

DACOWITS

Defense Advisory Committee on Women in the Services



1951-2011: 60 Years of DACOWITS



2011
REPORT

Executive Summary

Defense Advisory Committee on Women in the Services



The Defense Advisory Committee on Women in the Services (DACOWITS) was established in 1951. Its mandate is to provide the Secretary of Defense with advice and recommendations on matters and policies relating to the women in the Armed Forces of the United States. The individuals who comprise the Committee are appointed by the Secretary of Defense to serve in a voluntary capacity for three-year terms.

As in the previous year, in 2011 DACOWITS divided its work into two general areas, Wellness and Assignments, with subcommittees formed for each. The subcommittees selected specific topics for study, as described below.

To undertake its work on the selected topics, the Committee gathered both primary and secondary sources of information, including briefings from military representatives and subject matter experts; data collected during installation visits from focus groups and surveys; and literature reviews, other survey data and available research and resources. These sources of information formed the basis for the Committee’s reasoning and recommendations.

The Committee agreed on recommendations at its September 2011 meeting. The Committee approved this report at its December 2011 meeting.

Wellness Recommendations and Continuing Concerns

DACOWITS has addressed the issues of sexual assault and sexual harassment several times in past years. Most recently, in 2010 the Committee received briefings from the Department of Defense’s (DoD) Sexual Assault Prevention and Response Office (SAPRO) and reviewed relevant literature. The Committee observed that DoD and the Services have necessarily placed a great deal of emphasis on data collection and on response efforts once an assault has occurred, including improvements in reporting procedures for sexual assaults and in services to sexual assault victims. They have also emphasized and refined training programs

as an important prevention tool. The Committee determined in 2011 to focus its work on further efforts that might be made to prevent sexual assault and sexual harassment in the first instance, with a view to reducing their incidence within the military community and thereby promoting the wellness of female Service members.

As explained in more detail in the full 2011 report, DACOWITS made the following recommendations, based on the reasoning set forth below, and also identified some continuing concerns.

Recommendations

Recommendation 1: This recommendation is three-fold and addresses the Committee’s view that publicizing the outcomes of sexual assault cases more broadly within the military, and on an installation level, would be helpful in reducing sexual assaults.

Recommendation

- DoD should publicize reports of sexual assault and their dispositions in a simple format accessible to a wide military audience, to be used in required training and other venues.
- DoD should consider requiring local commanders to publicize, in a timely manner, this same information, including information on reports and dispositions at their specific installations.
- Sexual assault information to be publicized should include the number of reports and type of disciplinary actions taken as a result of sexual assault investigations. Because there may be valid reasons why disciplinary action is not taken in some cases, reasons should be provided for cases where no action is taken. All such information should be in aggregate form, as necessary to conform to any applicable privacy or other legal requirements, taking into account the needs of the victim as appropriate.

Reasoning

Focus group participants stated that Service members are generally unaware of the extent to which there has been follow-up on reported sexual assaults and the disciplinary or other action that has been taken. This lack of awareness makes it hard for Service members to assess whether sexual assaults are actually taken seriously and may contribute to the perception that an individual’s rank affects the outcome. This lack of awareness may also lead perpetrators to believe that they are at little risk of being held to account. Finally, lack of awareness may lead to lack of confidence in the Sexual Assault Prevention and Response process and to a consequent unwillingness to report assaults. Publicizing information on case dispositions should demonstrate that the military as a whole, as well as individual units, do not tolerate sexual assault and will discipline fairly. Including information on why disciplinary action is not taken in some cases should also foster increased confidence in the system, potentially leading both to fewer assaults and greater reporting of assaults that do occur. This recommendation is consistent not only with focus group participant recommendations but also with research that shows that publicizing enforcement activities and disciplinary outcomes may deter crimes by making clear the cost to the offender.

Although this recommendation pertains to sexual assault, many of the same considerations could apply to sexual harassment cases. The Committee has identified as a continuing concern for possible further consideration whether DoD and the Services should give more attention to the prevention of sexual harassment (as distinct from sexual assault) and the ways in which this might be accomplished. A report by the U.S. Government Accountability Office on preventing sexual harassment in the military, which was released after DACOWITS voted on its 2011 recommendations, may be especially relevant to any further examination of sexual harassment issues.

Recommendation 2: DoD should include measures of sexual assault and sexual harassment in command climate assessments.

Reasoning

Focus group research and DoD surveys reveal widespread agreement among Service members that sexual assault and sexual harassment have negative effects on military readiness. As former Secretary of Defense Robert Gates stated with respect to sexual assault, “This type of act in the military not only does unconscionable harm to the victim; it destabilizes the workplace and threatens national security.” Both focus group and other research reveal that a positive command climate can help prevent sexual assault and harassment. Yet measures of sexual assault and sexual harassment are not consistently and expressly taken into account in command climate assessments. Including these measures in command climate assessments could help ensure that prevention of sexual assault and sexual harassment is a command priority.

Although this recommendation pertains to command climate assessments, many of the same considerations could apply to including sexual assault and sexual harassment measures in individual performance evaluations of commanders, and the Committee has identified this as a continuing concern for possible further consideration.

Continuing Concerns

In the course of examining sexual assault and sexual harassment prevention, the Committee identified several continuing concerns for possible further consideration.

- Whether DoD and the Services should place greater attention on prevention of sexual harassment as distinct from sexual assault.
- Whether effectiveness in combating sexual assault and sexual harassment should be made a part of individual performance evaluations of installation commanders and other leaders.
- Whether additional specialized training should be required for investigators, counselors and victim advocates in sexual assault matters.
- Whether there are special problems of sexual assault and sexual harassment in the recruiting process and, if so, how they should be addressed.

Assignments Recommendations and Best Practices

In 2010, DACOWITS recommended that DoD eliminate its 1994 combat exclusion policy, thereby ending gender-based restrictions on military assignments and opening all career fields/specialties, schooling and training opportunities that have been closed to women. As a follow-up to this recommendation, in 2011 DACOWITS decided to examine ways to effectively and fully integrate women into ground combat units, including any potential barriers to such integration. In addition, based on reports gathered by the Committee in 2010, in 2011 DACOWITS decided to examine the adequacy of the weapons training female Service members receive in preparation for deployment to combat zones.

As explained in more detail in the full 2011 report, DACOWITS made the following recommendations, based on the reasoning set forth below, and also suggested some best practices:

Recommendation 1: DoD should eliminate the 1994 combat exclusion policy and direct the Services to eliminate their respective assignment rules, thereby ending the gender-based restrictions on military assignments. Concurrently, DoD and the Services should open all related career fields/specialties, schooling and training opportunities that have been closed to women as a result of the DoD combat exclusion policy and service assignment policies.

Reasoning

This recommendation repeats the recommendation made by DACOWITS in 2010. As described in DACOWITS’ 2010 Report, that recommendation was grounded in focus group and other research gathered by the Committee in 2009 and additional research supporting the expansion of roles of women gathered by the Committee in 2010. Because DoD is, at this time, reviewing the 1994 combat exclusion policy in response to a congressional directive to do so, DACOWITS believes it is important to repeat and re-emphasize this recommendation. Moreover, the Committee continued to find strong support for this recommendation in its focus group and other research conducted this

year, including in the final report of the Military Leadership Diversity Commission and the statements of high-ranking DoD personnel. Equally important, the Committee found no insurmountable obstacles to integrating women into currently closed positions.

Recommendation 2: The Services should develop appropriate physical standards by MOS, relevant to the job to be performed.

Reasoning

The Committee’s 2010 recommendation, repeated above in 2011, would end gender-based restrictions on military assignments. This would mean opening to women combat arms career fields and MOSs that are currently closed and allowing women to compete for all assignments for which they are qualified. However, the Committee is concerned that DoD and the Services, in the review that they are currently undertaking of assignment policies for women, may be evaluating women on an “average” rather than an individual basis and may be using or establishing standards to judge women’s qualifications that have not been validated, even for men. Instead, the selection of military personnel for assignment should be based on individual qualifications, not on gender or other stereotyped concepts of women’s or men’s capabilities. The qualifications should be those necessary to perform the actual duties of a specific military job. Any standards for the job, especially physical standards, should be validated to ensure that they accurately predict job performance.

Recommendation 3: In addition to a general increase in quality of pre-deployment weapons training, the Services should ensure that deployed Service members receive appropriate in-country weapons training on the weapons used by the units in which they are serving in theatre.

Reasoning

Focus group participants, both men and women, described their pre-deployment weapons training as inadequate in some respects. Some reported receiving a bare minimum of training, and some complained

about the quality and consistency of the training. Additionally, some women focus group participants reported that, once in theatre, they were issued new weapons on which they had not been previously trained and that weapons training while deployed was inadequate. The Committee believes that weapons training both pre- and post-deployment should be improved for both women and men Service members.

Best Practices

In the course of examining ways to effectively integrate women into combat units, DACOWITS identified, and wishes to suggest, several best practices.

Best Practice 1: Leaders should adopt practices similar to those that were implemented during the process of the repeal of Don't Ask Don't Tell, in which they visibly support the integration of women into currently closed positions.

Comment

Leadership is key to the successful implementation of new policies and programs. It is very apparent that the soldiers, sailors, airmen, and marines get on board with new programs when the leaders at all levels of the organization support the new policies and programs and actively demonstrate their support, including during briefings and training.

Best Practice 2: The Services should employ a phased approach for a full integration of women into all currently closed combat assignments. At a minimum, several women should be integrated into units at a time. The integration should occur in the combat engineers, artillery, and armor followed by the infantry.

Comment

The integration of women into combat units will require that some facilities be modified, training be

reviewed, and testing be conducted to ensure that job-related standards are employed in selecting Service members for particular assignments. Navy experience in bringing women onto warships supports the practice of integrating women into currently closed units several at a time. Further, since women are already present in some MOSs and various levels in the combat engineers and artillery, the transition of women into these units should be relatively easy. The transition into armor and infantry could require more time and effort.

Best Practice 3: DoD and the Services should have more of an emphasis on mentorship, both formal and informal. However, leadership needs to encourage and support informal mentorship.

Comment

During focus group sessions the importance of mentorship was discussed. Although mentoring is important to all Service members, it will be especially important for the women who are integrated into combat units. Informal mentoring, because it is not done to meet a requirement, can be more appealing because all involved have chosen to be in a mentoring relationship.

Best Practice 4: The Services should assure their recruitment policies fully support the successful integration of women into the combat arms.

Comment

If restrictions on the assignment of women are lifted as DACOWITS has recommended, it will be important for all Services to attract and recruit both men and women to serve in the combat arms. Some current policies may unnecessarily discourage potential recruits from considering such service – and possibly service in the military itself. For example, the Marines tell recruits that they may be put into the infantry involuntarily, even though such involuntary assignments seldom occur. The Marine Corps should review its policy of involuntarily assigning recruits to infantry.

