

Military says quality of recruits is 'guaranteed'

The Chinese military has dismissed speculation that unhealthy applicants are entering the armed forces, and has reassured the public about the quality of new recruits.



Teenagers have their ears checked during the extensive physical examination process for military recruits in Kunming, Yunnan province, on Monday. Candidates must pass every item on the checklist to be accepted. Gao Wei / For China Daily

“Recruitment is the foundation of national defense, and high-quality recruits are crucial to the military’s combat capability,” the Defense Ministry’s recruitment office said in an online statement on Tuesday.

The military eliminates unfit applicants who fail rigorous physical examinations, it said, adding that recent public worries about the quality of recruits were the result of people mistakenly assuming that an increase in the number of rejected applicants meant there were more subpar recruits.

In 2014, the United States military turned down 80 percent of all applicants, but that led to the highest quality of military recruits in 40 years, as the Obama administration moved to downsize the US Army, according to the Pentagon.

“China’s recruitment process has strict rules and procedures,” the Defense Ministry office said. “The quality of our recruits is guaranteed, and the headwaters of our military will flow long and strong.”

On Saturday, the People's Liberation Army Daily said on its WeChat account that around 56 percent of those who applied to join the army in an unnamed city this year failed to meet physical standards.

The post spurred heated online discussion about the quality of young recruits, as well as how unhealthy diets and the overuse of smartphones may have undermined their health and eyesight.

"A war zone does not need weak 'pretty boys'. Only strong young men can shoulder the responsibility of protecting the nation," said netizen Xu Xuewei in an online comment.

The PLA is undergoing a series of reforms to become a world-class fighting force. However, it is having a hard time finding recruits, as couples are having fewer children.

As a result, in 2014, the Chinese military relaxed its physical standards so that recruiters could attract more young people with higher education backgrounds.

The height requirement for males was lowered from 162 centimeters to 160 cm, and for female candidates from 160 cm to 158 cm.

It also reduced eyesight requirements. Nearly 70 percent of high school and university students in China are nearsighted, according to Peking University.

"While the physical criteria may have been lowered slightly, the educational requirement has been increased significantly," said Major General Zhu Chenghu, a professor at PLA National Defense University.

"The general quality of young recruits has actually improved over the years, with many college students holding degrees in engineering and international relations," he said. "A strong body is still very important for a soldier, but education is now more valuable than ever in building a strong, modern military."