

The Impacts of Gender Discrimination in the Military: a Review

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The purpose of this review is to better understand the relationship between gender and discrimination in the United States military and the impacts that it can have in the day-to-day treatment of women, violence against women, and how this relationship might impact the military child-care setting. According to a 2020 report published by Military OneSource, there are over 1,000,000 DoD Active Duty military personnel, over 40,000 DHS's Coast Guard Active Duty members, over 1,000,000 DoD Ready Reserve and DHS Coast Guard Reserve, almost 200,000 members of the Retired Reserve, and a little over 6,000 members in the Standby Reserve.¹ These numbers do not include civilian personnel. While these numbers may seem large, and they are by no means insignificant, only 17.2% (~229,000) of the DoD Active Duty force is represented by Women. This is an eye opening difference compared to the over 1,103,000 (82.8%) men who are currently serving in the DoD Active Duty force.² In regards to children and families, there are over 2,000,000 military personnel and over 2,500,000 family members (spouses, children, and adult dependents). Almost 32% of military personnel are married with children, ~15.7% are married without children, and ~5.7% are single with children. Of the almost 1,000,000 military spouses, almost 25% are between the ages of 31-35, while just over 20% of spouses are age 26-30. Further, the largest age group of military children is between birth and 5 years at about 37% of the 1,620,000 military children in 2020.

Sexism

There are five prevalent themes that female active-duty service members list when separating from the military are work schedules, deployments, organizational culture, family planning, and sexual assault.³ In a report written by the United States Government

¹ 2020 Demographics Profile

² 2020 Demographics Profile

³ GAO

Accountability Office (GAO) to Congressional Committees, it highlighted that the Department of Defense noticed disparities in the recruitment and retention of female enlisted servicemembers. It was also noted, when analyzing the 2004 and 2018 fiscal years that promotion rates were lower for female enlisted, but were slightly higher for female officers. In 2004, 15.1% of the military population throughout the ranks compared to the 84.9% male representation. In 2018, the female representation only rose to 16.5% to the 83.5% male representation.⁴ Work schedules and deployments are listed as reasons for separation because both have negative impacts on spouses and children. Female servicemembers feel that they need to make gendered sacrifices just to be in the military, this is cause for lack of retention.⁵

Why is gender bias still an issue in the military when women have served since the creation of the Women's Army Corps in 1943.⁶ Elizabeth M. Trobaugh uses her own experience in the U.S. Army to better understand and evaluate areas where gender bias may prevent women from succeeding in Army culture.⁷ By conducting an online survey, Trobaugh was able to assess that common stereotypes against women became a physical reality, making it challenging for women to succeed. In the survey, respondents were asked to provide comments and they all touched on a singular theme: stereotyping. One respondent stated "Many MOS in the Army seem to have a lower standard for women. It's almost as though they don't expect as much of them because they feel it's a waste of time. It is absolutely not true and saddens me thinking of all the lost potential" and another "There are two standards. The Army standard, and the female standard. Until the female standard is removed, females will never be equal to males".⁸ When discussing the integration of women in combat units there is a general consensus between men

⁴ GAO

⁵ GAO

⁶ Trobaugh 2018

⁷ Trobaugh 2018

⁸ Trobaugh 2018

that this would be an overall negative decision. Not only would it “lower standards”, but it would increase SHARP training. One male commenter stated: “As far as combat arms units go, there would be an extremely negative effect within units which are traditionally male. The things that go on there, the bonds, would be damaged. SHARPs [the Army’s Sexual Harassment/Assault Response and Prevention program] stuff would be through the roof. I would almost rather die before changing my demeanor within my unit. Standards need to be met and maintained, but we should all strive to exceed the standard”.⁹ This degree of bias is so innate and ingrained in the United States military that the only policy opportunities would be the way to enact change. Trobaugh suggests that the U.S. Army Field Manual (FM) 7-22, *Army Physical Readiness Training*, should be improved and read as it did in 1980 “Just because women are different does not mean they are incapable of achieving satisfactory levels of performance”.¹⁰

Violence Against Women

Violence against women in the military is not something that has historically been discusses on a worldwide scale, however, that is slowly changing. With such a high number of cases reported it is startling to hear so little about it in the media. The first case of SASH to make major political news was the death of Spc. Vanessa Guillen when she went missing in April and her body was identified on July 30, 2020. Spc. Guillen had been sexually harassed by a superior noncommissioned officer on two occasions. When she reported her assault, her superior officer failed to take appropriate action.¹¹ This section analyzes sources pertaining to sexual violence against women in the military, spouses of military members and the impact that is has on the lives of women.

⁹ Trobaugh 2018

¹⁰ Trobaugh 2018

¹¹ Britzky 2019

The blatant sexism addressed in the section above paves the way to violent acts against women in the Armed Services as previously described. In the FY2019 Department of Defense Annual Report on Sexual Assault in the Military, the report addressed unit climate, sexual assault reporting, victim assistance, and efforts to reduce and stop sexual assaults from taking place. According to the report “the Military Services received a total of 7,825 reports of sexual assault involving Service members as either victims or subjects, a 3 percent increase from the 7,623 reports received in Fiscal Year 2018. In addition to the 6,236 Service member reports described previously, the Department received 937 reports from United States civilians and foreign nationals who alleged a sexual assault by a Service member, and 652 reports from Service members who sought assistance for a sexual assault that occurred prior to military Service.”¹²

Not only are active-duty females subject to SASH (Sexual Assault/Sexual Harassment), but the spouses and partners of active-duty men. In 2010, The National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey (NISVS) conducted a survey including women from the general U.S. population, active-duty women, and the wives of active-duty men to better understand the prevalence of intimate partner violence, sexual violence, and stalking. For the age range of 18 to 59 years, 40.3% of women in the general population experienced lifetime contact sexual violence. Additionally, 36.3% of active duty women and 32.8% of wives of active duty men experienced contact sexual violence in their lifetime.¹³ Further, in the same age range, 39.7% of women in the general population experienced lifetime physical violence, rape, or stalking by an intimate partner; 31.5% of active duty women and 29.5% of wives of active duty men experienced lifetime physical violence, rape, or stalking by an intimate partner.¹⁴

¹² DoD 2020

¹³ NISVS 2010

¹⁴ NISVS 2010

A study conducted by Dichter (2016) found that intimate partner violence and non-partner sexual assault in the context of military service have lasting implications for supporting women's health and well being.¹⁵ The purpose of the study was to look at the intersection between women's experiences with sexual violence and their military service. The qualitative interview study consisted of 25 women who were receiving primary care at a U.S. veterans medical facility. The women interviewed were ages 22-58 with a mean age of 44.6. The majority of women (56%) identified as Black or African American, while 20% identified as white, 16% as hispanic, and 8% as other. In regards to their military history, 24% served in Operations Enduring Freedom or Iraqi Freedom (OEF/OIF) while the 68% majority served post-Vietnam and all branches of service were represented.¹⁶

The interviews revealed that there are two main themes when looking at the intersection between violence exposure and military service. The first theme is military service (entering and leaving). This theme includes coercion into entering the military, coercion to leave the military, effects on service/work performance, and the impact of survival strategies on career outcomes.¹⁷ The second theme centered around the military's responses to and coping with sexual violence and includes the subthemes of military sanction for perpetration, lack of accountability for military perpetrators and protection of service member perpetrators, military service as an opportunity to escape, and warrior identity as an obstacle to help-seeking.¹⁸ While there are some limitations to the study (location and number of participants), Dichter et al. strongly highlight the reality that women in the armed services have faced and continue to face. The Military Occupational Health Model "highlights the potential for military occupational resources to

¹⁵ Dichter et al. 2016

¹⁶ Dichter et al. 2016

¹⁷ Dichter et al. 2016

¹⁸ Dichter et al. 2016

mitigate the negative impact of outcomes on goals”.¹⁹ If applied, this model has the potential to aid the military in supporting victims of sexual violence.

Impacts on Childcare

The gender bias women face in the military can have multiple effects on childcare. The bias ultimately begins with access and education on contraceptives and comes to a head at the quality and accessibility of the Department of Defense’s Child Development Centers (CDCs).

There are over 220,000 women active-duty in the United States military²⁰ and not all of them have the same access to contraceptives or resources for family planning. In 2016, the Marine Corps eliminated mandatory education on contraceptives to female recruits.²¹ This left females to seek education and birth control access elsewhere on their own time. According to a survey in Military Medicine, a year prior to the 2016 elimination, unintended pregnancies were at 6.9%. However, as a result of the policy change there have been “an additional 67 deliveries a year, 5,601 days of postpartum leave, and 30,937 nondeployable days among female Marines, compared to the year before, according to the American Journal of Obstetrics and Gynecology”.²²

In November of 2021, the United States Marine Corps released an article stating “Our organization, processes, and approach to personnel and talent management are no longer suited to today’s needs and incompatible with the objectives of Force Design 2030”. In this article the USMC will “seek to secure the necessary departmental and statutory authorities to increase the duration of parental leave for both primary and secondary caregivers. For the primary caregiver, we will seek an expansion of leave for up to one year in length.... Second, until those authorities

¹⁹ Dichter et al. 2016

²⁰ 2020 Demographics Profile

²¹ Kime 2020

²² Kime 2020

are obtained, we will authorize primary and secondary caregivers to take additional parental leave when they agree to extend their service contracts.”²³ This willingness to create change is significant because it is coming directly from the USMC, rather than legislators or government officials, this concept additionally recognizes both primary and secondary caregivers, and understands that if the family unit is taken care of the Marine Corps will ultimately be more effective in their mission.

The Department of Defense “considers child care services a quality of life benefit and DOD officials have indicated that the primary reason for providing child care services is to enhance force readiness”.²⁴ The DoD uses the Demand Accomodation Rate as well as the current wait list to better understand if it is meeting the needs for its CDC’s (Child Development Centers).²⁵ In 2019, the U.S. Navy reported that there were ~9,000 families that were on the waitlist for childcare. The Army reported 5,000 children on their waitlist. The Air Force and Marines had 3,200 and 800 children on a waitlist respectively.²⁶ The number of children on the waitlist vary between the branches because the quality and accessibility of childcare is decided by each branch specifically.

A major issue currently in the United States Military is access to quality childcare and it is becoming a readiness problem. Every year, a significant portion of funds in the defense budget goes to preparedness and readiness, however, CDCs receive little of those funds. The Military Times reported that “solving that shortage may involve another lingering military quality-of-life concern: spouse unemployment”.²⁷ Additionally, service officials said they are looking for ways to simplify the credentialing process for spouses with daycare experience, to get them working

²³ Talent Management

²⁴ Congressional Research Services

²⁵ Congressional Research Services

²⁶ Congressional Research Services

²⁷ Shane III 2019

on military bases more quickly after family moves.²⁸ This is one option in combating the worker shortage in Child Development Centers.

Another issue faced in Military Child Development Centers is the quality and safety of the facilities. The Stars and Stripes reported that a Congressional report found that 72 Air Force childcare facilities were either “failing” or “poor” in rating.²⁹ While there are 72 failing CDCs, an Air Force official stated in the House Armed Services Committee (HASC) hearing that they plan on utilizing \$20 million in funds to upgrade one facility in Texas.³⁰

Discussion

Gender bias and discrimination in the United States military is wide reaching and impacts virtually all areas of life. A lot of issues women face in the military can be eliminated if the patriarchal structure of the military was ‘rewired’ to view women and the challenges they face as a priority. The first section in this review highlighted startling challenges regarding female representation in the military as well as stereotyping and the impacts that it can have on readiness. The second section reviewed intimate partner violence and sexual assault and sexual harassment (SASH). Additionally discussed in the second section is Spc. Vanessa Guillen and the thousands of women who report sexual violence and their voices remain unheard. The third section of the review discusses family planning and child care facilities in the United States military. The poor quality and response to all of the issues addressed highlights the emergent need to change and restructuring in today’s military.

²⁸ Shane III 2019

²⁹ Cammarata 2021

³⁰ Cammarata 2021

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