

UDC: 355.231/.237(497.11)
DOI: 10.5937/pnb29-58317
Original scientific paper

The Policy of National Security
(Политика националне безбедности)
Year XVI vol. 29
No. 2/2025
pp. 97-120

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QUALITATIVE INSIGHT INTO FACTORS OF ENROLLMENT IN MILITARY HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS IN THE REPUBLIC OF SERBIA***

(Translation in *Extenso*)

Abstract

This paper explores the factors that influenced the decisions of cadets at the Military Academy (MA) and the Faculty of Medicine at the Medical Military Academy (MF MMA) to enroll in military higher education institutions (HEIs) in the Republic of Serbia. The research aimed to identify, through qualitative analysis of focus group responses, the reasons and motives behind cadets' enrollment decisions and their reflections on those decisions. The theoretical framework of this paper is based on empirical research findings and theoretical considerations regarding the factors and models of HEI selection applicable to both civilian and military contexts. The research was conducted on a sample of 32 cadets, and the data were sorted and analyzed through ten thematic categories. The results reveal that the decision of cadets to enroll in military HEIs in the Republic of Serbia was shaped by a complex mix of

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*** The research was conducted for the purpose of completing a doctoral dissertation.

social, institutional, and economic factors, many of which have already been identified in relevant scientific literature. The insights gained from this study can provide a foundation for developing an instrument for future quantitative research and refining higher education institutions' communication strategies.

Keywords: Military Academy, Faculty of Medicine of the Military Medical Academy, cadets, HEI choice, military profession, focus group.

INTRODUCTION

At the end of the seventies and the beginning of the eighties of the 20th century, in the context of accepting the marketing orientation as a model of institutional development of tertiary education institutions, it was noticed that the surrounding factors, which influence the business orientations worldwide, unavoidably and unequivocally impact them (Vrontis, Thrassou and Melanthiou 2007, 979). Higher education started being perceived as "goods" or "services" offered to potential students, i.e., "buyers" or "clients". In this sense, universities adopted marketing in response to the following challenges: financial sustainability, increased competitiveness, globalization, and the perception of education in the sense of its market value (Maringe and Gibbs 2008, 29–43; 60). For higher education institutions to be able to develop efficient marketing strategies and position themselves strategically, they must understand the factors and recognize the legitimacy of decision-making processes among future students.

Although numerous research dealing with theoretical conceptualizations and empirical research on factors and models of choice of civilian higher education institutions (HEIs) have been published in the previous decades, in scientific literature, there is almost a complete absence of analyses relating to military higher education institutions (see Hemsley-Brown and Oplatka 2015; Paulsen 1990). The only empirical research identified in relevant databases refers to the choice of the Military Academy in the Republic of Türkiye, while in Serbia, research systematically dealing with this topic is not known (see Balik and Başpinar 2022). We are speaking of a deficiency that indicates a need for new, scientifically founded insight into the nature and dynamics of

decision-making among the youth who opt for the officer calling by enrolling into the Military Academy (MA) and the Faculty of Medicine of the Medical Military Academy (FM MMA), which is the key research problem of this paper.

During the significant reform of the higher military education in Serbia in the first decade of this century, the key determinants were the following: normative and doctrinal assumptions, educational determinants (above all, the Bologna declaration), defining the profile of an officer and previous results of research of the military education system (Marček i Jeremić 2009, 182–183). By adjusting to the demands of Bologna, the military higher education institutions (MHEIs) in the Republic of Serbia made a huge step towards integration into a unique educational system and, with their civilian counterparts, they compete in the “educational market” with the inevitable need for understanding and anticipating the current challenges of competitiveness. The question of opting for the MHEI holds specific significance in light of generational changes and the specifics of Generation Z, whose communication habits, values, and career preferences significantly deviate from the previous generations (see Turner 2015; Perić, Mamula-Nikolić and Delić 2020). The youth today place great value on stability and job security. At the same time, they expect flexibility, room for advancement, and respect for personal values, which in many respects does not fit into the strict hierarchy and structure of the military system (Savić, Lazarević and Grujić 2023, 130–132; Deloitte n.d.).

The subject of this research is the factors influencing the decision of young people to enroll in MHEI in the Republic of Serbia, with a special reference to their subjective interpretations of motivation and evaluation of their own decision on enrollment. The research is directed towards understanding the determinants in the decision-making process regarding enrolment and the meaning the youth gives to military education as the initial step in the forthcoming career of an officer.

This paper aims to identify and interpret the reasons and motives that influenced the MA and the FM MMA cadets to enroll in MHEI through a quantitative analysis of the focus group results and to offer insight into their satisfaction with that decision. The results presented in this paper offer a basic insight into the reasons for choosing these specific institutions and represent a foundation for the continuance of empirical research in the following, quantitative phase.

The analysis is based on two interrelated and complementary aspects: the reasons and motives of cadets for enrollment on one side and their satisfaction with the decision made on the other. In this way, it is possible to examine the factors that could influence the decision of young people to opt for a military career through education at the MHEI and compare them with the results obtained through scientific research in the field of choice of civilian and military HEIs.

METHODOLOGY

The focus group method was used for conducting the qualitative research. Contrary to a group interview, its methodological predecessor, in a focus group, focuses on the interaction among participants (Merton 1987, 556–557). According to Kitzinger (1994, 122), focus groups are “a form of group discussions organized for researching a defined set of questions. The group is focused on some form of collective activity. Most importantly, the focus groups differ from the broader category of group interview by explicit use of group interaction as research data” (Stalmeijer et al. 2014, 1). In a focus group, the moderator (or interviewer) directs the discussion to a specific topic or a set of questions, inciting participants to exchange opinions. Focus groups are often used in early phases of research to identify patterns in participants’ responses, which could be used as a foundation for developing hypotheses to be confirmed or discarded through quantitative research (Merton 1987, 558). Bearing in mind the fact that, in the available literature, there is no applicable and scientifically verified instrument (scale) used for examining the influence of different factors on opting for the MHEI and that, when speaking of civilian HEI, the factors are examined in the literary as contrasted to social, economic, political or geographic (regional) context. In the given example, qualitative research enables the identification of five variables that will provide a broader insight into this issue and create a basis for the quantitative phase of empirical research.

The research on which this paper was based was conducted in April 2024 based on the consent of the University of Defense rector, the head of the Military Academy, and the Dean of the Faculty of Medicine of the MMA. A mixed group of 32 cadets was formed: 20 from the Military Academy (twelve males and eight females) and twelve from the Faculty of Medicine of the MMA (four males and eight females), evenly distributed according to their study years. The Command of the Cadet

Brigade ensured cadets' participation with different academic success and territorial origin, per the statistical regions of the Republic of Serbia.

During the focus group, the participants were informed that they were expected to name the decisive reasons regarding their decision to enroll in the military HEI. In the first round of giving statements, the cadets were offered the possibility to present one or two main reasons or motives. Afterwards, interaction within the focus group was encouraged, which took place in a constructive and encouraging atmosphere since a certain number of cadets were reserved and sparse in their responses during the first statement. After presenting the reasons and motives for opting for the MHEI, the discussion was initiated on satisfaction with the decision to enroll in MA and FM MMA. The responses and statements of participants were recorded in the previously prepared table form and afterwards classified into thematic categories. By the previously examined literature, they were prepared for further qualitative analysis.

RESULTS

After the systematization of data acquired from the chosen group regarding the question on the reasons that were determinant for their decision to enroll into the Military Academy, that is, the Faculty of Medicine of the MMA, a total of 34 different answers were acquired, all presented and ranked in Table 1 in accordance to the type of MHEI, gender and in total (the values are presented in %, for more straightforward interpretation, are rendered whole). The majority of answers/reasons (12) were mentioned up to four times. Six responses have a score of 5, the highest score simultaneously, while three statements, that is, reasons, were mentioned only once.

Table 1 – Ranking of responses of the focus group to the question of reasons that were determinant for opting to enroll in MA and FM MMA according to frequency

R	Response	MA		FM MMA		M		F		?	
		N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
1	Support of parents.	2	10	3	25	3	19	2	13	5	16
2	Officers “enjoy” high social status.	2	10	3	25	2	13	3	19	5	16
3	In military schools, you develop the ability to overcome all challenges (both personal and professional).	2	10	3	25	3	19	2	13	5	16
4	Military schools have the advantage compared to civilian ones due to special skills acquired at them - driving test is passed, certificate of foreign language proficiency is obtained, cadets learn to ski, etc.	2	10	3	25	3	19	2	13	5	16
5	People who graduate from the Military Academy or the FM MMA are more mature and ready for life than their counterparts from the civilian world.	2	10	3	25	3	19	2	13	5	16
6	I could overcome the education challenge at the MA/FM MMA.	2	10	3	25	3	19	2	13	5	16
7	It is important to me to have a guaranteed job after completing my studies.	2	10	2	17	2	13	2	13	4	13
8	Because I see myself as a patriot.	2	10	2	17	2	13	2	13	4	13
9	Because I believe that every man should be ready to defend their country with arms in case of war.	2	10	2	17	2	13	2	13	4	13
10	I like order and discipline.	2	10	2	17	2	13	2	13	4	13
11	I want to acquire highly proficient titles and competencies throughout my career.	2	10	2	17	2	13	2	13	4	13
12	Studies at the MA and FM MMA offer a unique combination of theory and practice.	2	10	2	17	2	13	2	13	4	13

13	As an officer of the Serbian Army, I would enjoy respect from the people I know.	2	10	2	17	2	13	2	13	4	13
14	In military school, you train your soul and your body equally.	2	10	2	17	2	13	2	13	4	13
15	Because the army was always highly respected in my family.	2	10	2	17	2	13	2	13	4	13
16	The positive attitude of my peers.	2	10	2	17	2	13	2	13	4	13
17	People from my close surroundings have a high opinion of the army.	2	10	2	17	2	13	2	13	4	13
18	I believe I am talented in leadership and command.	2	10	2	17	2	13	2	13	4	13
19	Because (MA/FM MMA) is an exquisite educational institution.	2	10	1	8	1	6	2	13	3	9
20	Because education is free, and cadets have a monthly “wage”.	2	10	1	8	1	6	2	13	3	9
21	I always enjoyed military/war-themed movies.	2	10	1	8	1	6	2	13	3	9
22	The predictability of my career is important to me.	2	10	1	8	1	6	2	13	3	9
23	The Military Academy/FM MMA truly prepares you for your future profession.	2	10	1	8	1	6	2	13	3	9
24	Because I believe that modern teaching means and methods are used at the MA and FM MMA.	2	10	1	8	1	6	2	13	3	9
25	I feel powerful in the uniform.	2	10	1	8	1	6	2	13	3	9
26	Because of good sports content.	2	10	1	8	1	6	2	13	3	9
27	I knew I would be extremely physically prepared when I graduated from military school.	2	10	1	8	1	6	2	13	3	9
28	Since childhood, I have listened to the stories of the military and military topics from my parents and close relatives.	2	10	1	8	1	6	2	13	3	9
29	Because the diploma of the Military Academy or the FM MMA is worth more than the diploma from civilian faculties.	1	5	1	8	1	6	1	6	2	6

30	Top professors teach at the Military Academy/Faculty of Medicine of the MMA.	1	5	1	8	1	6	1	6	2	6
31	I was born to be an officer/military doctor.	1	5	1	8	1	6	1	6	2	6
32	As an officer of the Serbian Army, I will have a good salary.	1	5	0	0	1	6	0	0	1	3
33	I enrolled in military school because I knew I could advance in my career and be promoted to higher ranks.	1	5	0	0	1	6	0	0	1	3
34	I enrolled in military school because I wanted to become independent.	1	5	0	0	1	6	0	0	1	3

Source: Author's analysis

Each cadet provided at least one and up to five responses to the question asked. The majority of cadets (25 out of 32) listed two determinant reasons for enrolling in MHEI. Two cadets listed only one reason each, while one listed five answers. The distribution of the number of responses (reasons) according to respondents is presented in Table 2.

Table 2 – Distribution of responses

Number of repeated answers	1	2	3	4	5
Number of cadets according to the number of answers	2	25	12	6	1

Source: Author's analysis

During the discussion in the focus group, statements of cadets reflecting their satisfaction with the decision to enroll in the Military Academy, that is, the Faculty of Medicine of the MMA, are recorded. The responses are recorded by the interviewer and systematized in Table 3. The cadets had an opportunity to confirm more answers with which they agreed. Out of ten recorded statements, five statements presented, confirmed by at least eight cadets (25% of the total), were chosen.

Table 3 – Overview of statements of the MA and FM MMA cadets on their satisfaction with their decision to enroll

R	Statement	MA		FM MMA		?	
		N	%	N	%	N	%
1	I am proud that I will become an officer of the Serbian Army.	10	50	4	33	14	44
2	The Military Academy/FM MMA was my first choice upon choosing a higher education institution.	8	40	4	33	12	38
3	When the moment came for me to apply to the MA/FM MMA, I had no doubts whether I should do it.	9	45	3	25	12	38
4	I do not regret that I enrolled in the MA/FM MMA.	7	35	4	33	11	34
5	I recommend that the person I hold dear and close enroll in a military school.	5	25	3	25	8	25

Source: Author's analysis

The results presented in this chapter are the foundation for analyzing and categorizing the acquired data, which will be put into the context of relevant literature.

DISCUSSION

The quality of responses to the question about the motives and reasons for choosing the MHEI was balanced among the cadets of the MA and the FM MMA. This was not the case despite the expectations that the responses of MA and FM MMA cadets would significantly differ. To a certain extent, this can be explained by the fact that both belong to the Cadet Brigade; they share the living and working space, leading to specific responses to homogenization. Moreover, on the specific sample, it is possible to conclude whether there are significant differences in the distribution regarding gender. In specific responses, a convergence of opinions, identified by Merton as one of the potential flaws of focus groups (Merton 1987, 555), is noticeable. For example, a response that one of the reasons for enrolment was “the inclination towards watching

movies with the military, that is, war theapeutics”, listed by one cadet in the first round of statements, was later mentioned two more times during the discussion. A similar was the case of the following responses: “I deemed myself capable to overcome the challenge of education at the MA/FM MMA”, “In military schools, you develop abilities of overcoming all challenges (both personal and professional)” and “I enrolled into military school because I want to become independent”.

Through the analysis of the quality and content of the answers provided regarding reasons for enrolling in the MHEI, they were systematized into ten groups and ranked in Table 3 by the average number of repetitions, starting from the highest to the lowest, as follows:

1. *Cultural capital* – personal inclinations and values passed along to the individual from their family and social environment they grow up in (see Balik and Başpinar 2022; Angulo, Pergelova and Rialp 2010; Chung et al. 2009; Bourdieu 2018). This group of responses includes the ones speaking of patriotism, beliefs that defending a country is every man’s (patriot) duty, inclinations towards order and discipline, and the love towards movies on military topics. This group of answers could have been named “inclination towards military profession” since it, in concretum, refers to the nature and fundamental values of the military calling. In this sense, the army is an essential institution for creating national identity and accepting common values (Starčević 2024). Some research identifies inclination towards a specific calling as the key factor in the choice of future faculty, whose significance surpasses all other factors (López-Bonilla et al. 2012);

2. *Status* – perception or the wished image of an officer’s position in society. This group of responses points to a specific number of cadets of the MA and the FM MMA who, probably under the influence of cultural capital, built up on the attitude regarding the prestige of the officer profession and the opportunity to climb the social ladder in this way. Laura Perna elaborates on the sociological models of acquiring status as a background for her conceptual model of the choice of HEI (see Perna 2006, 110–114). In the research conducted by López-Bonilla and others (2012), the perceived reputation of a specific profession in society, besides personal motivation – inclination towards a specific calling – is among those that significantly influence the decision to choose the HEI. This factor of choice is identified in the research of factors contributing to the choice of MA in Türkiye as well (see Balik and Başpinar 2022);

3. *Personal growth* – attending the MHEIs as an opportunity to mature and master the abilities and skills that cannot be acquired in civilian schools. We are speaking of a specific group of responses which, to a certain extent, can be linked with the elitist idea of the military profession, but still stand out in terms of a clearly expressed wish and need for personal growth. In a limited sense, this can also be perceived through the prism of “social and experiential benefits” mentioned in their work by Callender and Jackson (Callender and Jackson 2008, 413). In the said research, the respondents stated the following: “going to college is a worthy experience”, and “one of the best aspects of going to the university is the development of oneself as a person” (Callender and Jackson 2008, 413);

4. *Influence of close individuals* – support and encouragement to the cadets from their families and friends upon enrolling in the MHEI. We are speaking of a factor of choice quite extensively examined in the literature (see Gao, Ng and Lee 2021; Balık and Başpinar 2022; Prakhov, Kotomina and Sazhina 2020; Iacopini and Hayden 2017). Even though the influence of parents is more often mentioned as being decisive in choosing the institution of tertiary education, the focus group most often linked in their responses the parental encouragement with the attitude of their close surroundings regarding the possibility of enrolling in a military school. Therefore, the responses regarding the influence of parents, family, and friends are put into one common category;

5. *Quality of military education* – a set of answers emphasizing the specificity of the educational offer of higher education institutions and their study programs, i.e., their specific institutional characteristics. According to the paper written by Bonnema and Van der Waldt (Bonnema and Waldt 2008), the factor of choice named “content of the study program” is especially important to the students who are taking the quality and relevance of the curriculum into consideration in relation to their academic and professional goals. According to these authors, the students put special value on academic and practical components of the curriculum, including the method of conducting the program and applicability of the knowledge in comparison to their personal academic and professional goals (Bonnema and Waldt 2008, 6–8). Callender and Jackson call in their paper upon the stance of the Government of Great Britain that “the choice of students will be an increasingly significant driver of quality of education since students are choosing quality courses that will offer them higher-level skills necessary during their working

life" (Callender and Jackson 2008, 413). This explains the answers in which it is stated that the reason for choosing the MA and FM MMA is the directionality of their study programs towards the unity of theory and practice, carrying along a set of specific knowledge and skills necessary for the officer profession, i.e., military doctor, which is in accordance with the research on the topic of choosing the MA in Türkiye (see Balık and Başpinar 2022);

6. *Auto-perception* – beliefs on personal capabilities and talents in the context of being predisposed to the military perception. In this group of responses, the ones showing that the MA and FM MMA cadets see themselves as gifted for the callings of officers and military doctors are systematized. Suppose this group of answers is perceived in the context of Chapman's college choice model. In that case, it is clear that they uncover a set of individual characteristics of students the author calls "Aptitude", i.e., "Self-image", as presented in their model by Hansen and Litten (see Chapman 1981; Vrontis 2007, 981–982). Balık and Başpinar single out self-assessment of abilities and talents for the military career as a significant factor in the choice of the military academy in Türkiye (Balık and Başpinar 2022, 56);

7. *Benefits* – the reasons for enrolment are dominantly based on economic parameters, which point out the advantages of free education, safe employment, and the expected wage. The most influential factor was the certainty or security of employment after completing the studies in the research on factors of choice of HEI in Serbia (see Mitić i Mojić 2020). The significance of this issue is stressed in other research (see Platz and Holtbrügge 2016; López-Bonilla et al. 2012; Maringe 2006). The response that the reason for choosing the MHEI was "good wage" is also supported by the results of a research series (see Mitić i Mojić 2020; Delavande and Zafar 2019). The benefits of free education in military HEIs in Serbia and monthly stipends (wages) provided to the MA and FM MMA cadets, when listed as motivation for enrolment, can be linked with research stressing the significance of stipends and financial benefits upon choosing civilian HEIs (see Kaye 2021). Almost the same factors of choice of the Turkish MA are listed by Balık and Başpinar (Balık and Başpinar 2022), who established that the financial stability and social benefits of military service, with the possibility of being awarded a stipend, make choosing this MHEI significantly more attractive to future students;

8. *Career* – this group includes responses related to beliefs that the military career is predictable and enables advancement, high ranks, knowledge, and professional competencies. We are speaking of a set of institutional characteristics that result from a specific role of the MHEI to school officers for the army's needs (Morin and Chanut 2018). The said reasons are entirely by the results of the research conducted by Balık and Başpinar (Balık and Başpinar 2022), who include the professional development and the possibilities for advancement into a factor of choosing the Turkish MA, called “career possibilities”, which is, as stressed, attractive to young and ambitious people. Besides, in the quoted paper, this factor is not examined in the literature in a manner that would be suitable for interpreting responses to questions given in the focus group. As a term, the career perspectives are most often linked in research to the possibility of employment and high wages upon graduation;

9. *Physical culture* is a specific group of answers that are singled out because they mention reasons for enrolling in the MHEI, due to the sporting content and the education and training system, which promotes the development of physical abilities. It is necessary to stress that the said factor is rarely mentioned in literature as independent, and its attributes are most often linked to location, infrastructure, and quality of educational plans and programs. In their research, Bonnema and Van der Waldt (Bonnema and Waldt 2008) attribute the possibility of playing sports during studies as a factor in the decision on the enrolment of the less motivated students, with little *direction*. Akareem and Hossain concluded similarly (Akareem and Hossain 2016, 62), discovering that students who play sports (and participate in extracurricular activities in general) usually have lower academic expectations than the ones not doing so. However, the results of this qualitative research do not offer the possibility to confirm such statements. In the responses making up the group “physical culture”, there are also some contextual overlaps with the group called quality of military education, in concretum, in the case of the following answer: “In military school, you train your soul and body equally” and “I knew that, when I graduate from military school, I will be extremely physically prepared.” Moreover, the response “due to good sporting contents” can also be interpreted as emphasizing the significance of the sporting infrastructure since the focus group cadets stressed their impressions of the sports center, the athletic hall, and the Military Academy. Still, this paper’s answers were singled out for their specificity and for conducting further quantitative research. It is necessary

to stress that this factor is not identified in the research on the factors of choice of the MA in Türkiye (Balık and Başpinar 2022);

10. *Reputation* – a set of responses on the reasons for enrolling in the MA and FM MMA based on the reputational characteristics of the MHEI. We can presume that the said reasons are closely linked to the ones presented in the groups' "cultural capital" and "influence of close individuals" since the perception of the reputation of the MHEI among future students in this period must have been generated in the closest surrounding and eventually through the media. In terms of examining the reputation of HEI as a factor of choice, there is a series of research that directly confirms its influence (see Mitić and Mojić 2020; Platz and Holtbrügge 2016; Munisamy, Jaafar and Nagaraj 2013).

Table 4 – Overview of responses by groups

R	Response/statement/claim	Factor	Literature
1	Because I see myself as a patriot.	Cultural capital	Angulo, Pergelova and Rialp 2010; Chung et al. 2009; Bourdieu 2018.
	Because I believe that every man should be ready to defend their country with arms in case of war.		
	I like order and discipline.		
	I always enjoyed military/war-themed movies.		
2	I feel powerful in the uniform.	Status	Balık and Başpinar 2022; Perna 2006; Bourdieu 2018; López-Bonilla et al. 2012.
	Officers "enjoy" high social status.		
3	As an officer of the Serbian Army, I would enjoy respect from the people I know.	Personal growth	Callender and Jackson 2008.
	People who graduate from the Military Academy or the FM MMA are more mature and ready for life than their counterparts from the civilian world.		
	In military schools, you develop the ability to overcome all challenges (both personal and professional).		
	I enrolled in military school because I want to become independent.		

4	<p>Because the army was always highly respected in my family.</p> <p>Support of parents.</p> <p>Since childhood, I have listened to the stories of the military and military topics from my parents and close relatives.</p> <p>The positive attitude of my peers.</p> <p>People from my close surroundings have a high opinion of the army.</p>	Influence of close individuals	Gao, Ng and Lee 2021; Balik and Başpinar 2022; Prakhov, Kotomina and Sazhina 2020; Iacopini and Hayden 2017.
5	<p>The Military Academy / FM MMA truly prepares you for your future profession.</p> <p>Military schools have the advantage compared to civilian ones due to special skills acquired at them – driving test is passed, certificate of foreign language proficiency is obtained, cadets learn to ski, etc.</p> <p>Studies at the MA and FM MMA offer a unique combination of theory and practice.</p> <p>Because I believe that modern teaching means and methods are used at the MA and FM MMA.</p>	Quality of military education	Bonnema and Waldt 2008; Akareem and Hossain 2016.
6	<p>I could overcome the education challenge at the MA / FM MMA.</p> <p>I was born to be an officer/ military doctor.</p> <p>I believe I am talented in leadership and command.</p>	Auto-perception	Balik and Başpinar 2022; Vrontis 2007; Chapman 1981.
7	<p>It is important to me to have a guaranteed job after completing my studies.</p> <p>As an officer of the Serbian Army, I will have a good salary.</p> <p>Because education is free, and cadets have a monthly “wage”.</p>	Benefits	Kaye 2021; Mitić and Mojić 2020; Delavande and Zafar 2019; Platz and Holtbrügge 2016; López-Bonilla et al. 2012; Callender and Jackson 2008; Maringe 2006.

	I enrolled in military school because I knew I could advance in my career and be promoted to higher ranks.	Career	Balik and Başpinar 2022; Morin and Chanut 2018; Platz and Holtbrügge 2016; Bonnema and Waldt 2008; Akareem and Hossain 2016.
8	The predictability of my career is important to me.		
	I want to acquire highly proficient titles and competencies throughout my career.		
9	In military school, you train your soul and your body equally.	Physical culture	Bonnema and Waldt 2008.
	Because of good sports content.		
	I knew I would be extremely physically prepared when I graduated from military school.		
10	Because (MA/FM MMA) is an exquisite educational institution.	Reputation	Mitić and Mojić 2020; Platz and Holtbrügge 2016; Munisamy, Jaafar and Nagaraj 2013.
	Because the diploma of the Military Academy or the FM MMA is worth more than the diploma from civilian faculties.		
	Top professors teach at the Military Academy/Faculty of Medicine of the MMA.		

Source: Author's analysis

If we perceived the previously examined responses, that is, groups of responses, as potential influence factors regarding the choice of the MHEI, their broad generalization by the criteria developed by Paulsen (Paulsen 1990) or Hemsley-Brown and Oplatka (Hemsley-Brown and Oplatka 2015) would be limiting. Paulsen classifies the factors of choice of HEI into three broad groups: 1) characteristics of the (future) student – high school success, socioeconomic status, influence of family and peers and personal preferences; 2) institutional factors, which include location, availability and quality of study programs, schooling expenses and selectivity of acceptance and 3) factors of environment, which include demographic changes, economic circumstances and public policies (see Paulsen 1990). In the systematic overview of literature on the topic of influential factors regarding the choice of university, Hemsley-Brown and Platka also singled out three groups of factors as follows: 1) factors

linked with students – demographic and academic; 2) factors linked to the institution – general characteristics of the HEI, outcomes and benefits and quality and 3) interaction factors between characteristics of students and the HEI, referring to – financial aspects, sources of information, location and physical availability (see Hemsley-Brown and Oplatka 2015).

For example, according to Paulsen, the factor (group of answers) of status, which reflects the perception or the desired image of the officer's position in a society, can be classified into any of the three broad groups. Since *status* points to personal preferences, it can be perceived as a characteristic of a (future) student. Moreover, this group of answers indeed is linked with the perception of institutional characteristics of the MHEI in a narrower sense and the military (as the umbrella organization) in a broader sense. Ultimately, the *status* is linked with wider social and economic circumstances, which could also classify it among the environmental factors. A thought experiment with the same variable gives a similar result in the context of Hemsley-Brown and Oplatka's classification (2015). *Status* is, to a great extent, a reflection of the characteristics of a future cadet and the features of the institution which member (cadet) they wish to become. Moreover, *status* also has an interactive component because, as a factor of choice, it influences the future cadet and the institution without giving either party an exclusive sphere of influence.

The previous conclusion explains that Balık and Başpinar (2022), when researching influential factors of choosing the MA in Türkiye, did not resort to generalization, but indeed to specification of influential factors for their more precise and more clear examination, which would be more suitable in this case.

Based on the heterogeneity of the identified factors in this qualitative research, it can be assumed that the model of choosing the MHEI in the Republic of Serbia most probably would not exhibit excluding attributes of classical social models of gaining status but could possess specific characteristics of economic models of investment into human capital (see Perna 2006). Such acquired typology can serve as a foundation for constructing instruments in further qualitative analysis of the choice of the MHEI in Serbia.

CONCLUSION

The results acquired at the focus group point to the fact that the cadets of the MA and the FM MMA made their decisions to enroll into these institutions most probably based on the attitudes and opinions on the army and the military profession formed in their childhood and early youth, under the influence of family and close individuals. For them, education and the Military Academy and the Faculty of Medicine of the MMA represent an opportunity to rise on the social ladder and acquire affirmation of their perceived inclinations and talents, and develop psychophysical abilities.

They perceive as advantages of education at the MHEI as the directionality of their study programs towards acquiring concrete knowledge and skills needed for the upcoming service, the possibilities for acquiring additional qualifications and secured employment, secure career advancement, and financial benefits of the military service. For them, the military HEI has a reputation for academic excellence and elitism compared to its civilian counterparts.

Considering the acquired responses' comprehensiveness and diversity, we can conclude that the decision to enroll in the MHEI results from actions of several mutually connected personal, familial, institutional, and broader social factors. This research offered an initial qualitative insight into the field that has not been sufficiently examined in the scientific literature until now.

The limitation of this research is primarily embodied in a relatively small sample and the possible influence of the work dynamics on the honesty of specific responses, which is also one of the pronounced flaws of the focus group method. In these limitations, we could also include that the research was reduced to exclusively MA and FM MMA cadets and did not include enrolment candidates. Moreover, the retrospective of the research could have led to the deformation of respondents' attitudes, especially those from the senior years of study. Thus, it is possible that they were corrected to a certain extent under the influence of many years of living in the military environment.

Despite the previously mentioned limitations, the acquired results offer a solid foundation for the creation of instruments and hypotheses for the next qualitative phase of research which will, with the use of suitable statistical methods, and a significantly bigger sample, enable

more clear and more precise examination of influential factors that opt the youth to enroll into the MHEI.

In light of contemporary challenges of marketization of higher education, the specifics of the current generation and positioning of the military profession as one of many career choices offered to young people, this research can also serve as a guideline for creating and adjusting the promoted activities of the MA and the FM MMA, by the expectations and values of the target group.

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КВАЛИТАТИВНИ УВИД У ФАКТОРЕ УПИСА ВОЈНИХ ВИСОКОШКОЛСКИХ УСТАНОВА У РЕПУБЛИЦИ СРБИЈИ***

Резиме

Овај рад се бави идентификовањем и анализом фактора који су утицали на одлуке кадета Војне академије (ВА) и Медицинског факултета ВМА (МФ ВМА) да упишу војне високошколске установе (ВВШУ). Циљ истраживања био је да се, путем квалитативне анализе одговора добијених у фокус групама, идентификују разлози и мотиви кадета за упис као и искази којима они вреднују своје одлуке. Теоријски оквир рада ослања се на резултате емпиријских истраживања и теоријска разматрања фактора и модела избора цивилних и војних ВШУ. Истраживање је спроведено на узорку од 32 кадета, а подаци су разврстани и анализирани кроз десет тематских категорија. Резултати указују да је на одлуку кадета о упису на ВВШУ у Републици Србији деловао сложен амалгам потенцијалних фактора социјалне, институционалне и економске природе који су, у највећој мери до сада идентификовани у релевантној научној литератури. Добијени увиди могу послужити као основа за развој инструмента за даља

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квантитативна истраживања и прилагођавање комуникационске стратегије ВВШУ.

Кључне речи: Војна академија, Медицински факултет ВМА, избор факултета, кадети, војна професија, фокус група.

* This paper was received on April 18, 2025, and accepted for publication at the Editorial Board meeting on May 14, 2025.