ABLE AND WILLING? WHAT CONSCRIPTION DATA CAN TELL US ABOUT ENTREPRENEURSHIP (SUMMARY)

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ABLE AND WILLING? WHAT CONSCRIPTION DATA CAN TELL US ABOUT ENTREPRENEURSHIP

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Principal Topic
Recent evidence has shown that entrants into entrepreneurship are disproportionately drawn from the population of high ability employees who are exposed to entrepreneurial environments. This paper utilizes register data to examine the origins of such an ability—the exposure effect. Military conscription records for 25,000 Swedish men allow us to investigate the importance of general and social ability, measured at age 18. Evidence suggests that employees with lower ability are more strongly affected by entrepreneurial environments than those with high ability.

Method
We use detailed registry data including military conscription records and full labor market histories of over 25,000 Swedish men. The data are unique and include measures of their cognitive ability at age 18—including speech and logic, spatial reasoning, and technical knowledge—as well as their non-cognitive ability, assessed by psychologists. Following earlier studies we use several measures of entrepreneurial environments: entrepreneurial families, working in small firms, and residing in entrepreneurial regions. We measure entrepreneurship as the creation of an incorporated enterprise.

We use a cohort-based research design and present descriptive and bivariate data showing the profound effect of regional sorting of high-ability individuals into urban areas. Interval-censored survival models (clog-log) test the effects of cognitive- and non-cognitive ability, exposure to entrepreneurial environments, and the contingent nature of these two mechanisms.

Results and Implications
Results reveal a strong effect of both cognitive and non-cognitive ability on entrepreneurship entry; an effect that is partly conditioned by exposure to entrepreneurial environments. Our study provides the seed for developing moderated theories explaining how peoples’ cognitive and non-cognitive abilities are necessary but insufficient to explain entrepreneurship entry. A focus on the interplay between ability and exposure suggests that, instead of focusing on ‘either or,’ research should study the interplay of innate ability and exposure when seeking broad explanations of entrepreneurship.

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