

The aim of this project is to analyse the socio-cultural aspects of compulsory military service in Poland in the years 1956-1989 and the methodological problems associated with such research.

The organisational-legal issues of military service and attitudes to conscription and incorporation into military service with particular account taken of the strategies adopted to avoid this service, are to be subjected to detailed scrutiny in this project. Research will extend to probing the conditions in which military service was performed. Social pathologies in the army, in this the relations of older and younger recruits which lay at the bottom of the phenomenon known as “the wave”, will be studied exceptionally scrupulously. Project participants wish to ascertain how far back the genesis of this phenomenon reaches, how it changed, and the extent to which it was universal. Moreover the planned research will be concentrated on an analysis of desertions and other so-called “extraordinary events” in the army. Participants will try to ascertain their intensification, reasons and mechanisms governing their disclosure and concealment.

Determinations will be made not only on the basis of national and regional, military and state, archive inquiries, but also with the help of live interviews with former conscripts and professional army cadres.

The import of this research project stems, above all, from the fact that in the post-1989 academic research to date, the army of the People’s Republic of Poland period is viewed almost exclusively as an exceptionally significant factor in shaping an oppressive political reality. However, compulsory military service as a mass socio-cultural experience has not become, as up to now, the subject of any scholarly reflection whatsoever. It is likewise in other eastern bloc countries where academic achievement in the study of sociological aspects of military service after World War II seems quite modest. Indeed, in principle, it seems to be restricted to the Soviet example and the problem of violence between older and younger conscripts (so-called *dedovshchina* - literally in Russian: the reign of grandfathers). The project aspires to changing this state of affairs and to answer questions regarding the utility of various categories of sources for such research.

The proposed research is of an inter-disciplinary character. The analyses will focus on sources and works relating to law psychology, history, and historical anthropology. This should considerably enrich our knowledge in the field of military history, but also on Polish social history after 1945 and in consequence, the socio-cultural history of Central and Eastern Europe.