



# Assignment Policy of Women in the Military: Weapons Training and Implications of Integration of Women Into All Combat Units



Presented to the Members of the  
Defense Advisory Committee on  
Women in the Services (DACOWITS)  
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# Structure of Presentation



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    - Weapons Training and Gender
  - Implications of Integration
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    - Possible Impact on Readiness
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- Summary



# Research Questions



- In 2010 DACOWITS recommended elimination of gender-based restrictions on the assignment of women to ground combat positions.
- In 2011 DACOWITS explored three primary research questions related to assignments:
  - Is weapon's training for female Service members adequate to prepare them for combat?
  - What are the potential implications of full integration of women into all combat units?
  - How can the military successfully integrate women into ground combat units?



# Method of Investigation



- Focus groups
  - 21 focus groups in seven locations
  - Included administration of a “mini survey” and focus group discussions
  - Total n = 199
  - Representative of both active duty and Reserve Component
  - Across all services: Army (28%), Marine Corps (21%), Navy (17%), Air Force (14%), Army National Guard (13%), Reserves (8%)
- Method of data collection
  - Generation of transcripts from each focus group
  - Identify major themes and subthemes
  - Enter resulting findings into a sample-wide database for analysis
  - Determine salient comments throughout focus group sessions



# Sample Demographics



Demographic Profile of Focus Group Participants (N=199)		
Variable	N	Percent*
<b>Gender:</b>		
Female	139	70%
Male	60	30%
<b>Total</b>	<b>199</b>	<b>100%</b>
<b>Service:</b>		
Army	55	28%
Marine Corps	41	21%
Navy	33	17%
Air Force	28	14%
Army National Guard	26	13%
Reserves (Army and Navy)	16	8%
<b>Total</b>	<b>199</b>	<b>100%</b>
<b>Pay Grade:</b>		
E1-E4	45	23%
E5-E6	70	35%
E7-E9	19	10%
O1-O3 (including Warrant and Chief Warrant Officers)	45	23%
O4-O6	20	10%
<b>Total</b>	<b>199</b>	<b>100%</b>



# Results: Adequacy of Weapons Training

- Participants were asked about their weapons training experiences:
  - Overall, most women (69%) reported on the mini-survey that their combat weapons training was adequate
  - Compared to men:
    - Women were more likely to report their training was *somewhat* or *very inadequate*, or that they *did not receive any combat related training*
  - Overall, 21% of women reported either inadequate or no combat weapons training

Please rate the adequacy of the weapons training you received prior to your most recent deployment in preparing you for combat.*			
	Women	Men	Overall
Very adequate	40%	54%	44%
Somewhat adequate	29%	36%	31%
Neither adequate nor inadequate	10%	3%	8%
Somewhat inadequate	9%	3%	7%
Very inadequate	8%	3%	7%
I did not receive any combat-related training prior to my most recent deployment	4%	0%	3%
<b>Total</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>



# Results: Adequacy of Weapons Training

- Extent of Weapons Training:
  - Participants reported training was received, but it was often:
    - Inconsistent and/or inadequate
      - “It seems like there is not a consistent training cycle, and it’s like, if they have time they’ll train you, but if not then ‘Okay, you’re out.’” — Junior Female
    - Of poor quality
      - “It is training, but going to a gun range for one hour and just shooting the number of bullets required, I don’t feel that was adequate.” — Senior Female
    - Not taken seriously/trainers would qualify individuals regardless of skill
      - “I don’t think they are getting ready in my unit. The supervisors ask about the recoil, and they say I don’t want that, and the supervisors are like, ‘Okay,’ and they don’t have to [shoot it]; they just check the block” — Senior Male
    - Not long enough/in-depth enough
      - “I definitely agree that they need to get more Army [weapons] training” — Junior Female
    - Possible inadequate due to financial reasons
      - “We have no money. We are supposed to go out there and do training, but we are all broke” — Junior Male



# Results: Adequacy of Weapons Training

- Weapons Training and Gender
  - Though results from the mini-survey suggested woman service members viewed training as less adequate than men, focus groups indicated:
    - Inadequacy may not necessarily be gender-specific
      - “They get the same training that the males get, so if it is adequate for the men, then it is adequate for the women...we get the same weapons training as the men” — Senior Female
    - Inconsistencies may be due to MOS
      - “There are always going to be training shortfalls, about who is going to need the training more. There is the bias and it is not going to have to do with gender, it has to do with MOS” — Senior Male
    - Training may differ, on some level, based on gender:
      - “They get the very broad basics, but after that, no, [women do not get the same weapons training as men]” — Junior Male
    - Pragmatic gender differences
      - “...helmets are always an issue. You have a bun and that’s standard, and they tell you to put your helmet on, and it just won’t fit” — Junior Female





# Results: Implications of Integration



- Participants were asked about the potential implications of fully integrating women into combat units
- Feedback covered three primary subthemes
  - Overall view of integration
  - Impact on readiness
  - Challenges
    - Cultural
    - Sexual assault/harassment
    - Logistics
    - Fraternization
    - Leadership protocols



## Results: Implications of Integration



- Views on revising the assignment policy:
  - Most were supportive of full integration
    - “I think [fully integrating women into all combat units] is a good thing... You need females, especially in Muslim country where men can’t search women.” — Senior Male
  - Participants felt that integration would work if standards were not lowered for women
    - “Standards cannot be lowered. A handful of women might make it.” — Senior Female
  - Women expressed anger that they did not receive recognition for their previous combat experience
    - “The...guys got their ribbons; when I was out there, and I fractured my arm out there, but I didn’t get the recognition.” — Junior Female
  - Some men, and a few women, expressed opposition
    - “I don’t support women in ground combat. I think it’s a bad idea. Distractions. ...fraternization...physical capability – I think there are women who can do it, no doubt. But on average, I think that it is a bad idea to implement that. I think there is a big difference between men and women.” — Senior Female



# Results: Implications of Integration



- Impact on readiness
  - The majority felt integration would have a positive or neutral impact
    - “I think it will be positive overall...The more you integrate, the tighter it will be.” — Senior Male
  - Some felt there would be an initial impact, but not long-term
    - “It was just like when women first started in the armed forces. Initially there are issues, but as it grows it will get better just like now.” — Junior Female
  - Rarely individuals felt it would have a negative impact
    - “I can see a negative impact. If they put a woman on a 50 cal, according to my experience they needed help, and she got moved to a driver. So guys have a trouble breaking in the line on a runaway gun. I weight 240 lbs. will a female be able to carry me if I’m injured? That’s the problem.” — Junior Male



# Results: Implications of Integration



- Potential Challenges
  - Cultural issues including:
    - The acceptance of males
      - “I don’t think the women would have any problem integrating; it would be the males.” — Senior Male
    - Overcoming gender stereotypes
      - “A lot of it is overcoming stereotypes. It would be women showing that we can accomplish just as much; we can do a lot of different things and be just as effective, and sometimes more effective.” — Junior Female
    - Women would have to work harder to prove themselves
      - “I’m sure they (women) can do all the things if they’re there, but they will have to prove themselves.” — Junior Male
    - Men would want to protect women, which may have an impact on the mission
      - “The men that are working beside us – they still want to protect us...I was deployed with some guys who encountered an IED, and the guys were trying to shield the women...” — Senior Female



# Results: Implications of Integration

- Potential Challenges
  - Sexual assault/harassment issues
    - “Sexual assault and sexual harassment... there’s a lot of harassment with them going down-range.” — Senior Female
  - Logistics including:
    - Facilities
      - “The only thing I would think would be housing. They need to deal with their female issues [being] met and that’s hard when we are in a small group... Privacy and things are the issues: sleeping quarters, showers, that type of thing.” — Junior Male
    - Hygiene
      - “Female hygiene [is a] big issue (infantry or whoever). Not having a shower for 30 days or 60 days. Can females really handle that?” — Senior Female
    - Access to quality healthcare
      - “In combat arms and radar, there’s no good logistical reason why we can’t do it. They’ll be like, ‘You can’t do it because of your period,’ and with the birth control I’m on, the menstruation is not an issue. The Army might want to address that – informing the females of their birth control [options] in certain types of environments.” — Junior Female



# Results: Implications of Integration



- Potential Challenges
  - Fraternization between men and women
    - “I deployed 9 months late for a 15 month deployment. There were issues with females in my unit sleeping with the males. It was harder because of the reputation the other women established before I got there. They think every female is the same. That’s what I came into.” — Senior Female
    - Pregnancy as a result of fraternization
      - “We were talking about the women getting pregnant on these ships and being taken off... well, it takes two, so take the male off too. It’s only fair. One woman had that issue, and the man got taken off, but she had to petition [for the man to be taken off the ship].” — Senior Female
  - Leadership protocols
    - Unintended consequences of leadership protocols (e.g. rape whistles)



## Results: Successful Integration

- Female service members who had served in combat ships or aircraft, or men who had served alongside women in these locations, were asked how the military could make full integration a success
- Several subthemes emerged:
  - Need for consistency and qualification criteria
  - Role of leadership
  - Training
  - Full integration versus partial
  - Emphasis on training
- Service members also shared thoughts on mentoring



## Results: Successful Integration

- Consistency and qualification criteria, regardless of gender
  - “I think that if we were to do a full integration... there should be a sidebar PT (Physical Training) test, and if you don’t pass the male’s standards on the PT test, then you can’t be [in a] combat MOS, and it should be the same [standard] for males and females.” — Junior Female
- Role of leadership
  - “It starts with the leadership; they set the standards, and we follow them.” — Senior Male
- Full integration versus partial
  - “Any failure with such a small group will be magnified. I don’t believe in the process of trial, I believe in the process of large integration. With these units that are being slowly integrated, policy needs to be behind this full force with these integrations such as with the [integration of women on] submarines.” — Senior Female





## Results: Successful Integration

- Training
  - “When it comes to the military, I think there is a need to keep your training involved. Sexual harassment, cultural bias, and so forth. You may have a nice unit, but you have a couple of crazies. [They] need to be consistent with training and the same standard is necessary.” — Senior Female
- Participants were asked questions about mentoring of women in the military and ways this could assist full integration
  - Overall, participants felt mentoring could be beneficial
    - “I think mentoring comes into play when we help them avoid the mistakes they would make without us. Broken homes, absent fathers....you come into a male dominated field and misconceive the [military] family for something that it’s not.” — Senior Female
  - Several mentioned the importance of gender neutrality
    - “If you get a new soldier, male or female, if you treat the female different, you’re already throwing them under the bus. You have to mentor her the same way as a male, or it will never be the same.” — Senior Male



## Results: Successful Integration

- Mentoring continued:
  - Some discussed gender preference
    - “I think it should be a male mentoring, and a female mentoring a male. So you get the full experience. You switch up like that you get a feel for both sides.” — Junior Female
    - “If you have females in the unit already, so obviously a female mentor would be better. Either way you look at it, we’re still different, males and females. But if there’s a female already integrated into the unit, then that’s what you need.” — Senior Male
  - A few also had a stated preference for informal, versus formal, mentoring
    - “[I prefer] informal [mentoring], because then you know that they mean it and they aren’t forced to do it.” — Senior Female



## Summary



- Is weapon's training for female Service members adequate to prepare them for combat?
  - Overall, the majority of focus group participants agreed that training did not vary by gender and was adequate
  - Common complaints by participants were that trainings were inconsistent among Services/installations/MOSs, of poor quality, not frequent enough, not taken seriously enough
- What are the potential implications of full integration of women into all combat units?
  - Most were in support of integration
  - Service members felt there would be either a positive or neutral effect on readiness
  - Challenges cited were overcoming cultural issues, managing sexual assault/harassment, logistical issues, fraternization, and leadership



# Summary



- How can the military successfully integrate women into combat units?
  - Consistent and equal performance metrics and qualification criteria
  - Emphasize role of leadership
  - Employ a full scale, systematic, integration
  - Emphasize training
  - Role of mentorship
    - Most participants felt mentorship would be beneficial
    - Participants were split on whether the military should have same-sex or opposite-sex mentorship
    - Some preference for informal mentorship versus formal mentorship

# DACOWITS 2011

## ASSIGNMENTS FOCUS GROUP PROTOCOL

### WARM-UP/INTRODUCTIONS

We are here today to hear about your experiences and thoughts relating to the assignment of women to combat units and about the weapons training provided to women. Before we get started, let's go around the room and please tell us:

1. Your branch of Service (e.g., AC Marine Corps, Army Reserve).
2. How many years you've served in the military.
3. Your career field or MOS.

### WEAPONS TRAINING

We'll begin with a discussion of your experiences relating to the weapons training women receive, and then we'll move onto a discussion of assigning women to combat units.

4. Tell me a little bit about the weapons training you've received in the past.
  - a. What weapons have you been trained on? How recently?
  - b. What weapons are used in *the unit that you're currently assigned to*? To what extent have you been trained on each of these weapons?
  - c. Thinking about your most recent deployment, what weapons were used in *the unit that you were attached to*? To what extent have you been trained on each of these weapons?
5. Generally speaking, to what extent do you believe that women are receiving adequate weapons training on all weapons used *in the unit they're assigned to*?
  - a. In your experience, do you believe women are being qualified with the *individual weapons* used in the unit they're assigned to?
6. And how adequate do you think the weapons training is that women receive on the weapons organic to the *units they are attached to while deployed*?
  - a. Do you think women are being qualified with the *individual weapons* used in the unit they're attached to while deployed?
7. In what ways, if any, do you think there are differences in the adequacy of the weapons
8. In your experience, to what extent are men and women who are in MOSs other than combat arms, such as postal clerk, personnel, finance, and supply, qualified or familiar with other weapons organic to the unit to which they are assigned?

9. What steps, if any, do you think need to be taken to ensure that women and men who are not in combat MOSs receive adequate weapons training?
10. What regulations are you aware of in your service that determine what weapons training is available to both women and men?

### **LESSONS LEARNED: INTEGRATION OF WOMEN IN COMBAT SHIPS AND AIRCRAFT**

Next I have a few questions for you about your experiences involving the integration of women onto combat ships and aircraft.

11. [ASK WOMEN]: Have you served on a combat ship and/or aircraft? If so, tell me a little bit about it. [IF NO ONE IN GROUP SAYS YES, THEN MOVE ONTO Q13]
  - a. How large was the unit in which you served?
  - b. Roughly how many other women did you serve with?
  - c. What challenges, if any, did you or other women you served with encounter that you think may be related to being a women serving on a combat ship/aircraft?
  - d. To what extent do you think these challenges were overcome?
  - e. What measures, if any, were taken to overcome these challenges?
  - f. Did you have a mentor or serve as a mentor to other women while serving on a combat ship or aircraft? If so, to what extent do you think this mentorship helped overcome any challenges related to the integration of women on combat ships or aircraft?
  - g. What lessons do you think were learned from the integration of women onto combat ships and aircraft that may apply to the integration of women into direct ground combat assignments?
12. [ASK MEN]: Have you served on a combat ship and/or aircraft alongside women? If so, tell me a little bit about it. [IF NO ONE IN GROUP SAYS YES, THEN MOVE ONTO Q13]
  - a. How large was the unit in which you served?
  - b. Roughly how many women did you serve with?
  - c. What challenges, if any, do you think there were with the integration of women onto combat ships and aircraft?
  - d. To what extent do you think these challenges were overcome?
  - e. What measures, if any, were taken to overcome these challenges?

- f. To what extent do you think mentorship of men and/or women helped overcome any challenges related to the integration of women on combat ships or aircraft?
- g. What lessons do you think were learned from the integration of women onto combat ships and aircraft that may apply to the integration of women into direct ground combat assignments?

## **INTEGRATION OF WOMEN IN COMBAT UNITS**

For these next few questions, I want you to imagine for a moment that the current combat exclusion policy were lifted for women in the military, and that women could be assigned to any MOS, including ground combat and special forces. In other words, answer these questions as if women were fully integrated into all combat units.

- 13. What, if any, challenges do you think there would be if women were fully integrated into all combat units?
  - a. Related to the success of the unit and its mission?
  - b. Related to the careers of individual women?
  - c. Related to the well-being of women?
- 14. In what ways do you think mentoring would be useful or helpful if women were fully integrated into combat units?
- 15. What forms of mentoring do you think would be helpful to the successful integration of women into combat units? In other words, what would mentorships “look like” in terms of assisting in the successful integration of women into combat units?
- 16. What do you think would be the overall impact on military readiness if women were to be fully integrated into combat units?

## **WRAP-UP**

We have just a few final questions before we are done with our discussion.

- 17. What more would you like to say regarding potential challenges to the full integration of women in combat units or regarding the adequacy of weapons training women receive that we have not yet covered?
- 18. We’re also interested in hearing anything else you’d like to share with us about women in the military. Is there anything else you’d like to talk about with us? We may use your