

Report on the paper

„The Impact of Military Work Experience on Later Hiring Chances in the Civilian Labour Market. Evidence from a Field Experiment“ by Stijn Baert and Pieter Balcaen

The authors conduct a correspondence test to determine the hiring opportunities of workers with military work experience relative to workers with civilian work experience in the Belgian labour market. To each of 348 vacancies they send two similar (fictitious) applications. Both applicants state two years of relevant work experience, but one applicant has worked in the civilian labour market and the other applicant in the military.

The methodology of this paper is adopted from previous studies such as Bertrand and Mullainathan (AER, 2004) and is widely used in the discrimination literature. The novelty of the study by Baert and Balcaen originates from their specific data set. Accordingly, I think it would be fruitful to provide more information regarding the differences and similarities between the two labour markets.

- I am interested in more details regarding the fictitious job experience (especially w.r.t. to the equivalence of experience in the military and in the civilian labour market) and the experience required by the firms.
- Sorting into the military is obviously not random. The authors acknowledge that, but while they explain in detail how the military is *perceived* by the private sector (which is especially relevant for taste based discrimination), it would be great if the authors could provide more data regarding the actual characteristics/productivity of workers who worked in the military.
- This previous effect may vary a lot between countries (e.g. I would expect that worker characteristics and motivations for joining the military are quite different in the USA than in Belgium). This limits the transferability of the results.
- Does the unemployment rate of workers with military work experience differ significantly from the unemployment rate of workers with comparable civilian work experience?

The authors cannot reject the hypothesis of equal treatment. However, only 76 employers send at least one of the fictitious applicants a positive reply (112 for a wider definition of callbacks). This callback rate is in line with the literature, but a larger sample would have allowed for a deeper analysis of the data set and might have provided fruitful insights: For instance, the advantage of the candidate with civilian working experience seems to concentrate in the applications as electronic technicians (in 8 cases, only the civilian candidate receives a callback, in 4 cases only the candidate with military job experience). Due to the limited sample size, this effect is not significant. I am not quite sure why discrimination should be especially prominent in this sector, but maybe a larger sample could have shed some more light on this issue.

I would also find it worthwhile to test whether firm size has an effect on discrimination. Larger firms usually have a more standardised application process that should reduce the effect of the image of the military discussed in section 2. In general, I would appreciate a more detailed discussion of the job characteristics.

Minor comments:

- It would be helpful if the authors could specify *how* training received in the military environment affects productivity (so *what* do Bryant/Wilhite (1990) and Hartley/Sandler (1995) find?).
- The same holds for the effect of military experience on social capital (Lin 1999, Portes 1998).

Conclusion:

The authors conduct a field experiment to address a relevant issue, the integration of workers with military experience into the civilian labour market. The analysis is well done, but the sample size limits the explanatory power of the study. Given this restriction, I would suggest to revise the paper and especially improve the motivation and deepen the analysis wherever possible.