

Obligatory military service in Iran: 21st-century slavery that harms the health of soldiers and society.

Mohammad Reza Shadmand Foumani Moghadam¹

¹Affiliation not available

March 15, 2022

Abstract

The Islamic Republic of Iran is one of few countries that still has an active obligatory military service for 24 months. As far as we know, this is the first study that reviewing Iran obligatory military service, its health and life hazards for soldiers and compare it with slavery. According to “*National Law for Military Service in the Islamic Republic of Iran*”, all male citizens of the Islamic Republic of Iran are obliged to perform military service during war and peace for 24 months. for this purpose and make sure male will join the service, limitation established that deprecate nearly all the citizenship rights if the males refuse to join the army. However, the harmful effects of the current form of military service during the service that put the health of soldiers in high danger can continue after the service, is the other side of this service. in addition, it has a close pattern with slavery in the 18th century that required a significant revise based on a voluntary method that could significantly improve both the morale of soldiers and the socio-economical state of the country.

Keywords: soldiery, depression, health, human right, slave

Introduction

The Islamic Republic of Iran, a strategic historical country in the middle-east with a rich source of minerals and oil, currently is one of the missile power of the world (Graham 2011, Elleman 2015). Because of the political nature of the Islamic Republic, the studies about Iran’s impediment’s structure is limited or lacking but despite its military strength and young population, facing national labour and financial complications as well as sanction and disagreements (Mohammidi 2013, Torabi 2013).

Military service is a complex matter, that changed several times from sixteen century until now (Smith 2012). Military service generally was in the two forms of obligatory during the war and full-time recruitment during peace till World War I in 1908, that show the countries with obligatory military service are more capable to defend that country till the late 1950s that the new method of soldiery that was using well-trained volunteered well-paid introduced by the United Kingdome and the United States (Smith 2012). This new method of soldiery, which was first used during World War II as special forces like Special Air Service (SAS) and US-Marines as well as obligatory shown to be more efficient till 21st century that the new more reliable drones, machines and electronic warfares start to replace the manpower (Smith 2012, Shunk 2015).

However, there are still countries that use obligatory military service law but few of them activate this law (Smith 2012). Some of these countries are Iran, North Korea, Syria, Azerbaijan and Israel that between them only Iran is in military peace since the end of the Iran-Iraq war in 1988 (Smith 2012, Razoux 2015). Unfortunately, in Iran, at least 24 months of military service is obligatory for all males elder 18 years old without any consideration to their educations and career role that is highly related to financial disadvantages, brain escapes, health concerns, ageing of populations and psychological concerns in the Iranian society that confirmed and published by “*The Parliament of Iran*” (Torabi 2013, Mohammad Yazdanpanah 2014).

Despite the well-known harms of this kind of soldiery in Iran for individuals, their families and society, the pattern of soldiery has not changed yet. The aim of the current study is to review the harmful effects of obligatory military service on the health of soldiers, society and economics in Iran and compare it with slavery in the 18th century as one of the first studies that review Iran's obligatory military from this point of view.

Method

The rules related to Iran military service titled “*National Law for Military Service in the Islamic Republic of Iran*” (Farsi: qnwn khdmr wZyfh 'mwmy) that proposed by “*General Staff of the Armed Forces of the Islamic Republic of Iran*” and approved by “*The Parliament of Iran*” on 21 October 1984 for the last time with 7 seasons, 66 articles and 58 notes, fully reviewed (Hashemi 1984). The reviewed rules compared with the process of military service recruiting in this country in 2021 and a randomized interview was made with some soldiers. In addition, to support the complications that soldiers declared, the studies related to soldiers' health, and lifestyle in Iran were considered and reviewed. Because of the sensitivity of military service, in the cases that were no related article about the complaints, the official reports of “*Islamic Parliament Research Center Of The Islamic Republic Of IRAN*” considered as references (Torabi 2013, Mohammad Yazdanpanah 2014).

Result and Discussion

Military service law in Iran :

According to article 1 of Iran military service law (Hashemi 1984), defending the independence and territorial integrity of the Islamic Republic of Iran and the lives, property and honour of the people in the religious and national duty of every Iranian and in the performance of this duty all male citizens of the Islamic Republic of Iran are obliged to perform military service following the provisions of this law (Hashemi 1984). No person included in the military service can be exempted from service except in cases authorized by this law (Hashemi 1984). In article 11 and season 6 (articles 56 and 57) also issued, in times of war and public mobilization, if necessary, those who have used the exemption from the period of emergency service for any reason in peacetime will also be summoned to the service (Hashemi 1984). This while by referring to article 16, all conscripts who enter the emergency service will take an oath of allegiance to the Islamic Revolution, the Islamic Republic, the Constitution, and the Supreme Leader (Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces of the Islamic Republic of Iran) in accordance with the regulations of the Army of the Islamic Republic of Iran (Hashemi 1984).

Again, in article 2-7 and approves by the Armed Force committee, all the males elder 18 years old with no regard to their occupation, educational degree, talents and specialization are obligate to join the Armed Forces of the Islamic Republic of Iran for 3 months of military training and 21 months of services (Hashemi 1984). However, according to season 5 (article 31 to 46) under some conditions could receive military service exemption in Iran like having severe physical or mental diseases (article 39 and 40), having an entirely disabled first-rate family member in the condition of being the only child (article 44), the age more than 48 years old (note 1 of article 4) or still having student condition during education and up to 1 year after graduation (article 31 to 37) (Hashemi 1984). However, there are some pieces of an unofficial report that the “*Armed Forces of the Islamic Republic of Iran*” have not given the exemption to some eligible individuals. For example, in March 2021, it was issued by the government, university graduations from health-related subjects will pass their military services in the hospitals due to the COVID-19 pandemic. But after field investigations it was understood, a comparable amount of nurses, clinical nutrition, clinical laboratory, and public health Master's and Bachelor graduations are deployed at borderlines. They are also a share of evidence that the “*Iran Armed Force*” medical committee denied giving medical exemption approval to some eligible mental or physically disabled individuals that were confirmed by the medical committees of the public hospitals.

Military service Absence consequences :

Despite the lack of any system to follow the absence of males from military service, the Islamic Republic regime, announced a series of limitations for those who will not introduction themselves for military dispatch in article 10 and season 7 (article 58 to 67) (Hashemi 1984). By referring to this article, these individuals are considered absent, and the following activities are banned:

- Receiving any working or health insurance
- Issuance of business license, employment permit and membership in cooperatives.
- Employment in any form of full-time, part-time, contractual, daily wage and service purchase.
- Receive any loans and assistance for agriculture, industry, animal husbandry and housing purpose.
- Registration of any non-compulsory transfer of property directly or indirectly in notaries.
- Receive pensions from government and affiliated organizations.
- Continuing the education inside or outside of country (if was not able to receive a firm offer up to 1 year from graduation from the previous institute, in addition to a ban to study the same level of education)
- Permission to partial or entirely leave of the country for any purpose including education, therapy, vacation, working and etc.
- Participate in driving tests and obtain the driving license (currently suspended for a limited period).

In addition to mentioned limitations, employers or employers of absentees will be punished by paying a fine or other penalty that will be decided. According to the limitations listed above, nearly all the civil rights, even the basic ones, retains from absent individuals that highly could influence their life.

Iran military service in actin :

The “*General Staff of the Armed Forces of the Islamic Republic of Iran*” claims about 180,000 to 250,000 new soldiers (total of 430,000) are required each year except its official employed military forces. this is while the *United States Army*, only have about 190,000 military personnel in Europe, the Pacific, Africa and Middle-east during conflict (Eaglen 2015). On the other hand, Iran only have a 5894km borderline that based on this required manpower means 76 soldiers for each 1km of borders! However, this is without consideration of its official employed military forces that is estimated to be 140,000 to 280,000 personnel. So, what is the main use of this huge manpower? Despite It is not possible to provide any official referable evidence because of both sensitivities of the regime and the importance of military information in Iran, some reports are available that shows except soldiers who are at borderlines, some soldiers are engaged in an occupation that neither related to their specialization nor their rank or the established description for this service. Some of these works that were declared by soldiers are 1. Gardening, 2. Shepherding, 3. Labouring, 4. Footman, 5. Cleaning, 6. Officers personal drivers, 7. Secretary and 8. Doing officers personal jobs like buying groceries, ironing, and taking care of their children. This is while, some soldiers who were at barracks declared, their two-year service is abstracted in daily marching without any specific executive military training. Maybe it could be related to political regards of the regime as one study suggested in states with bigger militaries, regimes have more incentive and capacity for repression (Savage 2017). This is while obligatory military units are not a committed source for this purpose either and their only use is during wars. So, the purpose of having this huge military manpower is still unclear.

Iranian soldiers’ quality of life and salary :

The main reason for individuals to deny this 2 years’ service is the low quality of life in military centres (Torabi 2013, Mohammad Yazdanpanah 2014). In one study and the only available study related to the lifestyle of soldiers in Iran SF-36, a tool to assess the quality of life, shown Iranian soldiers aged 23 ± 3.057 are having a low quality of life (Rezaei Jaberee et al. 2017) that confirmed the current report by “*Islamic Parliament Research Center Of The Islamic Republic Of IRAN* ” (Torabi 2013, Mohammad Yazdanpanah 2014). One of the most important factors of improving quality of life is the income of individuals. There is evidence that the monthly stipend of obligate soldiers is ranged from 2,400,000 IRR (equal to 10 USD) for private to 12,000,000 (equal to 50 USD) for Sergeant in comparison with a minimal established monthly

stipend of 35,000,000 (equal to 145 USD) and expense of 32,000,000 (equal to 133 USD) for each person without accommodation costs by the “*Central Bank of the Islamic Republic of Iran*”. As could be conclude, the salary of a soldier is significantly lower than to even support his own simplest requirements as a master private (PV-3) stated, “the stipend is not even enough for our bus tickets”. This is while the annual income of private in Australia, Germany, Greece, Ireland, New Zealand, Poland, the United Kingdom, and the United States are 32,820, 27,400, 33,600, 9,250, 30,600, 33,200, 11,300, 26,000, and 23,100 USD respectively, according to the each country department of defend published data. In addition, the low quality of barrack environments and dormitories in Iran, in addition to the lack of any welfare equipment could enhance the decreasing the quality of life during military service.

Iranian soldiers Health :

The low quality of life, high-pressure working status, destruction of character, enforcement and very low salary of soldiers could lead to more complicated disorders. As a result of this model of soldiery in Iran, Rezaei Jaberee et.al reported a worrying overall mental health score of 43.70 ± 20.49 , vitality score of $52/12 \pm 22.43$, emotional health score of 52.12 ± 22.43 , communicational health score of 41.58 ± 23.00 and disorder due to emotional health score of 36.14 ± 35.06 (Rezaei Jaberee et al. 2017). Based on the questionnaire Jaberee et.al used, the higher score shows a better situation in individuals while soldiers received only half of these scores which are extremely low for this age (Rezaei Jaberee et al. 2017). In addition to this study, another study with 171 young soldiers in Iran reported 63% of soldiers are suffering from mild or severe depression (Nosratabadi and Halvaiepour 2016). This is while, the high risk of depression in Iranian soldiers during their military service also reported in several other studies (Farsi, JABARI, and Ebadi 2006, Panjehband and Shokraei 2008, Torabi 2013, Mohammad Yazdanpanah 2014). Furthermore, Nosratabadi et.al also reported 28.4% of Iranian soldiers had a suicidal ideology and additionally reported suicidal ideation, depression and drug abuse are relatively significant in Military Medical University soldiers that generally have a significantly better life quality within Iranian obligatory soldiers (Nosratabadi and Halvaiepour 2016).

In addition to harmful mental outcomes, many foundations could put Iranian soldiers at risk of physical health loss as well as mental health. This is while the detrimental relation of mental disorders on general health is already well established (Prince et al. 2007). Also, in addition to psychological risks, soldiers are suffering from low quality of diet, low medical care and low hygiene environment and water during their military service (MEHRABI, ESMI, and KHOUBDEL 2009). This is while the importance of having a healthy adequate diet, having routine medical care, and hygiene environment on improving the health of individuals are well known and established from long-ago (Bartram and Cairncross 2010, Willett 1994, Murphy 1996). As the official reports, one study in 2007, reported approximately 98% of Iranian soldiers are at risk of Hepatitis E virus (HEV) infection within 800 soldiers (GHORBANI et al. 2007). In another study with 247 individuals, the overall score of physical health was $59.35 \pm 17.88\%$ (Rezaei Jaberee et al. 2017). Moreover, The scores for having pain, general health, physical performance and role disorder due to physical health was $56.07 \pm 20.36\%$, $55.43 \pm 17.84\%$, 74.76 ± 20.36 and $51.21 \pm 33.92\%$ respectively that are extremely low for the age of 23 ± 3.057 (Rezaei Jaberee et al. 2017). Another study also noted the length of service during Iran’s military service could put soldiers general health in serious danger (Taghva et al. 2014). Additionally, Farsi et.al with three-hundred and one 21.49 ± 2.02 years old Iranian soldiers also reported a high risk of losing health that could put their lives in danger (Farsi, JABARI, and Ebadi 2006). These findings are also noted in the “*Islamic Parliament Research Center Of The Islamic Republic Of IRAN*” reports (Torabi 2013, Mohammad Yazdanpanah 2014). The conclusion of the published paper are showing Iranian soldiers’ life is at high risk and required immediate attention while no action has been made till now.

Comparison of Iran military service with slavery :

Slavery is a condition in which one human being was owned by another (Kopytoff 1982). A slave was considered by law as property, or chattel, and was deprived of most of the rights ordinarily held by free persons (Kopytoff 1982, Hartman 2012). The cruel golden age of salvatory was between 18 to 19 centuries that slaves became the main source of working labour and economics (Hartman 2012). During this period, slaves generally were combined from defeated nations and colonies, sold by the parents or/and a clan chief

or war prisons (Hartman 2012). During the time this slavery was removed and all people including prisons of war received the right to freely work and be paid (Kopytoff 1982, Hartman 2012). The similarity of obligatory military service with slavery and the importance of civil rights was one of the reasons that this form of service was cancelled or significantly changed (Beattie 2001). However, in 2021, this kind of slavery, named military service is still unchanged in Iran (Beattie 2001). According to the military service absence consequences, males elder 18 years old are not able to work, receive health insurance or any loan that made this groups accept to give the service or occupy burglary works as well as refugee and immigration population. This is while during military serving their health and life is at risk either. During the last few years, a new description for slavery in the modern age was produced based on the old one. According to the new description, slavery is a severe abuse of other people for personal or commercial gain (Kara 2017, Landman and Silverman 2019). This new kind of slavery surrounds us but often is just out of sight (Kara 2017, Landman and Silverman 2019). In this new method of slavery, people unwillingly can become forced to make our clothes, serve our food, pick our crops, work in factories, or work in houses as cooks, cleaners or nannies to provide a reliable source of income (Kara 2017, Landman and Silverman 2019). By relying upon the established description for slavery and the condition of Iranian soldiers, the most import similar factors between slavery and the current military service method in Iran are:

- In both of them, individuals are forced to do things they are not desired.
- The physical health, nutrition and, mental health of both are at high risk.
- Both groups are receiving very high pressure from their holder.
- Both are used as simple labour with no attention to their abilities and skills.
- Both are derived from the simplest civil rights like the right to a fair trial, the right to government services, the right to education, and the right to use public facilities.

By a simple comparison between slavery in the 18th century, modern slavery and the condition of Iranian males obligate to service that was well discussed, the current method of military service in Iran could be considered a kind of slavery between the modern and 18th-century forms of slavery. However, the end of these 2 years is not the end of problems.

After 24 months of military services, now males are able to start their career activity in their own country. In some cases, especially in those who faced health and mental disorder, the therapies may start and has their special condition. But those who pass this condition without any severe outcome, now facing new limitations. The long period between graduation and starting career activity especially in the educated population could be named as one of the important disadvantages of mandatory military service in Iran. There is evidence that shows a long interval between learning and use could lead to entirely or partly losing of learned skills in this population (Mohammad Yazdanpanah 2014). As the report, this condition could affect the master's and bachelor's graduations skills significantly and naturally, the quality and the outcome of work will be lessened (Mohammad Yazdanpanah 2014). Other limitations that were mentioned and linked to this method of military service are brain escapes, increasing the age of marriage, ageing of the population, losing young labour manpower and increasing rate of lower quality employees that long-established by "*The Parliament of Iran*" (Torabi 2013, Mohammad Yazdanpanah 2014).

As far as we, this is the first study that reviews the complications of military service in Iran. Despite the huge negative effect of the current model of military service in this region, the main question is, why does Iran require this huge active military manpower that is not able to support their primary financial, health, nutrition, and life requirements?! One could be related to this abuse from these soldiers as a free source of labour. The other could be related to increasing the international military power statistics that could help in political matters (Savage 2017). However, this question has remained, how can you rely on an enforced army that has a problem in the primary needs that for sure results in low morale within the army that "General Staff of the Armed Forces of the Islamic Republic of Iran" need to answer. For this reason, according to the special financial condition of Iran, we suggest the current form of soldiery being revised to provisional-volumetry model with a significant increase in salary, health, nutrition, and life quality to improve both the soldiers' morals and proficiency as well as productivity of the country.

Conclusion:

The current form of military service in Iran that could be compared with slavery in the 18th century has a harmful effect on the health, nutrition, and depression of individuals as well as destructive association with national society and finance. However, by improving the quality of military centres, salaries, and making a better recruitment system based on voluntary, not only a significantly higher morality within the army will be expected but also a better civilization and national economy will have resulted.

Acknowledgement: First, we want to acknowledge all those braves who are already fighting to change the current form of Iran's military service to professional-voluntary military service as other developed countries. Second, we want to thank the soldiers who help us in gathering the information for this paper who declare to stay unidentified.

Conflict of Interest: there is none to declare. However, the author believes this paper could start a series of changes in the quality and model of soldiery in this region by shouting the unpleasant status of Iranian males.

References:

- Bartram, Jamie, and Sandy Cairncross. 2010. "Hygiene, sanitation, and water: forgotten foundations of health." *PLoS Med* 7 (11):e1000367.
- Beattie, Peter M. 2001. "9. "Tightening Screw" or "Admirable Filter"?: The 1908 Obligatory Military Service Law, 1906–1916." In *The Tribute of Blood* , 207-237. Duke University Press.
- Eaglen, Mackenzie. 2015. *US military force sizing for both war and peace* : JSTOR.
- Elleman, Michael. 2015. "Iran's Ballistic Missile Program." *Iran Primer* .
- Farsi, Z, MOROUEI M JABARI, and A Ebadi. 2006. "General health assessment of Army soldiers seen in a military medical outpatient clinic in Tehran."
- GHORBANI, GH A, Seyed-Moayed Alavian, Ali Akbar Esfahani, and SH ASAARI. 2007. "Seroepidemiology of hepatitis E virus in Iranian soldiers."
- Graham, Robert. 2011. *Iran* . Vol. 29: Routledge.
- Hartman, Saidiya V. 2012. *The time of slavery* : Routledge India.
- Hashemi, Speaker of the Islamic Consultative Assembly - Akbar. 1984. National Law for Military Service in Islamic Republic of Iran. edited by Parliament: The Parliament of Iran and General Staff of the Armed Forces of the Islamic Republic of Iran.
- Kara, Siddharth. 2017. *Modern slavery: A global perspective* : Columbia University Press.
- Kopytoff, Igor. 1982. "Slavery." *Annual Review of Anthropology* :207-230.
- Landman, Todd, and Bernard W Silverman. 2019. "Globalization and modern slavery." *Politics and Governance* 7 (4):275-290.
- MEHRABI, TAVANA A, NA ESMI, and M KHOUBDEL. 2009. "SOLDIERS'KNOWLEDGE ON HYGIENE STATUS IN A MILITARY TRAINING CENTER."
- Mohammad Yazdanpanah, Mehdi Zolfaghari. 2014. Report of the specialized meeting "Current military situation, favorable future conditions". edited by Politics. Islamic Parliament Research Center Of The Islamic Republic Of IRAN.
- Mohammidi, Ali. 2013. *Iran encountering globalization: problems and prospects* : Routledge.

- Murphy, Patricia Aikins. 1996. "Health assessment, health promotion, and disease prevention services." *Journal of nurse-midwifery* 41 (2):83-91.
- Nosratabadi, Mehdi, and Zohreh Halvaiepour. 2016. "A structural equation modeling of the relationships between depression, drug abuse and social support with suicidal ideation among soldiers in Iran in 2015." *Journal of research in health sciences* 16 (4):212.
- Panjehband, M, and M Shokraei. 2008. "Evaluation of depression among soldiers in one resting place of Islamic Republic of Iran Air Force." *EBNESINA* 11 (1):17-21.
- Prince, Martin, Vikram Patel, Shekhar Saxena, Mario Maj, Joanna Maselko, Michael R Phillips, and Atif Rahman. 2007. "No health without mental health." *The lancet* 370 (9590):859-877.
- Razoux, Pierre. 2015. *The Iran-Iraq War* : Harvard University Press.
- Rezaei Jaberee, S, S Abedini, Sh Mohseni, and Z Foladi. 2017. "Quality of life among soldiers of a military unit in Bandar Abbas city, Iran." *EBNESINA* 19 (1):54-56.
- Savage, Jesse Dillon. 2017. "Military size and the effectiveness of democracy assistance." *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 61 (4):839-868.
- Shunk, Dave. 2015. "Ethics and the enhanced soldier of the near future." *Military Review* 95 (1):91.
- Smith, Richard WP. 2012. "Soldiery."
- Taghva, Arsia, Masoud Azizi, Mohammad Hossein Rajabian, Mojgan Khademi, Abbas Omid, Vahid Donyavi, and Seyed Mozaffar Rohani. 2014. "Average Military Service Length and Soldiers' General Health." *J Archives in Military Medicine* 2 (4).
- Torabi, Yousef. 2013. Patterns of future military in the Islamic Republic of Iran edited by Political. Islamic Parliament Research Center Of The Islamic Republic Of IRAN.
- Willett, Walter C. 1994. "Diet and health: what should we eat?" *Science* 264 (5158):532-537.