

Committee: Human Rights 1



Topic: Compulsory Military Service

Key Definitions:

Compulsory

Required by law or a rule; obligatory.

Military service

Time spent serving in the armed forces, especially as a compulsory period for young people in some countries.

Conscription

To force someone by law to serve in one of the armed forces.

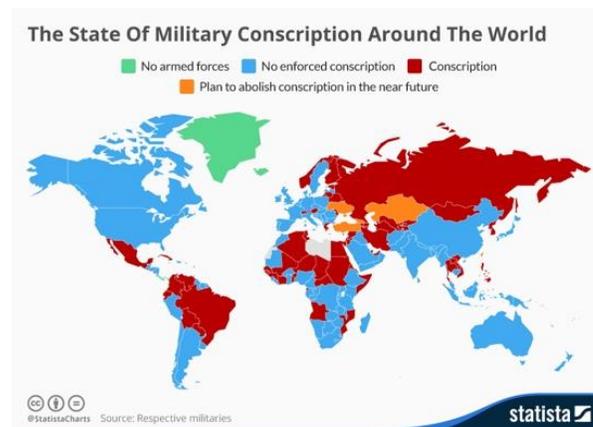
Introduction:

Around 26 countries require some form of military service, and for the majority of these countries it is to enhance its security. Many people see military service as a form of encouraging a sense of national pride and promoting social cohesion. The lack of compulsory military service is thought to increase a nation's susceptibility of internal conflicts and is weaker when faced with external threats. However, military service can put people at risk of their physical and mental health.

In recent times, with an increasing awareness of mental health, compulsory military service has been seen as unjust and unfair due to the effects that service can have on soldiers. In recent research done at the King's Centre of Military Health Research said that military service can contribute to the development of mental health issues. Furthermore, service may become a trigger to underlying conditions, as factors of military service may make soldiers more vulnerable, which can cause people's difficulties to be exacerbated, making them less likely to cope with any military trauma. Not only can military service affect serving personnel but it can also negatively affect their families. Anglia Ruskin University research found that military spouses have lower well-being score than the general population. Furthermore, a study by King's College London found that if a veteran suffered a traumatic event, their spouse is at risk of developing secondary traumatic stress. As serving personnel have no choice of whether or not they wish to serve, this can be seen as a violation of their right to the freedom of thought, religion or belief and conscience and on article 18 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, there is a guarantee to these rights. The right to object military service conscientiously goes along this article, as the obligation to use lethal force may gravely conflict with the right to display one's belief or religion and the freedom of conscience.

Key Statistics:

- Countries with more than one year of compulsory military service: Armenia, Angola, Central African Republic, Chad, Cuba, Eritrea, Equatorial Guinea, Guinea, Guinea- Bissau, Iran, Israel, North Korea, South Korea, Kyrgyzstan, Libya, Mali, Mauritania, Mozambique, Myanmar, Niger, Sao Tome and Principe, Senegal, Singapore, Somalia, Syria, Sudan, Tajikistan, Thailand, Turkmenistan, Togo, and Yemen.
- Countries that have compulsory military service for both men and women: Armenia, Cape Verde, Chad, China, Eritrea, Israel, Norway, North Korea, and Sweden.
- North Korea has a required service of 11 years for men and 7 for women.
- In Laos compulsory military service can start from 15.



Possible solutions:

- In its resolution the Human Rights Council requested, “a report on different approaches and challenges with regard to the application procedures for obtaining the status of conscientious objector to military service in accordance with human rights standards.”
- Make sure the mental health of soldiers is stable before service
 - Doing a mental health check on soldiers may prevent future problems from arising. If they are not stable, they should not serve in the military.
- Ensuring that soldiers have their basic human rights and treated fairly.

Useful Links:

<https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201719/cmselect/cmdfence/813/813.pdf>
House of Commons Defence Committee report on mental health of armed forces.

<https://www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/RuleOfLaw/Pages/ConscientiousObjection.aspx>
United Nations Human Rights report of conscientious objection to military service.

<http://worldpopulationreview.com/countries/countries-with-mandatory-military-service/>