station, Tex., 2019). The use of the margins command along with logit estimation is also discussed in Williams, 2012.

[2] One key limitation is that pseudo-R^2 estimates are not comparable across data sets. They can be compared across specifications using the same data but are not comparable in the same way a goodness-of-fit statistic is in the ordinary least squares context (Institute for Digital Research and Education, undated).

- It is important to recognize that some of our variables are related to each other (age, marital status, and dependents; age and education; age, education, and entry paygrade). These do manifest in some cases with slight changes to the coefficients and significance level across specifications. However, for our main variables of interest (age), the trends are broadly consistent.
- Across all attrition outcomes (BCT, early-term, and first-term), female soldiers have close to twice as high odds of attriting as male soldiers; females also have around 30-percent lower odds of reenlisting compared with male soldiers.
- In terms of education, the results from BCT attrition and early-term attrition are less clear across specifications. In BCT attrition, higher education implies higher likelihood of attrition, and similarly for early-term attrition when considering the specification with the full range of variables. However, for first-term attrition, there is a clearer and consistent relationship between education and first-term attrition. More education implies lower attrition. In terms of reenlistment, it is noteworthy that individuals who come in with a college degree have higher odds of reenlisting.
- For race or ethnicity, relative to the excluded category (Asian or Pacific Islander), the other groups have higher rates of attrition. Generally, across attrition outcomes and model specifications, the odds of attrition are higher among Whites and American Indian and Alaskan Natives, followed by Blacks and Hispanics.
- In terms of marital status, married soldiers have slightly higher odds of attriting during BCT and early term but lower odds of attriting in the first term compared with soldiers who were single when they enlisted. Being married at accession is also associated with higher odds of reenlistment.
- In general, enlisting with dependents increases the odds of attrition, but it is also associated with higher odds of reenlistment.
- Having a BMI flag (whether above or below the standard) is associated with higher odds of attrition across attrition outcomes. In terms of reenlistment, enlisting with a higher BMI flag is associated with lower odds of reenlistment, but a lower BMI flag is associated with slightly higher odds of reenlistment.
- Relative to AFQT Category I (the highest-scoring), enlistees in the other AFQT categories have higher odds of attriting. However, each of the lower AFQT categories has higher odds of reenlisting compared with the highest category.
- Examining the length of the contract reveals that longer-term contracts have higher odds of attrition relative to a one- or two-year term, and they also have lower odds of reenlistment.
- Interestingly, receiving a bonus is associated with higher odds of attrition, though the effect is small (1–2 percent) and statistically significant only in the case of early-term and first-term attrition. It is associated with stronger and larger (7-percent-higher) odds of reenlistment.
- Relative to a combat MOS, being in a noncombat MOS is associated with statistically significant and substantially (anywhere between 20 and 40 percent) lower odds of attrition across attrition outcomes. Being in a noncombat MOS is also associated with statistically significant and higher odds of reenlistment (range is 30-percent– to 80-percent–higher odds).
- Being deployed is associated with lower odds of attrition, as well as higher odds (more than twice as high) of reenlistment.
- Entering at a higher grade (compared with an E1) is associated with statistically significant lower odds of attrition (between 30 and 75 percent). It is also associated with higher odds of reenlistment (20 to 30 percent) for those who come in as E2s or E3s with E1 as the reference category. Those who come in as an E4 or higher are associated with lower odds of reenlisting (around 23 percent) compared with E1s.

TABLE B.1

Results of Logit Regressions for BCT Attrition Due to Failure to Adapt

	(1) BCT Attrition (failure to adapt)	(2) BCT Attrition (failure to adapt)	(3) BCT Attrition (failure to adapt)
Age			
16–18	1	1	1
	(.)	(.)	(.)
19–21	1.022*	1.037***	1.027*
	(2.20)	(3.50)	(2.55)
22–24	0.889***	0.962**	1.007
	(–8.77)	(–2.70)	(0.46)
25–35	0.980	1.053**	1.128***
	(–1.39)	(2.98)	(6.72)
Cohort controls	Yes	Yes	Yes
Gender			
Male		1	1
		(.)	(.)
Female		1.959***	1.645***
		(65.58)	(43.52)
Education Level at Accession			
Less than high school/GED		1	1
		(.)	(.)
High school diploma		1.107*	1.269***
		(2.16)	(4.90)
GED or test-based diploma		1.372***	1.430***
		(5.44)	(5.99)
Some college, associate degree, or certification		0.874*	1.267***
		(–2.40)	(4.07)
College		0.570***	1.658***
		(–10.12)	(6.60)
Postgraduate		0.532***	1.409**
		(–5.76)	(2.79)

Table B.1—Continued

	(1) BCT Attrition (failure to adapt)	(2) BCT Attrition (failure to adapt)	(3) BCT Attrition (failure to adapt)
Race/ethnicity			
Asian or Pacific Islander		1	1
		(.)	(.)
White		2.221***	2.001***
		(29.30)	(25.03)
Hispanic		1.188***	1.189***
		(5.74)	(5.67)
Black		1.315***	1.249***
		(9.50)	(7.59)
American Indian or Alaskan Native		1.723***	1.581***
		(10.89)	(8.97)
Marital status			
Single, never married		1	1
		(.)	(.)
Married		1.038	1.072**
		(1.50)	(2.72)
Divorced		1.361***	1.263***
		(8.36)	(6.14)
Other		1.583***	1.404**
		(3.75)	(2.68)
None		1	1
		(.)	(.)
Number of dependents			
One dependent		1.177***	1.108***
		(6.63)	(4.11)
Two dependents		1.199***	1.095**
		(6.12)	(2.98)
Three dependents		1.370***	1.245***
		(9.17)	(6.22)
Four or more dependents		1.314***	1.232***
		(5.21)	(3.87)

Table B.1—Continued

	(1) BCT Attrition (failure to adapt)	(2) BCT Attrition (failure to adapt)	(3) BCT Attrition (failure to adapt)
AFQT category			
AFQT Cat 1		1	1
		(.)	(.)
AFQT Cat 2		1.397***	1.322***
		(13.31)	(10.82)
AFQT Cat 3a		1.733***	1.514***
		(21.63)	(15.76)
AFQT Cat 3b		1.939***	1.627***
		(26.14)	(18.21)
AFQT Cat 4		1.775***	1.486***
		(12.46)	(8.21)
BMI flag (high or low)			
None		1	1
		(.)	(.)
High		1.131***	1.103***
		(13.16)	(10.18)
Low		1.279***	1.236***
		(11.57)	(9.65)
Contract Term of Service			
1 or 2 years			1
			(.)
3 or 4 years			1.323***
			(6.38)
5 or 6 years			1.429***
			(7.93)
Received bonus			
No bonus			1
			(.)
Received bonus			1.016
			(1.45)

Table B.1—Continued

	(1) BCT Attrition (failure to adapt)	(2) BCT Attrition (failure to adapt)	(3) BCT Attrition (failure to adapt)
CMF group			
Combat			1
			(.)
Medical			0.609***
			(–25.30)
Information operations			0.779***
			(–13.24)
Supply and maintenance			0.759***
			(–21.50)
Administrative and legal			0.749***
			(–11.20)
Other			0.718***
			(–25.52)
Deployed in first term			
No			1
			(.)
Yes			0.00231***
			(–63.26)
Entry paygrade			
E1			1
			(.)
E2			0.759***
			(–24.81)
E3			0.629***
			(–32.00)
E4 or higher			0.271***
			(–23.06)
Pseudo R^2	0.008	0.031	0.174
Log likelihood	–219,625.8	–213,395.8	–181,869.8
chi2	3,753.9	13,805.1	76,742.2
Observations	1,019,892	1,016,420	1,016,353

NOTES: Results are shown in odds ratios with *t* statistics in parentheses.
* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

TABLE B.2

Results of Logit Regressions for Early-Term Attrition Due to Failure to Adapt

	(1) Early-Term Attrition (failure to adapt)	(2) Early-Term Attrition (failure to adapt)	(3) Early-Term Attrition (failure to adapt)
Age			
16–18	1	1	1
	(.)	(.)	(.)
19–21	1.020**	1.037***	1.028***
	(2.63)	(4.63)	(3.32)
22–24	0.849***	0.933***	0.975*
	(–15.99)	(–6.29)	(–2.21)
25–35	0.905***	1.008	1.085***
	(–8.98)	(0.61)	(5.77)
Cohort control	Yes	Yes	Yes
Gender			
Male		1	1
		(.)	(.)
Female		1.934***	1.772***
		(82.78)	(62.71)
Education level at accession			
Less than high school/GED		1	1
		(.)	(.)
High school diploma		0.910**	1.046
		(–2.84)	(1.28)
GED or test-based diploma		1.239***	1.297***
		(5.13)	(5.83)
Some college, associate, or certification		0.722***	1.071
		(–8.09)	(1.58)
College		0.460***	1.319***
		(–19.53)	(4.79)
Postgraduate		0.445***	1.181
		(10.00)	(1.80)

Table B.2—Continued

	(1) Early-Term Attrition (failure to adapt)	(2) Early-Term Attrition (failure to adapt)	(3) Early-Term Attrition (failure to adapt)
Race/ethnicity			
Asian or Pacific Islander		1	1
		(.)	(.)
White		2.025***	1.803***
		(35.95)	(28.95)
Hispanic		1.123***	1.116***
		(5.33)	(4.86)
Black		1.219***	1.181***
		(9.49)	(7.69)
American Indian or Alaskan Native		1.628***	1.470***
		(13.13)	(9.89)
Marital status			
Single, never married		1	1
		(.)	(.)
Married		1.003	1.047*
		(0.16)	(2.26)
Divorced		1.335***	1.242***
		(9.92)	(6.99)
Other		1.460***	1.290*
		(3.78)	(2.39)
Number of dependents			
None		1	1
		(.)	(.)
One dependent		1.129***	1.061**
		(6.36)	(2.98)
Two dependents		1.152***	1.049*
		(6.10)	(1.97)
Three dependents		1.298***	1.182***
		(9.67)	(5.87)
Four or more dependents		1.201***	1.125**
		(4.38)	(2.66)

Table B.2—Continued

	(1) Early-Term Attrition (failure to adapt)	(2) Early-Term Attrition (failure to adapt)	(3) Early-Term Attrition (failure to adapt)
AFQT category			
AFQT Cat 1		1	1
		(.)	(.)
AFQT Cat 2		1.333***	1.255***
		(15.50)	(11.70)
AFQT Cat 3a		1.654***	1.438***
		(26.75)	(18.23)
AFQT Cat 3b		1.859***	1.545***
		(33.12)	(21.53)
AFQT Cat 4		1.984***	1.658***
		(21.07)	(14.30)
BMI flag (high or low)			
None		1	1
		(.)	(.)
High		1.175***	1.157***
		(22.85)	(19.50)
Low		1.281***	1.256***
		(15.08)	(13.00)
Contract term of service			
1 or 2 years			1
			(.)
3 or 4 years			1.442***
			(10.74)
5 or 6 years			1.575***
			(13.01)
Received bonus			
No bonus			1
			(.)
Received bonus			1.020*
			(2.26)

Table B.2—Continued

	(1) Early-Term Attrition (failure to adapt)	(2) Early-Term Attrition (failure to adapt)	(3) Early-Term Attrition (failure to adapt)
CMF group			
Combat			1
			(.)
Medical			0.485***
			(–47.48)
Information operations			0.597***
			(–34.40)
Supply and maintenance			0.575***
			(–54.80)
Administrative and legal			0.565***
			(–27.72)
Other			0.578***
			(–54.46)
Deployed in first term			
No			1
			(.)
Yes			0.00214***
			(–90.75)
Entry paygrade			
E1			1
			(.)
E2			0.735***
			(–35.42)
E3			0.602***
			(–45.14)
E4 or higher			0.267***
			(–30.62)
Pseudo R^2	0.007	0.030	0.216
Log likelihood	–336,775.3	–327,104.3	–264,540.1
chi2	4,437.5	20,433.1	145,447.4
Observations	1,019,892	1,016,420	1,016,353

NOTES: Results are shown in odds ratios with *t* statistics in parentheses.
* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

TABLE B.3

Results of Logit Regressions for First-Term Attrition Due to Failure to Adapt

	(1) First-Term Attrition	(2) First-Term Attrition	(3) First-Term Attrition
Age			
16–18	1	1	1
	(.)	(.)	(.)
19–21	0.916***	0.933***	0.913***
	(–15.59)	(–11.85)	(–14.12)
22–24	0.676***	0.754***	0.758***
	(–51.67)	(–34.35)	(–30.64)
25–35	0.621***	0.710***	0.719***
	(–56.06)	(–33.33)	(–29.41)
Cohort controls	Yes	Yes	Yes
Gender			
Male		1	1
		(.)	(.)
Female		1.995***	1.676***
		(108.20)	(68.83)
Education level at accession			
Less than high school/GED		1	1
		(.)	(.)
High school diploma		0.656***	0.677***
		(–19.24)	(–15.59)
GED or test-based diploma		0.742***	0.723***
		(–8.44)	(–8.15)
Some college, associate, or certification		0.406***	0.559***
		(–29.99)	(–17.25)
College		0.303***	0.794***
		(–43.85)	(–5.71)
Postgraduate		0.377***	0.936
		(–17.21)	(–1.02)

Table B.3—Continued

	(1) First-Term Attrition	(2) First-Term Attrition	(3) First-Term Attrition
Race/ethnicity			
Asian or Pacific Islander		1	1
		(.)	(.)
White		1.725***	1.610***
		(38.43)	(31.18)
Hispanic		1.148***	1.161***
		(8.76)	(8.82)
Black		1.520***	1.508***
		(27.86)	(25.38)
American Indian or Alaskan Native		1.771***	1.726***
		(20.97)	(18.16)
Marital status			
Single, never married		1	1
		(.)	(.)
Married		0.899***	0.905***
		(–7.06)	(–6.01)
Divorced		1.289***	1.208***
		(10.97)	(7.45)
Other		1.525***	1.416***
		(5.28)	(3.94)
Number of dependents			
None		1	1
		(.)	(.)
One dependent		1.160***	1.103***
		(10.26)	(6.18)
Two dependents		1.222***	1.126***
		(11.25)	(6.10)
Three dependents		1.251***	1.148***
		(10.58)	(5.97)
Four or more dependents		1.121***	1.053
		(3.51)	(1.46)

Table B.3—Continued

	(1) First-Term Attrition	(2) First-Term Attrition	(3) First-Term Attrition
AFQT category			
AFQT Cat 1		1	1
		(.)	(.)
AFQT Cat 2		1.360***	1.342***
		(23.31)	(20.60)
AFQT Cat 3a		1.669***	1.593***
		(38.07)	(31.66)
AFQT Cat 3b		1.658***	1.545***
		(37.66)	(28.96)
AFQT Cat 4		1.453***	1.350***
		(15.58)	(11.09)
BMI flag (high or low)			
None		1	1
		(.)	(.)
High		1.196***	1.183***
		(33.35)	(28.50)
Low		1.090***	1.054***
		(6.60)	(3.62)
Contract term of service			
1 or 2 years			1
			(.)
3 or 4 years			2.309***
			(30.28)
5 or 6 years			3.453***
			(43.89)
Received bonus			
No bonus			1
			(.)
Received bonus			1.018**
			(2.58)

Table B.3—Continued

	(1) First-Term Attrition	(2) First-Term Attrition	(3) First-Term Attrition
CMF group			
Combat			1
			(.)
Medical			0.691***
			(–31.91)
Information Operations			0.839***
			(–15.37)
Supply and Maintenance			0.749***
			(–36.45)
Administrative and Legal			0.725***
			(–19.60)
Other			0.715***
			(–42.52)
Deployed in first term			
No			1
			(.)
Yes			0.107***
			(–326.34)
Entry paygrade			
E1			1
			(.)
E2			0.720***
			(–49.28)
E3			0.558***
			(–73.16)
E4 or higher			0.231***
			(–49.26)
Pseudo R^2	0.006	0.030	0.183
Log likelihood	–494,374.2	–480,017.9	–404,301.3
chi2	6,041.4	29,723.9	181,057.8
Observations	838,456	834,986	834,921

NOTES: Results are shown in odds ratios with *t* statistics in parentheses.

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

TABLE B.4

Results of Logit Regressions for First-Term Attrition Due to Any Reason

	(1) First-Term Attrition (any reason)	(2) First-Term Attrition (any reason)	(3) First-Term Attrition (any reason)
Age			
16–18	1	1	1
	(.)	(.)	(.)
19–21	0.964***	0.981***	0.977***
	(–6.79)	(–3.51)	(–3.75)
22–24	0.793***	0.872***	0.906***
	(–33.01)	(–17.92)	(–11.56)
25–35	0.825***	0.921***	0.984
	(–25.01)	(–8.81)	(–1.58)
Cohort controls	Yes	Yes	Yes
Gender			
Male		1	1
		(.)	(.)
Female		2.212***	1.947***
		(128.12)	(90.90)
Education level at accession			
Less than high school/GED		1	1
		(.)	(.)
High school diploma		0.689***	0.714***
		(–17.25)	(–13.72)
GED or test-based diploma		0.788***	0.781***
		(–6.97)	(–6.40)
Some college, associate, or certification		0.465***	0.613***
		(–27.23)	(–15.40)
College		0.328***	0.854***
		(–43.53)	(–4.25)
Postgraduate		0.394***	0.985
		(–18.89)	(–0.26)

Table B.4—Continued

	(1) First-Term Attrition (any reason)	(2) First-Term Attrition (any reason)	(3) First-Term Attrition (any reason)
Race/ethnicity			
Asian or Pacific Islander		1	1
		(.)	(.)
White		1.783***	1.695***
		(44.67)	(37.40)
Hispanic		1.115***	1.128***
		(7.56)	(7.69)
Black		1.446***	1.452***
		(26.74)	(24.81)
American Indian or Alaskan Native		1.674***	1.631***
		(19.84)	(16.97)
Marital status			
Single, never married		1	1
		(.)	(.)
Married		0.938***	0.948***
		(–4.49)	(–3.39)
Divorced		1.434***	1.389***
		(16.57)	(13.51)
Other		1.572***	1.490***
		(5.82)	(4.58)
Number of dependents			
None		1	1
		(.)	(.)
One dependent		1.171***	1.128***
		(11.59)	(7.96)
Two dependents		1.212***	1.132***
		(11.51)	(6.69)
Three dependents		1.237***	1.153***
		(10.79)	(6.52)
Four or more dependents		1.169***	1.128***
		(5.27)	(3.64)

Table B.4—Continued

	(1) First-Term Attrition (any reason)	(2) First-Term Attrition (any reason)	(3) First-Term Attrition (any reason)
AFQT Category			
AFQT Cat 1		1	1
		(.)	(.)
AFQT Cat 2		1.383***	1.429***
		(27.46)	(27.48)
AFQT Cat 3a		1.671***	1.706***
		(42.28)	(39.63)
AFQT Cat 3b		1.591***	1.633***
		(38.31)	(35.55)
AFQT Cat 4		1.417***	1.512***
		(15.61)	(16.28)
BMI flag (high or low)			
None		1	1
		(.)	(.)
High		1.252***	1.256***
		(44.57)	(40.54)
Low		1.075***	1.041**
		(5.76)	(2.89)
Contract term of service			
1 or 2 years			1
			(.)
3 or 4 years			2.654***
			(37.09)
5 or 6 years			4.951***
			(59.43)
Received bonus			
No bonus			1
			(.)
Received bonus			1.070***
			(10.38)

Table B.4—Continued

	(1) First-Term Attrition (any reason)	(2) First-Term Attrition (any reason)	(3) First-Term Attrition (any reason)
CMF group			
Combat			1
			(.)
Medical			0.686***
			(–34.19)
Information Operations			0.790***
			(–21.63)
Supply and Maintenance			0.694***
			(–48.01)
Administrative and Legal			0.671***
			(–25.40)
Other			0.672***
			(–53.29)
Deployed in first term			
No			1
			(.)
Yes			0.119***
			(–350.75)
Entry paygrade			
E1			1
			(.)
E2			0.749***
			(–45.24)
E3			0.591***
			(–70.10)
E4 or higher			0.232***
			(–55.61)
Pseudo R2	0.002	0.031	0.185
Log likelihood	–541,928.1	–523,631.8	–440,587.8
chi2	2,407.6	33,779.3	199,767.9
Observations	838,456	834,986	834,921

NOTES: Results are shown in odds ratios with *t* statistics in parentheses.
* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

TABLE B.5

Results of Logit Regressions for Reenlistment

	(1) Reenlist	(2) Reenlist	(3) Reenlist
Age			
16–18	1	1	1
	(.)	(.)	(.)
19–21	1.026***	0.995	1.010
	(4.77)	(–0.98)	(1.70)
22–24	1.079***	1.065***	1.068***
	(11.10)	(8.53)	(8.57)
25–35	1.150***	1.094***	1.093***
	(18.62)	(9.95)	(9.46)
Cohort control	Yes	Yes	Yes
Gender			
Male		1	1
		(.)	(.)
Female		0.700***	0.715***
		(–55.00)	(–47.87)
Education Level at Accession			
Less than high school/GED		1	1
		(.)	(.)
High school diploma		1.098***	1.039
		(4.15)	(1.66)
GED or test-based diploma		1.033	1.024
		(0.91)	(0.66)
Some college, associate, or certification		1.269***	1.011
		(8.60)	(0.38)
College		0.833***	1.183***
		(–7.17)	(5.25)
Postgraduate		0.685***	0.974
		(–8.16)	(–0.51)

Table B.5—Continued

	(1) Reenlist	(2) Reenlist	(3) Reenlist
Race/ethnicity			
Asian or Pacific Islander		1	1
		(.)	(.)
White		0.687***	0.741***
		(–33.22)	(–25.79)
Hispanic		0.989	0.999
		(–0.86)	(–0.08)
Black		1.129***	1.135***
		(9.94)	(10.11)
American Indian or Alaskan Native		0.728***	0.775***
		(–12.51)	(–9.80)
Marital status			
Single, never married		1	1
		(.)	(.)
Married		1.086***	1.076***
		(5.94)	(5.15)
Divorced		0.832***	0.859***
		(–8.11)	(–6.56)
Other		0.658***	0.692***
		(–4.91)	(–4.25)
Number of dependents			
None		1	1
		(.)	(.)
One dependent		1.116***	1.148***
		(8.19)	(10.09)
Two dependents		1.260***	1.313***
		(14.21)	(16.33)
Three dependents		1.317***	1.370***
		(14.39)	(16.04)
Four or more dependents		1.375***	1.426***
		(11.18)	(12.13)

Table B.5—Continued

	(1) Reenlist	(2) Reenlist	(3) Reenlist
AFQT category			
AFQT Cat 1		1	1
		(.)	(.)
AFQT Cat 2		1.054***	1.068***
		(4.87)	(5.96)
AFQT Cat 3a		1.052***	1.113***
		(4.53)	(9.22)
AFQT Cat 3b		1.154***	1.269***
		(12.85)	(20.11)
AFQT Cat 4		1.503***	1.740***
		(19.78)	(25.45)
BMI flag (high or low)			
None		1	1
		(.)	(.)
High		0.846***	0.852***
		(–33.42)	(–31.25)
Low		0.994	1.014
		(–0.45)	(1.12)
Contract term of service			
1 or 2 years			1
			(.)
3 or 4 years			0.987
			(–0.58)
5 or 6 years			0.832***
			(–7.92)
Received bonus			
No bonus			1
			(.)
Received bonus			1.069***
			(11.31)

Table B.5—Continued

	(1) Reenlist	(2) Reenlist	(3) Reenlist
CMF group			
Combat			1
			(.)
Medical			1.540***
			(43.86)
Information Operations			1.316***
			(27.95)
Supply and Maintenance			1.375***
			(46.84)
Administrative and Legal			1.829***
			(43.95)
Other			1.276***
			(36.36)
Deployed in first term			
No			1
			(.)
Yes			2.326***
			(171.91)
Entry paygrade			
E1			1
			(.)
E2			1.193***
			(30.48)
E3			1.330***
			(43.31)
E4 or higher			0.775***
			(–12.49)
Pseudo R^2	0.003	0.017	0.051
Log likelihood	–549,018.2	–539,225.9	–520,849.6

Table B.5—Continued

	(1) Reenlist	(2) Reenlist	(3) Reenlist
chi2	3,154.4	18,812.0	55,487.7
Observations	838,456	834,986	834,921

NOTES: Results are shown in odds ratios with *t* statistics in parentheses.

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

Age-Focused Results

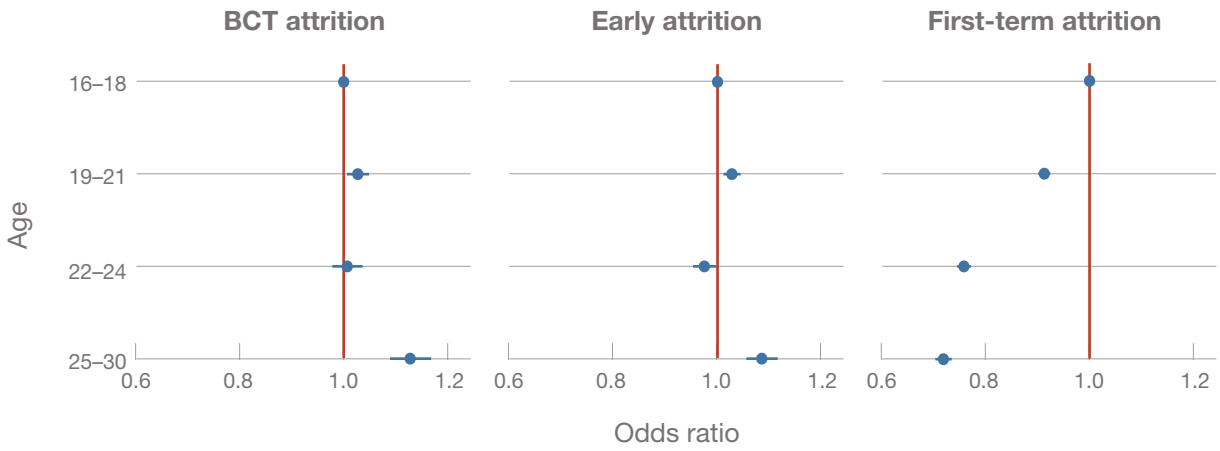
First-Term Attrition Due to Failure to Adapt

To focus on our variable of interest, age, we can refer to Figure B.1, which illustrates the odds ratios for BCT, early, and first-term attrition due to failure to adapt. As noted, since many of the covariates are categorical variables, we choose a category to exclude and interpret the findings relative to that excluded category. In this case, the excluded category is the 16-to-18-year-old age group. An odds ratio of greater than 1 means that this particular category is associated with higher odds of failing to adapt, while an odds ratio of less than 1 indicates that this category has lower odds of failure to adapt compared with the excluded category (age 16–18).

Compared with the 16-to-18-year-old age group, and accounting for a host of other factors, both the 19-to-21 and the 25-to-35-year-old age groups are associated with higher odds of BCT attrition due to failure to adapt. However, the difference is quite small in the case of the 19-to-21-year-old age group (3 percent). Being in the 25-to-35-year-old age group is associated with statistically significant higher odds of BCT attrition compared with the 16-to-18-year-old age group by about 13 percent. Early-term attrition is defined as having occurred in the first six months after accession. When examining early-term attrition due to failure to adapt, we find similar patterns. Compared with the 16-to-18-year-old age group, being in the 19-to-21-year-old age group is associated with 3-percent-higher odds of early-term attrition. The 25-to-35-year-old age group is associated with 9-percent-higher odds of attriting in the early term due to failure to adapt.

Early-term attrition is defined as having occurred in the first six months after accession. When examining early-term attrition due to failure to adapt, we find similar patterns. Compared with the 16-to-18-year-

FIGURE B.1
Attrition Outcomes Due to Failure to Adapt



SOURCE: Authors' calculations based on analysis of TAPDB-AE.

NOTES: Total number of enlisted personnel included is 1,019,892 who enlisted between 2002 and 2017 in the case of BCT attrition and early-term attrition, and 834,921 who enlisted between 2002 and 2014 in the case of first-term attrition. Error bars represent 95-percent confidence intervals.

old age group, being in the 19-to-21-year-old age group is associated with 3-percent-higher odds of early-term attrition. The 25-to-35-year-old age group is associated with 9-percent-higher odds of attriting in the early term due to failure to adapt.

For first-term attrition due to failure to adapt, there are much clearer distinctions between the age groups. Compared with the 16-to-18-year-old age group and accounting for other factors, soldiers in the 19-to-21-year-old age group have 10-percent-lower odds of attriting specifically due to failure to adapt in the first term compared with those in the 16-to-18-year-old age group. Soldiers in the 22-to-24-year-old age group have close to 25-percent-lower odds of attriting due to failure to adapt compared with the 16–18 age group, and soldiers in the 25-to-35-year-old age group have 30-percent-lower odds of attriting due to failure to adapt compared with the 16-to-18 age group. These results indicate that older recruits are less likely than younger recruits to attrite due to failure to adapt.

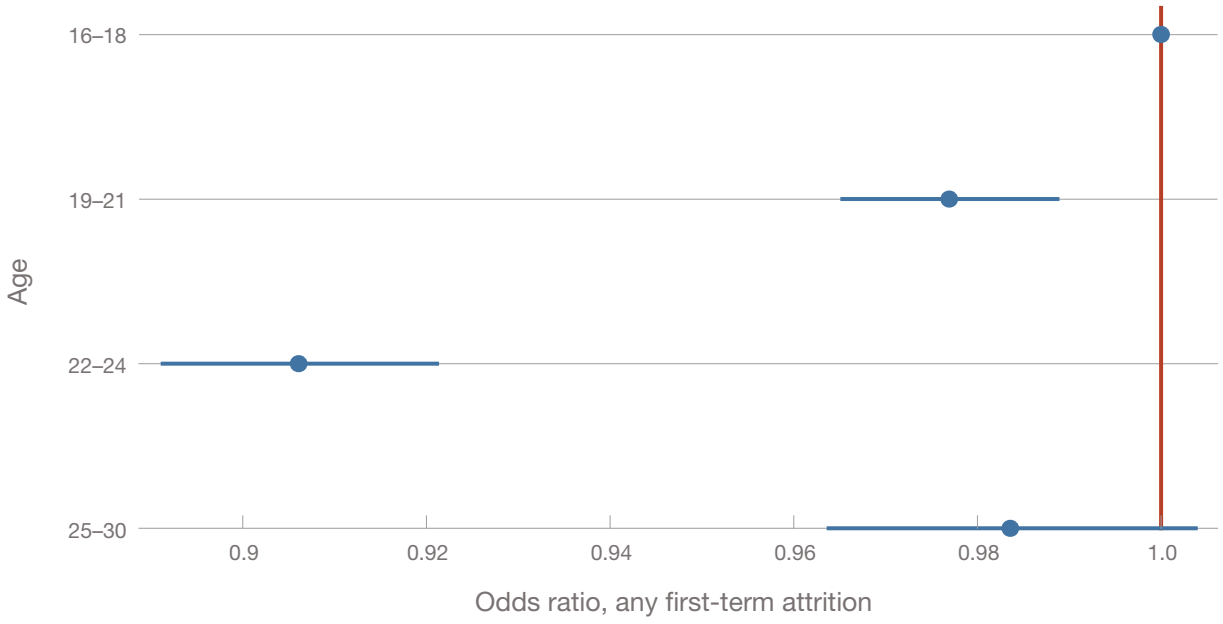
First-Term Attrition for Any Reason

In terms of first-term attrition for any reason, the 22-to-24-year-old age group has a statistically significant 10-percent-lower chance of attriting compared with the 16-to-18-year-old age group (Figure B.2). The 19-to-21-year-old age group has a statistically significant 2-percent-lower chance of attriting compared with the 16-to-18-year-old age group. The difference between the 25-to-35-year-old age group and those ages 16 to 18 is small and not statistically significant.

Reenlistment

In addition to attrition, the Army is also interested in the relationship between age at entry and reenlistment (Figure B.3). To the extent that there are cost savings and skill advantages to reenlistment versus recruiting and training new soldiers, reenlistment offers some significant advantages. Examining the odds ratios first,

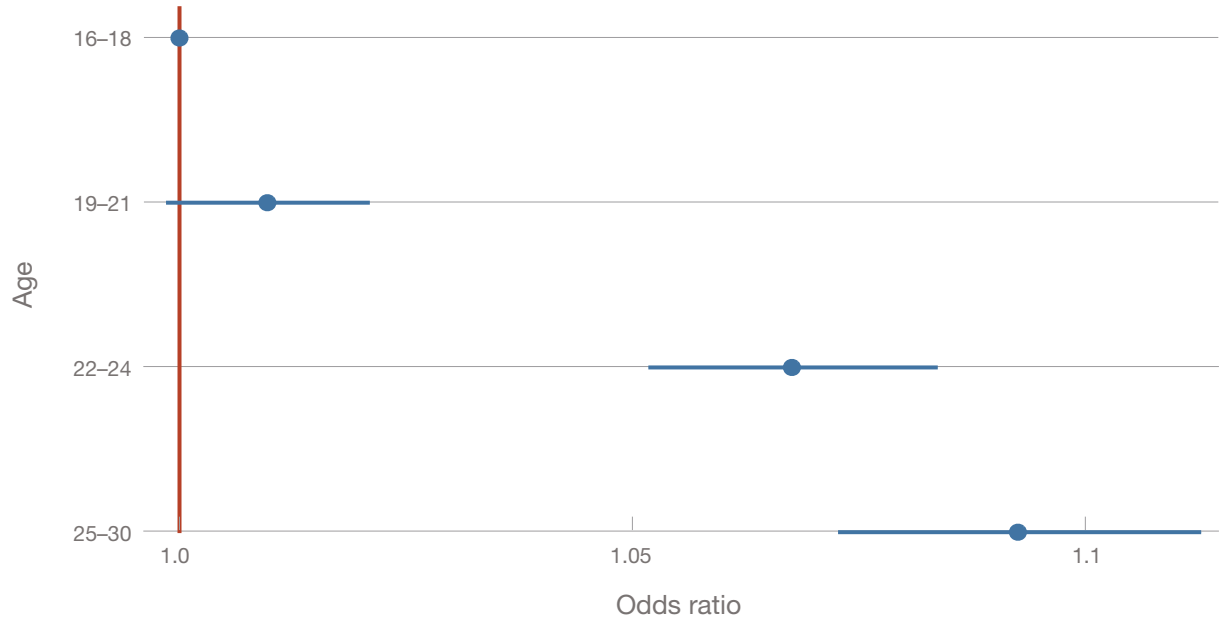
FIGURE B.2
First-Term Attrition Outcomes for Any Reason



SOURCE: Authors' calculations based on analysis of TAPDB-AE.
NOTES: Total number of enlisted personnel included is 834,921 who enlisted between 2002 and 2014 in the case of first-term attrition. Error bars represent 95-percent confidence intervals.

FIGURE B.3

Reenlistment Outcomes, by Age



SOURCE: Authors' calculations based on analysis of TAPDB-AE.

NOTES: Total number of enlisted personnel included is 834,921 who enlisted between 2002 and 2014. Error bars represent 95-percent confidence intervals.

we find that soldiers in the 22-to-24-year-old age group have 7-percent-higher odds of enlistment compared with those age 16 to 18, and soldiers age 25 to 35 years have 9-percent-higher odds of enlistment compared with those age 16 to 18. On the other hand, the difference between the 19-to-21-year-old age group and those age 16 to 18 is not statistically significant.

APPENDIX C

Recruiter Interview Protocol

Background Information

1. Will you please briefly introduce yourself and explain your current position and duties?
2. How long have you been in this role?

Targeting Older Recruits

1. Do you view older youth as a separate group from younger recruits?
   a. Do you do anything differently based on whether they seem older or younger?
2. Are individuals over the age of 21 viewed as a distinct group from the general recruiting population?
   a. If yes, how is recruiting this age group resourced down to the battalions and company recruiters?
3. Are older recruits targeted differently than youth 17–20?
4. How does a typical older age individual get recruited, and how, if at all, does it differ from a 17–20 recruit?
5. Does Army recruiter training incorporate anything toward recruiting youth over the age of 21?

Older Recruit Focus and Challenges

1. What are your experiences with recruiting this population?
2. Does recruiting individuals over the age of 21 pose any particular challenges?
3. Are there any particular challenges your recruiting region faces compared to others?
4. Are there things particular to recruiting the population over 21 that you have learned?
   a. That are of interest to the potential recruit/that they want to know about?
   b. That makes it difficult to get this population?
   c. That you can do to help recruit this population?
5. Are there MOSs individuals 21 and older tend toward versus others?
6. How do you perceive the quality of recruits aged 21 and over?
7. What are the advantages of recruiting older recruits? Disadvantages?
8. Do individuals 21 and over tend to enlist at higher ranks (E-3 or E-4) compared to others? Do you use these incentives (higher grades) to recruit this group?
9. Is Tricare or other family health benefits a bigger incentive for older youth with families?
10. Do more recruits 21 and over seem to drop out or "flake" from the recruiting process as compared with others?
11. Do you encourage recruits with bachelor's degrees to commission or enlist?

Supply and Demand Questions

1. Is there sufficient interest from this target group, or are these individuals not a good match?
   a. Compared to the typical age cohort you recruit, what factors do you think drive older age recruits to look into enlistment? What ultimately pushes them to enlist, or not to enlist?
2. Do you think recruiting resources are not being focused enough on these individuals?
3. How does marketing affect recruiting of this group?
4. Do you think lack of marketing toward this group affects their ability to be recruited?
5. At what types of locations or events are recruiters present? Sporting events, exhibitions?
   a. Do any of these help to target older recruits?

Available Recruiting Tools for Older Recruits

1. Are there tools and materials recruiters utilize specifically for this group?
2. If not, do you think some specifically designed tools or materials that you don't currently have would be helpful? If so, what content and messaging should it contain?
3. Does recruiter training cover this age group?
4. Is there a database used to help capture information about and recruit individuals 21 and over?
5. Do you target college campuses (or other sites) to help recruit individuals 21 and over?
6. Are there any trade schools or 2-year colleges with which you coordinate/affiliate?
7. How do you integrate loan repayment programs and post-9/11 GI Bill benefits into recruiting individuals 21 and over?

APPENDIX D

Additional Army New Recruit Survey Results

This appendix documents additional calculations from data from the New Recruit Survey.

TABLE D.1
Percentage Reporting "A Great Deal" of Discussion About the Possibility of Serving in the Army with Type of Individual

	Age 16–18	Age 19–21	Age 22–24	Age 25–35
Mom	40.3	35.2	33.7	25.3
Dad	31.6	27.0	28.4	20.5
Stepmother	6.6	5.0	5.6	4.2
Stepfather	10.2	9.3	7.2	5.5
Grandparent	13.0	12.7	10.3	7.7
Sibling	19.6	20.4	22.5	17.9
Extended family	11.6	11.8	10.9	9.3
Close friend	28.8	26.2	25.3	22.0
Significant other	21.7	23.5	31.1	40.7
Teachers/counselor	9.1	6.1	4.8	4.2
Community leader	5.1	5.0	4.3	4.8
Army veteran	18.3	17.7	18.6	18.4
Veteran of other branches	15.2	14.9	15.6	16.2

SOURCE: Authors' calculations from analysis of JAMRS, 2017, data.

NOTES: N = 16,953: 7,197 ages 16–18, 5,622 ages 19–21, 2,369 ages 22–24, 1,765 ages 25–35. Response options were *not at all*, *a little bit*, *somewhat*, *a lot*, *a great deal*.

TABLE D.2

Percentage Reporting That the Following People Influenced Their Decision to Join the Army "A Great Deal"

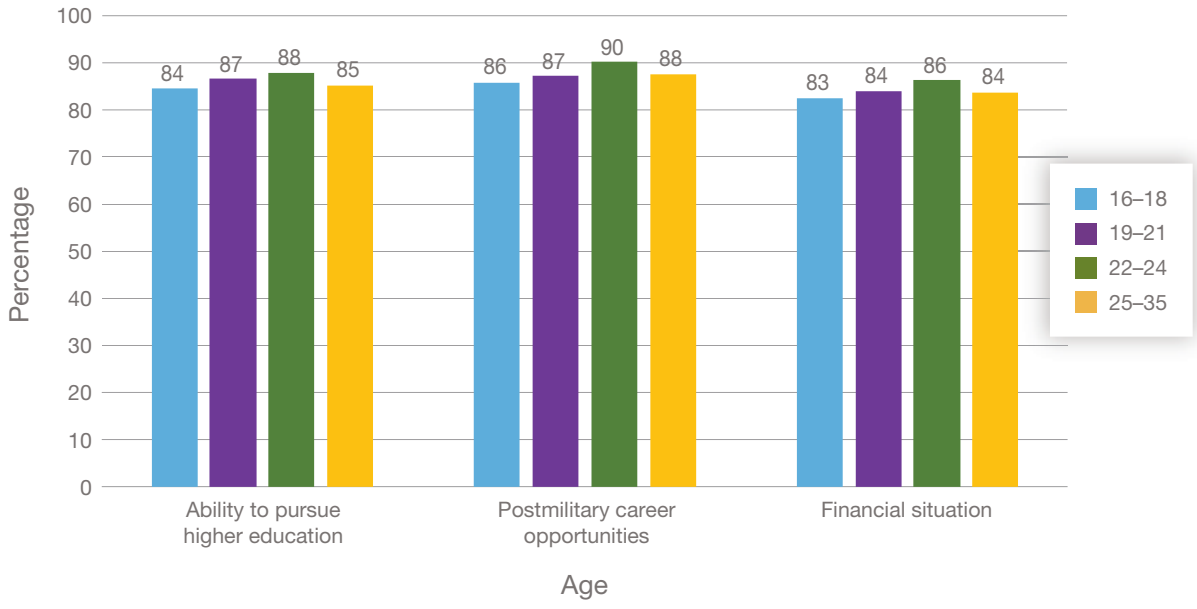
	Age 16–18	Age 19–21	Age 22–24	Age 25–35
Mom	19.8	19.6	19.5	14.1
Dad	18.9	17.9	18.4	13.4
Stepmother	4.0	3.8	3.0	3.0
Stepfather	6.3	6.6	4.8	4.5
Grandparents	10.1	11.0	8.5	7.5
Sibling	10.7	12.8	13.5	11.7
Extended family	9.6	9.5	8.5	7.9
Close friends	12.2	13.3	12.3	11.9
Significant other	9.3	12.7	18.7	22.7
Teachers/counselors	5.9	4.7	3.7	3.5
Community leaders	3.7	3.8	3.6	3.6
Army veterans	16.3	14.7	14.4	14.2
Veterans of other branches	13.5	12.8	13.1	12.8

SOURCE: Authors' calculations from analysis of JAMRS, 2017, data.

NOTES: N = 16,953: 7,197 ages 16–18, 5,622 ages 19–21, 2,369 ages 22–24, 1,765 ages 25–35. Response options were *not at all*, *a little bit*, *somewhat*, *a lot*, *a great deal*.

FIGURE D.1

Percentage Reporting That They Think Their Time in the Army Will Have a Positive Effect on . . .

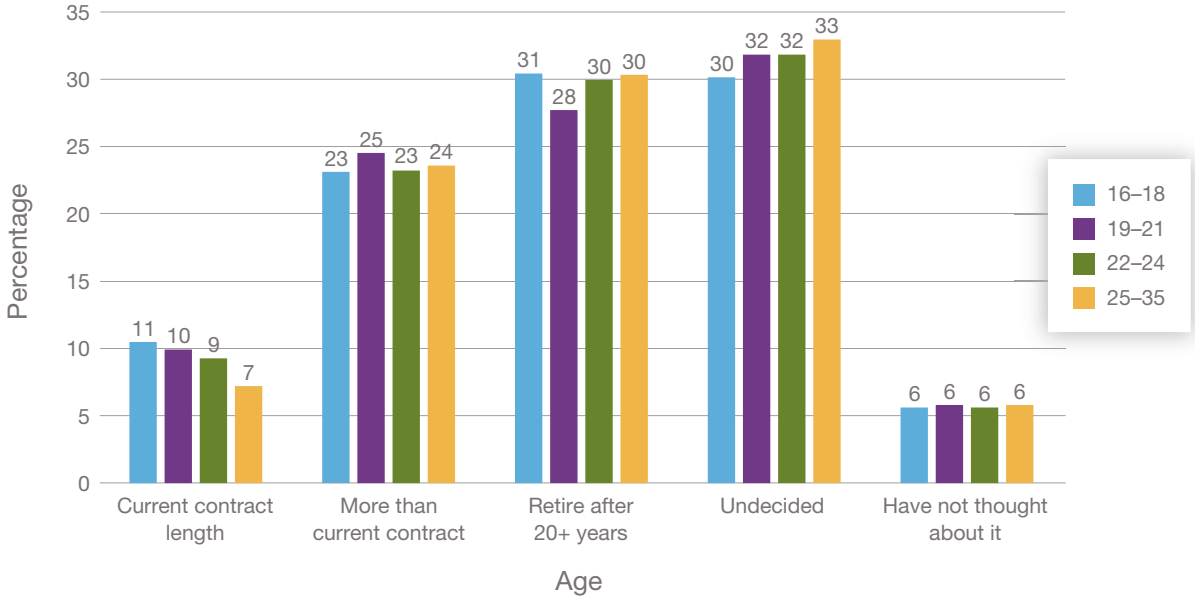


SOURCE: Authors' calculations from analysis of JAMRS, 2017, data.

NOTES: *N* = 16,953: 7,197 ages 16–18, 5,622 ages 19–21, 2,369 ages 22–24, 1,765 ages 25–35. Response options were *positive impact*, *no impact*, *negative impact*.

FIGURE D.2

Anticipated Length of Service in the Army



SOURCE: Authors' calculations based on analysis of JAMRS, 2017, data.
NOTE: *N* = 16,953: 7,197 ages 16–18, 5,622 ages 19–21, 2,369 ages 22–24, 1,765 ages 25–35.

APPENDIX E

Focus Group Discussion Guide

Prospective Questions for U.S. Army Enlisted Service-Members, 21 or Older

Section I: Background Questions (10 minutes)

Notetakers: align with assigned numbers, clockwise or counterclockwise

- What is your MOS?
- What is your current rank?
- How long have you been in the Army?
- At what age did you join the Army?

Section 2: Motivations (30 minutes)

What did you do before joining the military?

- Satisfaction with pay, work environment?
- Did you consider alternatives outside of the military?
- What were some of the most important factors that drove your decision to join the army?
- Did the state of the overall economy influence your decision?
- If you were married and/or had children at the time of your enlistment, did your family's situation affect your decision to join the military?

Why did you choose the army over other forms of military service?

- Interest in a particular MOS?
- Did you speak to recruiters from other branches?
- Did the army offer unique benefits through enlistment? Did you sign a special contract guaranteeing airborne training or special operations selection?
- Are other members of your immediate or extended family veterans or current service-members?

Did you have any concerns about enlistment at your age?

- Did the army clarify the physical requirements surrounding initial entry training? Did recruiters help prepare you for them?
- Were physical training requirements a concern for you?
- Did you have any concerns about integrating with younger recruits?
- (For those who completed college) Why did you choose to enlist instead of pursuing officer candidate school?

- Did the army's student loan repayment program influence your decision?
- Was the MOS that interested you closed to entry-level officers?
- Is there something about the enlisted route that seemed more attractive than officer training?
- Were there other programs or benefits offered to you that drove your decision?

Section 3: Experiences (20 minutes)

Did your age affect your experience during initial entry training?

- Did age differences make you feel distinct from your counterparts?
- Did your age present any advantages (student leadership)? Disadvantages?
- Do you feel you were treated differently by training cadre because of your age?

Do you feel your age or experience has impacted your service since initial entry training?

- Do you feel age or prior life-experience has affected your promotion schedule?
- Have you had any issues with fitness tests since initial entry training?
- Do you feel separate from younger colleagues, especially those with comparable rank?
- Does your unit's leadership treat you differently because of your age?

Do you feel your age, experience, or background affects your ability to perform your duties in your current MOS?

- Did you have any technical training prior to your enlistment?
- Did you pursue post-secondary education prior to your enlistment?
- Have any skills or knowledge obtained before enlistment helped you in your current role?
- How would you define your current MOS? Is it heavily technical? Physically demanding?

(For those with deployments) *Do you believe your age or circumstances impacted your deployment(s) in ways that were distinct from younger soldiers?*

- Did you have family considerations that perhaps did not affect younger members of your unit?
- Were you deployed to a combat zone? Do you feel age in any way affected your ability to perform in that environment?
- Did experience obtained outside the Army help to mitigate the effects of your deployment?
- Do you feel that age affected your post-deployment decision-making compared to younger soldiers?

Section 4: Future Plans (15 minutes)

How likely are you to remain in the Army?

- What do you feel are the biggest drivers behind your decision to stay or leave?
- Are you considering leaving the army for another military branch? If so, which?
- How has the army incentivized your reenlistment?
- Has your family influenced your decision to either remain or leave the Army?

For those who plan to stay in the military . . .

- How likely are you to remain in your current MOS?
- If you are reclassing, which MOS do you plan to join?
- Do you have any ambitions to become an officer?
- What aspects about service do you think are worth reenlistment?

For those who plan to leave . . .

- Do you have any desire to pursue educational opportunities outside of the military? Do you plan on using the GI Bill?
- What about army life drove you away from reenlistment?
- What professional opportunities are you considering outside of the military?
- Did your age impact your decision to ETS [expiration—term of service]?
- Is there any chance you would return to the army, perhaps in the reserves? The National Guard?

Section 5: Overall Impressions (15 minutes)

Overall, do you feel your age has impacted your experience in the Army?

- If so, are there any reasons not previously asked about that have affected your service?
- If not, do you feel there are any specific characteristics, skills, or qualities that may have helped mitigate or neutralize any age differences between you and other recruits?
- Do you feel the army—from your recruiter to your current unit's leadership—has done anything to exacerbate or ameliorate any age differences between you and your colleagues?

APPENDIX F

Table of Military Occupational Specialties

Table F.1 displays the job titles correlating to the MOS codes of participants in the focus groups.

TABLE F.1
Army Military Occupational Specialties Represented in the Focus Groups

MOS Code	Title
11B	Infantry
11C	Indirect fire infantry
12B	Combat engineer
12D	Diver
12N	Horizontal construction engineer
13B	Canon crewmember
15P	Aviation operations specialist
15T	UH-60 helicopter repairer
15U	CH-47 helicopter repairer
19D	Cavalry scout
19K	M1 armor crew
25N	Nodal network systems operator-maintainer
25U	Signal support systems specialist
35F	Intelligence analyst
42A	Human resources specialist
68W	Combat medic specialist
88M	Motor transport operator
89B	Ammunition specialist
91A	Ordnance officer
91B	Wheeled vehicle mechanic
91E	Allied trade specialist
91F	Small arms/artillery repairer
91M	Bradley fighting vehicle system maintainer
92A	Automated logistical specialist

Military Occupational Specialty (MOS) Code	Title
92F	Petroleum supply specialist
92G	Culinary specialist
92W	Water treatment specialist
92Y	Unit supply specialist

SOURCE: U.S. Army, "Find Your Match," online quiz, updated July 1, 2020b.

Abbreviations

AFQT	Armed Forces Qualification Test
AIT	Advanced Individual Training
ARC	Army Recruiting Course
ASVAB	Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery
BCT	Basic Combat Training
BDE	brigade
BMI	body mass index
BN	battalion
CDR	commander
CMF	Career Management Field
COVID-19	coronavirus disease 2019
CPT	captain
DA	Department of the Army
DEP	Delayed Entry Program
DoD	U.S. Department of Defense
DOTMLPF-P	Doctrine, Organization, Training, Materiel, Leadership, Personnel, Facilities, and Policy
FY	fiscal year
HQDA	Headquarters, Department of the Army
JAMRS	Joint Advertising Market Research and Studies
LRP	Loan Repayment Program
MEPS	Military Entrance Processing Station
MOS	Military Occupational Specialty
NCO	noncommissioned officer
OCS	Officer Candidate School
PCS	permanent change of station
POC	point of contact
PT	physical training
RA	Regular Army
ROI	return on investment
ROTC	Reserve Officer Training Corps

TAPDB-AE	Total Army Personnel Database–Active Enlisted
USAREC	U.S. Army Recruiting Command
VRT	virtual recruiting team
XO	executive officer

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RAND ARROYO CENTER

The Army is facing an increasingly difficult recruiting environment. Although the Army has traditionally focused most of its recruiting efforts on high school diploma holders ages 18 to 24, a 2014 RAND Corporation report suggested that, as a group, older recruits score higher on enlistment qualification tests than those who join before age 20, have attained higher levels of education or have greater life experience, and, once in service, are more likely than younger recruits to reenlist and to be promoted.

In this project, sponsored by the Assistant Secretary of the Army for Manpower and Reserve Affairs, a team from the RAND Arroyo Center examined the potential for recruiting individuals above the age of 21, identified barriers to recruitment, and proposed strategies for addressing those barriers. The authors analyzed the issues from both the supply and demand perspectives to derive an actionable set of recommendations for ways to improve recruitment among older individuals.

It is important to acknowledge that this research was conducted in fiscal year 2019 prior to the COVID-19 pandemic; while the authors provide comments throughout on issues and recommendations on which the pandemic may have a substantial impact, pandemic-specific experiences were not the focus of the analysis.

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