Effects of Military Experience on Religiosity

Jocelyn Mills (jrbrods@bgsu.edu)
Department of Sociology
Bowling Green State University

Research Questions
• How does having served in the military affect overall religious participation or spirituality?
• Does this association differ by age?

Background
• Past research shows that those aged 25 years and younger who have been in combat as a member of enlisted military service tend to become more religious than they were before the combat (Cesur, Freidman, and Sabia 2018).
• Studies also suggest that those who have served in the military, and especially those who have experienced a traumatic event during their time serving, tend to have a weakened faith compared to what they had before becoming a member of the military (Fontana and Rosenheck 2004).
• Those who have served in the military tend to be more spiritual than those who have never been in the military.
• Those with military experience will have fewer accounts of religious participation than those who have never served.
• These associations will be stronger for younger age groups and weaker for older age groups.

Hypothesis
• Contrary to my hypothesis, those with some military experience are less likely to be spiritual than those with no military experience.
• Differences in having served or not are only significant among those 46 years of age and older.
• Regardless of age, those with some military experience are less likely to participate in religious activities than those who have never served.

Dependent Measures

Spirituality
• Respondents were asked how spiritual they considered themselves to be.
  - Not: 9.9%
  - Slightly: 23.3%
  - Moderately: 38.3%
  - Very: 38.5%

Religious Participation
• Respondents were asked how often they prayed.
  - Never: 15.2%
  - Less than once a week: 9.2%
  - At least once a week: 17.1%
  - At least once a day: 58.5%

Independent Measure

Military Experience
• Respondents were asked if they had ever been on active duty for military training or service for two consecutive months or more.
  - Yes: 9.9%
  - No: 90.1%

Data
• 2016 General Social Survey (N = 2867)
• Representative sample of U.S adults aged 18 and over

Analysis
• Cross tabulation and Chi-square test using SPSS

Results
Figure 1. % Distribution for Spirituality by Military Experience and Age

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Non-veterans 18-45</th>
<th>Veterans 18-45</th>
<th>Non-veterans 46+</th>
<th>Veterans 46+</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Not Spiritual</td>
<td></td>
<td>22.1%</td>
<td>21.7%</td>
<td>35.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slightly Spiritual</td>
<td></td>
<td>37.6%</td>
<td>40.0%</td>
<td>39.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moderately Spiritual</td>
<td></td>
<td>24.3%</td>
<td>25.0%</td>
<td>17.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very Spiritual</td>
<td></td>
<td>15.0%</td>
<td>12.3%</td>
<td>12.6%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 2. % Distribution for Religious Participation by Military Experience and Age

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Non-veterans 18-45</th>
<th>Veterans 18-45</th>
<th>Non-veterans 46+</th>
<th>Veterans 46+</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Never</td>
<td></td>
<td>49.8%</td>
<td>31.1%</td>
<td>68.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less than once a week</td>
<td></td>
<td>18.8%</td>
<td>29.5%</td>
<td>19.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>At least once a week</td>
<td></td>
<td>31.8%</td>
<td>39.5%</td>
<td>19.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>At least once a day</td>
<td></td>
<td>18.8%</td>
<td>25.5%</td>
<td>17.7%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Summary of Findings
• Contrary to my hypothesis, those with some military experience are less likely to be spiritual than those with no military experience.
• Differences in having served or not are only significant among those 46 years of age and older.
• Regardless of age, those with some military experience are less likely to participate in religious activities than those who have never served.

Implications
• Although some research shows that religion helps service men and women recover from trauma, the current analysis suggests that having served in the military seems to weaken overall religiosity.

Resources
• Cesur, R., Freidman, T., & Sabia, J. (2018). Death, Trauma and God: The Effect of Military Deployments on Religiosity. doi:10.3386/w24954