

Are prisoners with military mettle more likely to toe the line or cross it?

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The military lifestyle can be one of extremes: the orderliness of regimen and obedience juxtaposed with the chaos of danger and violence.

But is that lifestyle a help or a hindrance when individuals with military backgrounds must face similar extremes in the much different context of prison? It's an interesting question to consider as thousands of men and women return home from duty overseas, many dealing with issues such as [post-traumatic stress disorder](#) (PTSD) or otherwise struggling with the transition to life back stateside.

Research developed by the University of Cincinnati's Matthew Logan shows that, in some respects, former military members make for better behaved prisoners than other inmates. Logan collaborates on this project with Paul-Philippe Pare, an associate professor at the University of Western Ontario. Some funding for this study was provided by the University of Western Ontario.

"My research has been looking at every demographic background that you can think of and making comparisons to others with how the prison experience is," says Logan, a doctoral student in UC's College of Criminal Justice, Education, and Human Services. "There's a lot of anecdotal evidence about people coming back from overseas with PTSD, but there is also anecdotal evidence of military service improving character."

Logan will present his research "Are Prison Inmates with Military

Backgrounds More Likely to Misbehave?" at the American Society of Criminology's (ASC) 69th annual meeting. This year's event will be held from Nov. 20-23 in Atlanta, and the theme is "Expanding the Core: Neglected Crimes, Groups, Causes and Policy Approaches." The ASC and its international membership encourage the exchange of criminological scholarship. Logan's research will be presented Nov. 23.

The research presents two rival hypotheses:

- Prisoners with military backgrounds might be more psychologically damaged than other inmates, and therefore they might fare worse in prison. These inmates might be more hostile toward staff or other inmates. They might be more defiant or more likely to get into altercations.
- Prisoners with military backgrounds might be better prepared for the regimented lifestyle and deference to authority required in prison. These inmates also might have specialized combat training, making it less likely that other inmates will confront them.

Logan and Pare used data from the 2004 Survey of Inmates in State and Federal Correctional Facilities, giving him access to the demographic, socioeconomic and criminal history characteristics of roughly 18,000 inmates. The national survey is designed by the Bureau of Justice Statistics and conducted by the Census Bureau.

Logan and Pare used the survey to compare inmates with and without military backgrounds on 12 behaviors related to deviance and rule-breaking while incarcerated, such as use of drugs or alcohol; possession of contraband; verbal or physical abuse toward staff or other inmates; or placement in solitary confinement. Results suggest that once relevant control variables were taken into account, inmates with military backgrounds were not more likely to misbehave.

"Inmates with military backgrounds were significantly less likely to be sent to solitary confinement - about 20 percent less likely than other inmates. And they were 36 percent less likely to use drugs, and 32 percent less likely to drink alcohol while incarcerated," says Logan, noting that those sent to solitary confinement are generally the most defiant. "When you look at other behaviors, inmates with military backgrounds are not any different from other inmates."

Logan says his research suggests that military training may be a positive influence in the lives of individuals with troubled upbringings or criminal tendencies. The fact that inmates with military backgrounds fare better in prison than other inmates may be an asset for rehabilitation.

Next, Logan is considering getting qualitative accounts directly from some [inmates](#). Interviews with prisoners who were former military members could supplement his statistical analysis.

"Maybe the next step would be qualitative interviews," Logan says. "What you can glean is subject to context, but it's an interesting piece to add to the puzzle. If it's congruent with the results we've already found, it really would serve to illustrate what we're trying to say with our research."

The University of Cincinnati's School of Criminal Justice, housed in the College of Education, Criminal Justice, and Human Services, is ranked among the top programs in the country.

Provided by University of Cincinnati

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