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One in Three Russians Exempt From Military Service for Medical Reasons

By Eva Hartog

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Roughly one third of this year's potential conscripts have been exempted from serving in the Russian military for medical reasons, the head of the Defense Ministry's main military medical directorate, Alexander Fisun, told the Rossiiskaya Gazeta newspaper on Tuesday.

This year, about 30 percent of conscripts were turned down after failing medical tests — a trend that has remained constant in recent years, the report said.

Many Russian draftees fake medical conditions to dodge their military duties amid widespread reports of brutal hazing and abuse in army barracks.

In July, a 19-year-old conscript in the Chelyabinsk region died days after he was beaten over the head with an iron flask by his immediate superior, in one of many examples of fatal

beatings and suicides to have plagued the Russian army for decades.

But according to Fisun, the high number of rejections is directly related to the medical committee's high standards.

“We don't need sick soldiers in the army,” Fisun told Rossiiskaya Gazeta. “That's why young people go through at least three medical committees in the military directorate,” he said.

The most common health problems among this year's conscripts were musculoskeletal disorders — a category that includes arthritis and osteoporosis. Neuropsychological conditions were the second most frequent medical condition, often caused by “adaption problems encountered in the conscripts' youth,” Fisun said. Circulatory system diseases — such as hypertension — and respiratory diseases, like asthma, were the third most common reason for exemption on medical grounds, the report said.

More than 63,000 conscripts were recruited in the fall draft which began in October, Interfax news agency reported.

Russia's military fervor is at a years-long high following Russia's annexation of Crimea last year and air strikes in Syria. But societal attitudes toward the draft are divided.

A recent survey by the state-run VTsIOM pollster showed one quarter of respondents said they thought the army “crippled young people morally, and sometimes physically,” whereas 64 percent said it provided moral and physical training.

Ten percent of respondents thought the time served primarily gave people experience in “humiliation and abuse,” while at least four times as many people cited “physical strength and stamina,” “courage,” “life experience,” and other positive attributes.

The negative view of the army is less widespread now than in a similar poll conducted in 1990, when 42 percent thought serving was a crippling experience, the survey showed.

The VTsIOM survey was conducted from Oct. 10 to 11 and questioned 1,600 people in 46 Russian regions. The margin of error did not exceed 3.5 percent.

Contact the author at e.hartog@imedia.ru

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