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Donald J. Eberly

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National Information Center
for Service Learning
1954 Buford Ave, Room R290
St. Paul, MN 55108-6197

The Differential Impact of National
Service on Women

By Donald J. Eberly

It is now generally accepted that if the United States establishes a national service program, women will be included. It was not always so. William James, in his 1906 "Moral Equivalent of War" speech at Stanford University, limited participation in national service to young men.

The United States started two large scale youth service programs in the 1930s; the Civilian Conservation Corps was limited to young men, the National Youth Administration --whose participants lived at home-- offered jobs to both young men and young women.

By the time two small scale youth service programs, the Peace Corps and VISTA, were created in the 1960s, the principle of female participation was firmly established. However, the national service proposals of the time tended to treat men and women differently as most such proposals addressed the military draft then in effect. Typically, the proposals suggested that young men could meet their service obligation by performing two years of civilian service, while young women would be admitted to civilian service as volunteers and might serve for only one year. ¹

The National Council of Women of the United States claims to have convened the first conference to concentrate on the role of women in national service in 1967. Seventy-five women, including educators, sociologists, civil libertarians, religious leaders, veterans and pacifists, met for three days to examine national service issues. By unanimous vote, they reached the following conclusions:

1. It was agreed that some form of national service for men and women
 - a- would be of benefit to the nation
 - b- would have special values for the individual
 - c- would strengthen rather than weaken family structures
 - d- and would be a desirable national goal.
2. It was agreed that while compulsory national service might be a necessity in a wartime emergency, the development of peacetime national service should be a voluntary privilege and opportunity, offered to all citizens.²

In 1969, Seventeen magazine did a survey of teen-age females and found that one in three favored a compulsory service program for women, nine out of ten favored a voluntary national service program for men and women, and two out of three respondents would personally volunteer to serve in such a program.³

In 1970, I attempted to gauge the likely effect of national service on young people. Among other things, I concluded that youth unemployment would fall 64% and the marriage rate for 18-21 year old women would fall 7% as some would postpone marriage in order to spend a year or two in national service.⁴

The effect of national service on women would depend on the type and size of national service. The national service model used in this paper is the one favored by the most people, according to nationwide polls, and the one closest to the type of national service that has emerged from several national service study groups in recent years. Its generic name is universal voluntary national service (UVNS).

UVNS would offer service opportunities to all 18-24 year olds. There would be a build-up period of three years, to permit needs to be translated into UVNS openings and to permit orderly administrative development. The All-Volunteer Force would continue on the assumption

that the loss of enlistees to civilian service would be offset by increased enlistments due to a stronger service ethic resulting from the national service program. Should a military draft be reinstated, UVNS veterans would bear the same relationship to it as military veterans.

Civilian service participants would receive a stipend and medical benefits equivalent to the minimum wage. In addition, those who complete a full year of civilian service would receive an education and training entitlement of one year for every year of service. In order to help insure that participants are well utilized, sponsoring organizations would provide training, supervision and a cash payment equal to five percent of the minimum wage. The annual cost to the federal government, including an educational set aside, would be \$10,500. UVNS participants would not replace regular employees.

Various studies and national service test projects suggest a steady state enrollment in civilian youth service of about one in every four young people, with 60% of the enrollees being female. At any one time, there would be 600,000 female participants in a total enrollment of one million.

Although the data in this paper are not taken from a single time period, they are adequate to show the likely effect of a national youth service program in several important areas. Unless otherwise indicated, it is assumed that UVNS has been in effect for at least three years and has reached its steady state enrollment of one million.

Service Needs. The service needs of society are many and varied. Various surveys as well as extrapolations from national service pilot projects suggest a need for at least two million, and more likely three to four million persons working in the kinds of service jobs that young people can do.⁵ An analysis of these studies and experiments suggests the distribution of national service participants given in Table I. The actual activity profile would be determined by the

interaction of the work needing to be done and the preferences of the participants.

Employment. The January 1982 employment profile of 18-24 year old females was as follows:⁶

	Number (Thousands)	Unemployed Rate
In Civilian labor force		
Employed	8,180	
Unemployed	1,410	14.5%
Not in Civilian labor force	5,236	

In ACTION's national service test program in Seattle in 1973, 7 out of 10 participants were unemployed and looking for work while about 15% were employed, generally in jobs in the secondary labor force. The remainder came from outside the labor force. Given these same proportions, the direct impact of national service on youth female employment would be as follows:

	Number (Thousands)	Unemployed Rate
In Civilian labor force		
Employed	8,690	
Unemployed	990	10.2%
Not in civilian labor force	5,146	

The indirect effects of UVNS could reduce unemployment even more as the spending power of participants generated a demand for additional workers. Also, with guaranteed employment available in UVNS, fewer young people could claim that they were actively seeking work but unable to find it.

Those participating in UVNS would also benefit from a year or more of work experience, would have overcome the hurdle of never having had a regular job, and would have a basis for career planning and further education.

While there would be no guarantee of jobs after service, the unemployment rate drop in the Seattle project from 70% to 18% six months after completion of service indicates the differential effect of a year of service.

College Enrollment. National service has a great influence on those who participate. Service in the Civilian Conservation Corps or in World War II was seen by some participants as "the best years of our lives." Many Peace Corps Volunteers compared their experience with college, reporting that they learned more from two years in the Peace Corps than they had from four years in college.

With UVNS in effect, many college bound young people would take the national service detour for a year or two, then go to college with a better sense of what they wanted from higher education. Some would drop out of college to enter UVNS.

There were 3.6 million 18-24 year old females enrolled in college in October 1980.⁷ Assuming they participated in UVNS at the same rate as the general population, some 900,000 would be UVNS enrollees at some time. In a given steady state year, however, colleges would lose no more than 200,000 women to national service. Eventually, this number would be more than offset by women attending college on the National Service GI Bill. During the three year transition period, the number of persons entering UVNS would be smaller (100,000 the first year and 300,000 the second) so the college enrollment losses would be smaller.

The peak net loss to higher education would likely occur in the third year of UVNS, when it might go as high as 4%. By the fourth year of UVNS and attainment of steady state enrollment, net college attendance would begin to increase as a result of the educational motivations generated by a year in UVNS and made possible

by the GI Bill for National Service.

Poverty. The number and percent of 18-24 year old females living below the poverty level in 1979 is given in the table⁸ below:

Race	Numbers (Thousands)	Percent of Cohort
White	1,261	10.3
Black	665	34.3
Spanish Origin	<u>230</u>	<u>24.2</u>
Total	1,975	13.7

National service would draw disproportionately from the poverty population, with an estimated 33% of participants being below the poverty line at the time of entry. With 600,000 female participants, some 198,000 would be below the poverty level. Assuming they were distributed in the same proportion as the female youth population in 1969, and that they would not be in poverty while in national service, the respective poverty groups would be reduced approximately 10%. The table below indicates the likely participation in national service.

Race	Number (Thousands)	Percent of Cohort
White	126	1.0
Black	66	3.4
Spanish Origin	<u>23</u>	<u>2.4</u>
Total	198	1.4

A recent Census Bureau report states that 70% to 80% of female-headed non-white families with children were living in poverty in 1982.⁹ Among white teenagers, the rate of out of wedlock births more than doubled from 1962-1977 while for black teenagers, with higher absolute rates, the rate increased about 16%.¹⁰ It would be of particular interest to determine the extent to which participation in UVNS might replace giving birth as a rite of passage for young unmarried women.

Armed Forces. The Pentagon reports an enrollment of 111,000 women aged 18-24 on active duty in 1982, or about 0.7% of this female age cohort. The Youth Attitude Tracking Study, Fall, 1982 suggests that young women are motivated to enlist by such factors as job enjoyment, money for education, level of income, equality of pay and opportunity for men and women, and serving one's country.¹¹

There is little reason to suggest that UVNS would have a significant effect on female enlistments in the All-Volunteer Force. Given the enlistment standards, the training and experience opportunities, the benefits package, and the preferences of female enlistees, most who enter the Armed Forces could be expected to do so even with UVNS.

Summary. The differential impact of national service on women would be most pronounced in the area of unemployment, with an estimated 30% of the unemployed 18-24 year old females entering national service.

National service would reduce the number of young women living in poverty and would temporarily reduce the number attending college. After a few years, however, the latter number would rise as those who had been in national service utilized their GI Bill for National Service.

In the absence of research findings to suggest either increased or decreased participation by women in the Armed Forces, it is assumed that they would continue to comprise about 9% of the active duty forces.

In other areas of interest, such as the voting rate, arrest rate and incarceration rate, there is insufficient evidence to suggest a particular effect of national service.

On the other side of the coin, it is clear that young women in national service would have a differential impact on national needs. In such fields as education, conservation, health and day care, the youthful participants would contribute significantly to individuals most in need and in so doing, help to meet important national needs.

A program of national youth service would cause a distinct shift away from unemployment and poverty toward useful jobs, work experience, career development and enhanced educational opportunities. In the process, the nation and its neediest people would benefit from the help the 600,000 young women would give them.

Footnotes

- 1) Eberly, Donald J. A Profile of National Service. New York 1966.
- 2) National Conference of Women of the United States, Digest of Proceedings of National Service Institute. New York April 3, 1967.
- 3) Seventeen, National Service Survey (March, 1969) Research Report.
- 4) Eberly, Donald J., The Estimated Effect of a National Service Program on Public Service Manpower Needs, Youth Employment, College Attendance and Marriage Rates. Russell Sage Foundation, New York, 1970.
- 5) U.S. Department of Labor, Assessing Large Scale Public Job Creation. Washington, D.C. 1979.
- 6) U.S. Dept. of Labor, Employment and Earnings February 1982. Washington, D.C., 1982.
- 7) U.S. Bureau of the Census, Characteristics of American Children and Youth, 1980. Table 16. Current Population Reports p-23, No. 114. Washington, D.C. 1982.
- 8) U.S. Bureau of the Census, op cit. Table 48.
- 9) Washington Post "Poverty Rate Rises to 15 Percent." Washington, D.C. August 3, 1983. p.A14.
- 10) Bureau of the Census, Unpublished Computer Output. Population Study 1978. From Martin O'Connell.
- 11) Market Facts, Inc. Youth Attitude Tracking Study Fall, 1982. Arlington, Va., May 1983