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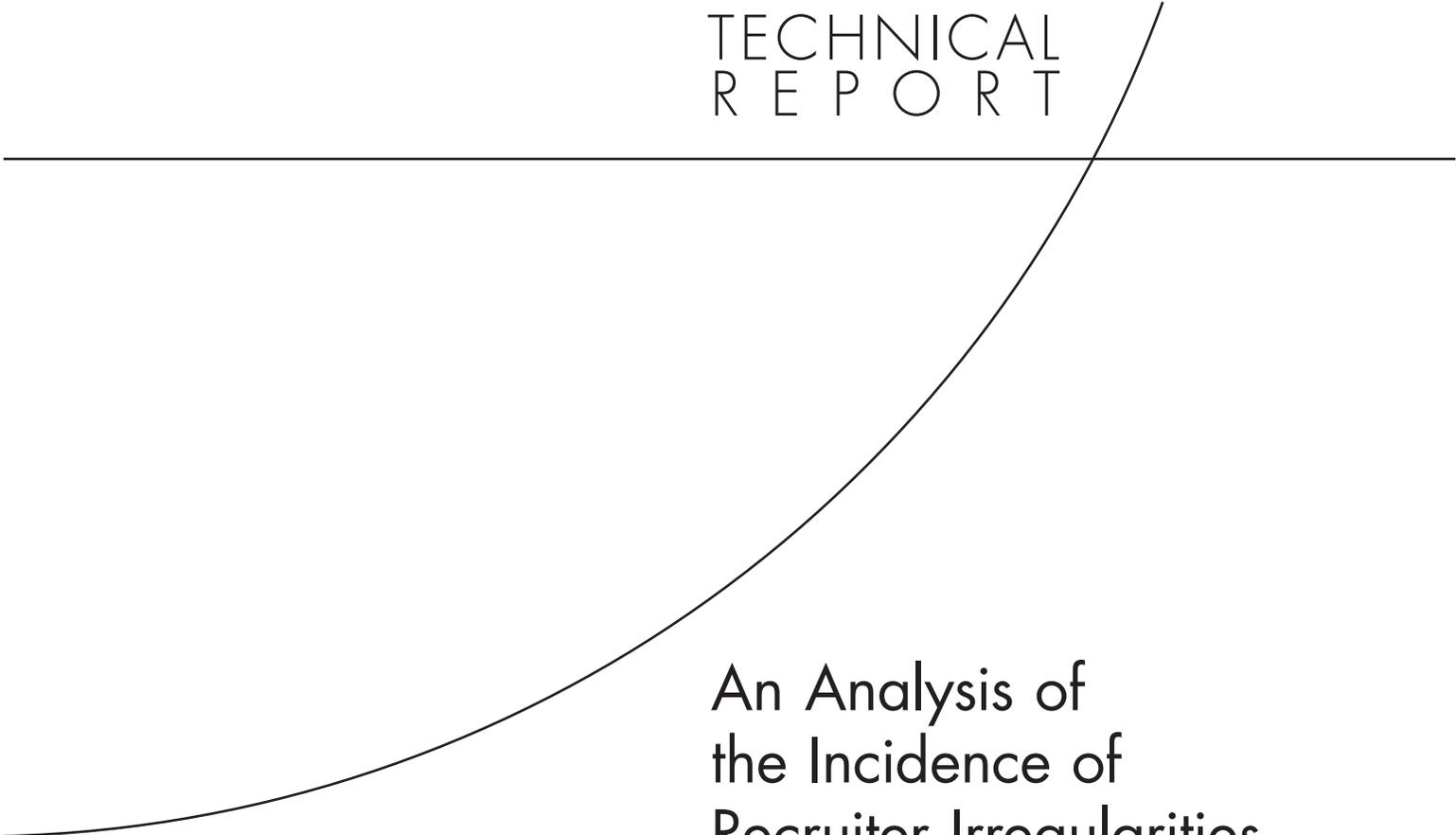
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TECHNICAL
R E P O R T



An Analysis of the Incidence of Recruiter Irregularities

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Prepared for the Office of the Secretary of Defense

Approved for public release; distribution unlimited



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Summary

In December 2006, the Office of the Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness provided the services with guidance on how to track and report incidents of recruiter irregularities. The guidance defines eight categories of irregularity that include criminal misconduct, fraternization, concealment or falsification of information, and testing irregularities. Since then the services have developed and improved their data systems to track and report irregularities following this guidance.

Our report provides tabulations of irregularities using these data systems, provided by OUSD and supplemented with data on accessions and recruiters. These data systems provide information on reported allegations of irregularities, on substantiated allegations, and the category of wrongdoing for each substantiated allegation. In addition, using Army contract data, we compare the characteristics of those signing contracts in the final days of the recruiting month with those signing contracts earlier in the recruiting month. Army recruiters are managed by an incentive and quota system that rewards recruiters for meeting their monthly mission. To the extent that the pressure to meet their monthly recruiting mission results in greater irregularities at the end of the month, and that the differences in the contract characteristics we consider reflect these irregularities, then analyses of differences in contract characteristics at the end of the month relative to characteristics of contracts signed earlier in the month provide an indication of irregularities, at worst, and lax recruiting, at best.

Findings

We find that as a fraction of the total recruiter workforce or as a fraction of the total number of active duty and reserve applicants, substantiated allegations and the number of applicants involved in substantiated allegations are small. Across all four services and all years of the study, the share of recruiters involved in substantiated irregularities never exceeds 3 percent and has fallen since 2007 to one substantiated irregularity per 100 recruiters in 2009. The share of applicants involved in substantiated irregularities is about 1 in every 1,000 applicants or 0.1 percent. Furthermore, most substantiated allegations are related to concealment of disqualifying information rather than criminal misconduct. These findings are consistent with the findings of a recent GAO report on recruiter irregularities (GAO, 2010).

Since it seems unrealistic to expect zero allegations, the results suggest that in general, irregularities are a minor problem, though we acknowledge that we have no external benchmark by which to assess size. Nonetheless, we note that it is quite possible that only allegations that have a relatively high chance of being substantiated are reported, and over time recruiters

may have become more adept at hiding irregularities from detection. Furthermore, given that recruiting is a relatively independent activity, especially for recruiters assigned to one-person stations, where it is difficult to substantiate an allegation, it is possible that our tabulations of substantiated allegations seriously undercount actual irregularities.

Turning to Army contract data, we find evidence of poorer screening of recruits at the end of the recruiting month. Specifically, we observe a 10-percent higher incidence of obesity, a 30-percent increase in low fitness ratings, and a 49-percent increase in waivers among contracts signed at the end of the recruiting month relative to those signed earlier in the recruiting month. Because of the need to balance the flow of contracts at each Military Entrance Processing Station over the calendar month, the end of the recruiting month for the Army does not coincide with the end of the calendar month. Because applicants likely have no specific reason to sign a contract at the end of the recruiting month and if all applicants are handled equally, applicant characteristics should be randomly distributed across days in the recruiting month. Any pattern that suggests some characteristics are more prevalent at the end of the recruiting month is thus an indication of recruiter, rather than applicant, behavior.

We also find that the incidence of contract cancellation for fraudulent enlistment is low but is, nevertheless, 50 percent higher (2.7 percent) among contracts signed at the end of the month. Furthermore, contracts signed at the end of the recruiting month are more likely to be renegotiated and are less likely to lead to an accession.

We also consider some longer-term outcomes to explore whether those signing contracts at the end of the month have poorer subsequent performance in the Army than those contracting earlier in the recruiting month. We observe minimal differences in persistence across the two groups, using several measures of persistence, including early separation, total days of service, and separation prior to the end of the original term of service. Court-martials and poor performance discharges also occur at similar rates across the two populations, but bad conduct discharges are 4 to 5 percent more common among those signing at the end of the month. Thus, the analyses suggest that recruits signing at the end of the month, when poorer screening is presumably greater, do not necessarily leave sooner than other recruits, but they may adversely affect readiness through poor conduct. We do not know the extent to which poor conduct by these recruits adversely affects the morale and performance of their peers, takes up a disproportionate amount of time by drill sergeants and training instructors for disciplinary action, and generally has a negative effect on unit cohesion.

While GAO suggests that one reason for a higher incidence of irregular contracts at the end of the month is the pressure on recruiters to meet their missions during a time of war, we observe no obvious increase in indicators of possible irregular recruiter behavior or less stringent screening when we compare contracts executed before and after the beginning of the Iraq war. One potential explanation for our result is that the Army's contract goal declined faster than the number of production recruiters during the initial phase of the war, reducing production requirements and thus the incentive for the average recruiter to seek marginal recruits. Because we do not formally investigate factors, other than the recruiting calendar, that influence recruiter behavior, we offer this only as a hypothesis.

Drawing upon our contract analyses, we describe a method for computing a range of estimates of the overall extent of unreported irregularities in the Army. Ultimately we do not know whether the higher incidence of bad conduct discharges for contracts signed at the end of the month represents a large change in recruiter behavior at the end of the month coupled with a small impact of this behavior or whether it represents a small change in recruiter behav-

ior combined with a large impact of lax screening on bad conduct discharges. However, for the most plausible ranges of values for these two variables, the implied overall rate of irregularities in the Army ranges from 1 to 9 percent of contracts. Although this analysis is not fully conclusive, it suggests that even with better data covering unreported irregularities, we would still arrive at the same basic conclusion that irregularities are relatively uncommon. At the same time, the true incidence of irregularities in the Army may be above that which is indicated by tabulations focusing solely on reported or substantiated irregularities.

Recommendations

Because of differences in how the services track and report irregularities, we recommend that OUSD refine the guidance it provides the services. Specifically, it should provide more details about how to report situations in which multiple recruiters are involved in a single allegation and when a given recruiter is involved in multiple categories of allegations at a point in time. Also, the services seem to use different criteria for determining whether an allegation is serious enough to report, because about half of allegations in the Air Force and Marine Corps were substantiated in 2007 and 2008 but far fewer allegations are substantiated in the Navy and Army. OUSD should therefore provide more guidance on how the services should determine whether an allegation is serious enough to report.

OUSD might also define subcategories of “concealment and falsification,” the most common category of irregularity. Currently, it is unclear what information is concealed or falsified, and so it is difficult to identify what aspects of the enlistment process require greater oversight or possible reengineering.

We explored merging information from the irregularities databases with data on contracts and recruiters for the Navy and Army. Combining data from the improprieties database with other data sources is likely to provide the Office of the Secretary of Defense and the services with greater insights into the circumstances that lead to improprieties than analyses of the improprieties databases alone. We therefore recommend that the services continue efforts to ensure integrity of the databases used to track irregularities, which would facilitate such linkages.

Finally, our analyses of the quality of applicant screening over the recruiting month provide a provocative but ultimately incomplete view of this feature of the recruiter management system. Although our analyses suggest that the recruiter incentive programs and quota systems may lead to undesirable behavior by recruiters, they also facilitate greater recruiter production of high-quality enlistments. Furthermore, some of the marginal recruits may ultimately be successful soldiers and citizens. Thus, even if the current management system leads to some recruiter misbehavior, the benefits of these systems may outweigh their costs. Further research is needed to illuminate the tradeoffs between effective recruiter production incentives and the potential for inappropriate behavior in response to those incentives.