

II. ASSIGNMENT POLICY OF WOMEN IN THE MILITARY: WEAPONS TRAINING AND IMPLICATIONS OF INTEGRATION OF WOMEN INTO ALL COMBAT UNITS

In 2009 and 2010, DACOWITS researched the topic of women in combat to gain insight into the combat experiences of our women in uniform. The Committee recommended that the current assignment policy be updated to allow for the assignment of women to all MOSs, as they found that women have and are being employed in combat jobs for which they are excluded from assignment. As follow-up to these studies, the 2011 DACOWITS Committee sought to better understand the adequacy of weapons training women service members receive in preparation for combat and the potential implications of the integration of women into all combat units. The Committee gathered data, using a focus group protocol and a short demographic survey of focus group participants, on the adequacy of weapons training and participants' views on the possible implications of the full integration of women into combat units. This chapter summarizes DACOWITS' findings on these topics in 2011.

Presented first is a description of the 2011 focus group participants and the qualitative analysis methodology used for the data presented in the report. The remainder of the chapter highlights focus group findings organized into the following domains:

- Adequacy of Weapons Training Provided to Women in the Military
- Potential Implications of Revising the Assignment Policy to Fully Integrate Women into All Combat Units
- How to Make Full Integration of Women into Combat Units a Success

Where applicable, the Committee's focus group findings are supplemented with results from mini-surveys completed by study participants.

A. CHARACTERISTICS OF FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANTS

To provide context for the overall themes and individual comments that emerged during the focus group sessions, presented here is an overview of the demographic and background characteristics of the focus group participants. During summer 2011, DACOWITS conducted a total of 21 focus group sessions on the topic of the Assignment Policy of Women in the Military. Focus groups were held at seven locations. A total of 199 participants attended the focus groups, with a range of 3 to 12 and an average of 10 participants per session, representing the entire Active component (AC) Services and some elements of the Reserve component (RC). Each focus group session included Service members who had deployed to OIF and/or OEF, including

junior and senior, enlisted and officer, women and men.¹ The overall demographic characteristics of the focus group participants are presented in Exhibit II-1.

Exhibit II-1: Assignment Policy of Women in the Military: Weapons Training and Implications of Integration of Women into All Combat Units Demographic Profile of Focus Group Participants (N=199)		
Variable	N	Percent*
Gender:		
Female	139	70%
Male	60	30%
Total	199	100%
Service:		
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%
Total	199	100%
Pay Grade:		
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%
Total	199	100%
Race and Ethnicity:		
Non-Hispanic White	96	48%
Non-Hispanic Black	51	26%
Hispanic	38	19%
Other (Non-Hispanic)	14	7%
Total	199	100%
Marital Status:		
Married	100	50%
Single, with no significant other	42	21%
Single, but with a significant other	35	18%
Divorced or legally separated	22	11%
Total	199	100%
Length of Military Service:		
Under 3 years	11	6%
3-5 years	46	23%
6-10 years	60	30%

¹ For this study, DACOWITS defined junior Service members as those in ranks E1 through E6, and senior Service members as those in ranks E7 through E9 and all officers.

Exhibit II-1: Assignment Policy of Women in the Military: Weapons Training and Implications of Integration of Women into All Combat Units Demographic Profile of Focus Group Participants (N=199)		
11-15 years	42	21%
16-20 years	25	13%
More than 20 years	15	8%
Total	199	100%

*Percentages may not sum to 100% due to rounding.

As Exhibit II-1 shows, the majority of focus group participants were female (70%). Almost half of study participants were non-Hispanic White (48%), just over a quarter were non-Hispanic Black (26%), and almost a fifth were Hispanic (19%). The Army was the most represented Service, with over a quarter (28%) of participants, followed by the Marine Corps (21%), Navy (17%), Air Force (14%), Army National Guard (13%), and Reserves² (8%)³. Nearly half of participants were junior or senior Noncommissioned Officers (NCOs – E5-E9) (45%), and roughly a third were officers (33%) (O1-O6, and including Warrant and Chief Warrant Officers), and almost half of study participants had served more than ten years in the military (42%). Half of participants were married (50%). For a complete summary of the demographic characteristics of these focus group participants, see Appendix TBD.

B. QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS METHODOLOGY

The methodology used by DACOWITS to identify salient themes related to the assignment policy of women in the military from the 2011 focus groups is similar to the approach the Committee has employed in previous years under its revised charter. Specifically, the Committee employed the services of a professional research contractor (ICF International) to assist in the development of focus group and survey instruments tailored specifically for the topic at hand. Contractor research staff served as scribes, accompanying the Committee members/facilitators to each focus group, and generating a transcript from the session. Each individual focus group transcript was then content-analyzed to identify major themes and sub-themes, and the resulting transcript-level findings were entered into a sample-wide database for further analysis. The purpose of the sample-wide analysis was to determine the most salient comments throughout the focus group sessions, i.e., themes that appear most frequently within and across focus group sessions. These findings are presented in this chapter.

² Reserves include Army Reserves and Navy Reserves.

³ DACOWITS visited a U.S. Coast Guard (USCG) installation in 2011; however, no Assignments topic focus groups were conducted (Wellness topic focus groups were conducted).

C. ADEQUACY OF WEAPONS TRAINING PROVIDED TO WOMEN IN THE MILITARY

In previous years' research, DACOWITS found that women deployed to OIF and OEF have served in combat jobs – to which they were not assigned before deployment – while in theatre. As such, the 2011 DACOWITS Committee decided to study the adequacy of the weapons training that women are receiving in preparation for combat. This section provides a summary of the focus group findings concerning the following sub-topics:

- Extent of Weapons Training Provided
- Weapons Training and Gender

This section concludes with a summary.

Extent of Weapons Training Provided

The vast majority of focus group participants – both men and women – reported that they received some form of weapons training. The majority of participants (75%) reported on the mini-survey that the weapons training they received prior to their most recent deployment was somewhat or very adequate in preparing them for combat (Exhibit II-2). Overall, women who participated in the focus groups were more likely than men to report that weapons training they received was somewhat or very inadequate, or that they did not receive any combat-related training prior to their most recent deployment. About one fifth (21%) of women in the 2011 focus groups reported inadequate or no combat weapons training.

Exhibit II-2: 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>I did not receive any combat-related training prior to my most recent deployment</i>	4%	0%	3%
Total	100%	100%	100%

*Percentages may not sum to 100% due to rounding.

Though most women indicated on the mini-survey that their weapons training was adequate, during the focus groups, only a few offered positive comments on their training.

“I had the opportunity to go out on the ranges and shoot. I had plenty of opportunity to shoot and train.”

—Junior Woman Service Member

“If you’re not deploying, you are not doing weapons training outside of basic training. If you do deploy, I’m fully confident you get the right weapons training.”

—Senior Woman Service Member

Weapons training inadequate

Although women participants generally agreed that they are getting weapons training, most reported that it was inconsistent and/or inadequate in some capacity. For example, several said that training received was not consistent among Services, MOSs, or installations.

“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 Woman Service Member

“To me, the training varied...The way that the Army trains, it lasts a lot longer than the Navy. The training that the Army gave was a lot more detailed; if you did not get it, they would not let you [deploy], they would make you stay behind...”

—Junior Woman Service Member

“Being in medical we’re not allowed to do much. I was not allowed to do much; I didn’t have time to train for anything. I just had to go.”

—Junior Woman Service Member

Many women also said that the weapons training they received was poor quality in some fashion, such as training not being long enough.

“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 Woman Service Member

“They wanted us to just check the box. It didn’t prepare me to shoot it [the weapon] in theatre.”

—Senior Woman Service Member

“I don’t think it’s sufficient. One time a year isn’t enough...Unless you do things on your personal time. It’s necessary to be a soldier, to protect yourself, and your battle buddy...”

—Junior Woman Service Member

“I think that [the weapons simulator training] is treated as a check-the-block type thing.”

—Senior Man Service Member

There were also concerns that training was not always taken seriously, as trainers would let people qualify regardless of ability.

“[There was] a lot of cheating going on. For soldiers who don’t shoot, it was like, ‘Just get it done at the end of the day,’ [for] both males and females. You would have someone in the range next to you shooting your targets [if you couldn’t qualify]...Towards the end of the day, the trainers were poking holes in the papers targets to make sure you were qualified.”

—Junior Woman Service Member

“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 Man Service Member

Some focus group participants expressed a need for additional weapons training, including longer/more in-depth training and training on more weapons, as they often needed to use or were issued weapons other than those they were trained on.

“I definitely agree that they need to get more Army [weapons] training.”

—Junior Woman Service Member

“If the frequency of training is increased, you’ve increased the familiarity. Males and females, you get more comfortable; how to engage targets with it, what to expect from the weapon, any weapon...I don’t know if it’s a budget issue, but you should increase the frequency.”

—Senior Man Service Member

Some said that they think lack of sufficient weapons training is a funding or budgetary issue.

“The funding was getting short because it took too much time; they cut back on a lot of that...The good thing is that it saves some money and the people at a desk don’t have to go through that unnecessarily. At the same time, you could go to country (i.e., deployed to a combat theatre) and never get that training.”

—Senior Woman Service Member

“...my company’s problems are lack of equipment. You’ll get only 3 bullets, and then you’ll get 5, and how are you going to get better if you can’t practice? How are you going to get the basics before you go out to the range?”

—Junior Woman Service Member

“It’s about the budget.”

—Junior Woman Service Member

“We have no money. We are supposed to go out there and do training, but we are all broke.”

—Junior Man Service Member

Weapons Training and Gender

Although the mini-survey results suggest that women participants see their weapons training as less adequate than the men in the focus groups, most participants reported that weapons training is not gender-specific – men and women receive essentially the same weapons training.

“...it’s not men or women, because it is pretty much the same [training for both genders] these days.”

—Senior Woman Service Member

“Generally everything is the same as the male; we’re getting the same treatment.”

—Junior Woman Service Member

“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 Woman Service Member

Some also said that weapons training is equally inadequate for both women and men, and a few noted that inconsistencies in weapons training is more due to MOS than gender.

“[Weapons training is] not that adequate. It’s not just [with] women; it’s everybody.”

—Junior Woman Service Member

“I think it’s equal [between the genders], but not adequate.”

—Senior Woman Service Member

“There are always going to be training shortfalls. Is there a bias to train the men more than the women? There would not be a bias. 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 Man Service Member

A few participants, however, noted differences in weapons training and/or qualifications by gender.

“They get the very broad basics, but after that, no, [women do not get the same weapons training as men].”

—Junior Man Service Member

“I started out at [a different installation], and now I’m at the division unit with women, and the difference in training is big. I don’t remember them doing the 240-range; now it is the M4 and M9, and now it is completely different. We trained more, we trained harder out there. Now we just go out to the range for a week, and they will qualify, maybe they won’t. At the divisions with more females, that’s the difference that I see.”

—Senior Man Service Member

During the discussion on weapons training, a few participants expressed frustrations with regulations concerning women’s hair, especially with buns interfering with the fit of the Kevlar.

“...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 Woman Service Member

“I think you need an adjustment back there; the webbing and the interior makeup of the Kevlar needs adjustment to keep it from moving. I have to buy a bunch of extra stuff like donuts and padding to keep it from moving.”

—Senior Woman Service Member

Summary: Weapons Training

The vast majority of DACOWITS 2011 focus group participants said that they have received weapons training. Although the majority of study participants – both women and men – reported on the mini-survey that the weapons training they have received is adequate, as this topic was explored in more detail during the focus group discussions, most participants said that their weapons training was inadequate in some capacity. The most commonly cited inadequacies included inconsistencies among Services, installations and MOSs, poor quality training, not enough training, and trainers not taking training seriously enough. Some participants shared that they thought the reason, at least in part, for the weapons training inadequacies is lack of sufficient funding. As the questions on weapons training were asked in the context of the training military women receive, the discussion touched on whether training varies between the genders, and the majority of focus group participants agreed that the training did not vary by gender. That is, most said that women and men receive the same weapons training.

D. POTENTIAL IMPLICATIONS OF REVISING THE ASSIGNMENT POLICY TO FULLY INTEGRATE WOMEN INTO ALL COMBAT UNITS

DACOWITS asked the 2011 focus group participants a series of questions concerning potential implications of fully integrating women into combat units. These included questions about lessons learned from previous integration of women onto combat ships and aircraft, potential challenges that may arise if women were fully integrated into combat units (including those related to mission accomplishment, women’s careers, and women’s well-being), impact on unit readiness if women were to be fully integrated, and mentoring. This section presents the themes that emerged in the discussions resulting from these questions, and is organized into the following sections:

- Views on Revising the Assignment Policy
- Possible Impact on Readiness
- Possible Challenges

A summary is included at the end of this section.

Views on Revising the Assignment Policy

Although not expressly asked about their opinions regarding the assignment of military women, many of the focus groups sparked discussion on this topic. Of those who expressed an opinion on this, most were in support of fully integrating women into combat units.

“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 Man Service Member

“I can tell you from my readiness I would love it [if women were fully integrated into combat units]... If they changed it, I'd stay until the day I die...”

—Senior Woman Service Member

“I think women have proved themselves...I want the best person for the job, period.”

—Senior Man Service Member

During this discussion, many participants expressed that they thought that men and women should be treated equally, and as long as standards were not lowered for women, there would not be a problem integrating them into ground combat units.

“Standards cannot be lowered. A handful of women might make it.”

—Senior Woman Service Member

“Hold us to the same standard.”

—Junior Woman Service Member

“You set one precedent and you can meet this standard that a man can, the same MOS fields, then there wouldn’t be any issues.”

—Junior Man Service Member

“I think if you can meet the physical demand it shouldn’t matter the plumbing.”

—Senior Woman Service Member

A few women expressed that they were upset that women were not receiving recognition for their combat experience.

“It pisses me off I’m a second class citizen. I went to Iraq, Kuwait; I could’ve died, and I get no respect...If they changed it (the assignment policy), I think it will help. I think there are a lot of disgruntled females because of it. So you lose a lot of great leaders, especially on the officer side because of it.”

—Senior Woman Service Member

“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 Woman Service Member

“It pissed me off females are good enough to go on these deployments and fill the slots, but not when we return. We’re good enough to get shot at as the gunner as a driver or medic or save a life, but as soon as we get home, ‘You can’t be in the infantry, you can go back to your support unit.’ That pisses me the hell off!”

—Senior Woman Service Member

Some men focus group participants and a few women participants expressed opposition to the full integration of women in ground combat units.

“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 Woman Service Member

“I will be totally honest. Are there women who could do the infantry job and artillery job? Yes, I guarantee some would run laps around the men. The big difference is that having the females in our job makes stuff hard - the pregnancy and harassment. You like her and I like her, let’s fight. It’s our natural instinct to protect them. If you see her with that heavy pack, you are going to want to help. It creates more issues and problems as far as the effectiveness of the unit. You have females being sent home... all these issues. I think a few could be just as effective. They should have to pass these same things as the men, but it would add all those other things on the table, and it would make it harder. It creates more paperwork and more animosity in the unit.”

—Junior Man Service Member

Possible Impact on Readiness

DACOWITS asked focus group participants what they think the overall impact on military readiness would be if women were to be fully integrated into combat units. The majority of participants felt that the full integration of women into ground combat units would have a positive or neutral impact on unit readiness.

“I think it will be positive overall...The more you integrate, the tighter it will be.”

—Senior Man Service Member

“I think it (military readiness) will stay the same or go up.”

—Senior Man Service Member

“I think that we would have a better Army if it [full integration of women into combat units] were implemented, getting females into the roles...”

—Junior Woman Service Member

Some said that the full integration of women into combat units may have a short-term impact during a transition phase, but that any impact will dissipate over time.

“On the short term there are these speed bumps, and you have the ‘old crusties’ that won’t let them do things, and the females may fight back. So I can see that happening first, but once that first female is allowed to do her job and she does it well, the integration process will speed up. But there will be short-term issues.”

—Senior Man Service Member

“If anything, it will be issues in the beginning, but it will smooth itself out over time.”

—Junior Man Service Member

“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 Woman Service Member

“You’ll have the old-school guys, and I’m open minded, luckily, but you’ll have these guys who will be like, ‘No, I won’t do it’, and they’ll be in the position to make those decisions, and it will take 5 or 10 years for them to retire, and the new generation will come through, and the new sergeants and higher-ups – they will be the norm, and until then, it will affect the readiness.”

—Junior Man Service Member

Rarely, participants said that they think the full integration of women in combat units would have a negative impact on readiness.

“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 Man Service Member

“I really believe that women shouldn’t be in that type of environment... We are too emotional, we are. [That’s] not to say that all women are like that, we are [that way], generally speaking, but at the same time they are physically stronger than us; our bodies are just made completely different.”

—Junior Woman Service Member

Possible Challenges

DACOWITS asked focus group participants what, if any, challenges they think there would be if women were fully integrated into combat units, including those related to the success of the unit and its mission, the careers of women, and the well-being of women. Participants anticipated several potential barriers to integration, such as cultural issues in a male-dominated environment, sexual harassment and assault, logistical issues (e.g., facilities and hygiene), and fraternization.

Cultural Issues

An overwhelming majority of focus group participants foresaw cultural issues within combat units as a potential challenge to the full integration of women. They mentioned issues such as men not being accepting of women in combat units, women having to overcome stereotypes and having to work harder to prove themselves, and men wanting to protect women.

“In terms of a cultural shift, that will be big. In Afghanistan, there was an infantry female; they don’t have laws banning that; she was just the first female to do that.

She was on ground controls and she didn’t have any issues. It’s the same thing with NATO forces; with having DADT repealed. The British, Italians, whatever, they have a fully integrated Army with homosexuals. It would just be a cultural shift.”

—Junior Woman Service Member

Men not readily accepting women into combat units

Some of the men in the focus group discussions said that they or their male peers may struggle with accepting women into combat units. A few of the women also noted this, mentioning that combat units are often a “good old boys club”.

“If you asked me, ‘Women: could they operate a tank battalion?’ Yeah, they could, but it is about the environment. The maturity of our male environment – they are not there.”

—Senior Man Service Member

“I don’t think the women would have any problem integrating; it would be the males.”

—Senior Man Service Member

“I think it will be harder because men don’t believe women should be in that position.”

—Junior Woman Service Member

“My squadron, coming back from my third tour, it’s a squadron that hasn’t had a woman in there in like five years. I’m coming in there and kind of breaking up the good old boys club, and it took another two years after the last woman was in there... it was almost two years before we got another female in our war room.”

—Senior Woman Service Member

“In most naval communities, it’s a good old boys club. Having a thick skin and being able to roll with it, and if you hear something that you don’t like, just correct it on the spot [is how you overcome this challenge].”

—Senior Woman Service Member

Overcoming stereotypes: Women need to work harder and “prove” themselves

Several women said that women in combat units will have to work harder and prove themselves in order to overcome stereotypes and be successful; some men noted this challenge as well.

“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 Woman Service Member

“You have to go at 110%; you’re always going to be on display.”

—Senior Woman Service Member

“Women have to work twice as hard; for some people they think women shouldn’t be in that position, but if they prove themselves, they can do it – guy or girl.”

—Junior Man Service Member

“I’m sure they (women) can do all the things if they’re there, but they will have to prove themselves.”

—Junior Man Service Member

“I was one of them in 1994 that was one of these five female units that had just integrated... We had to work extra hard. When we broke into that community we had to work extra hard.”

—Junior Woman Service Member

“It’s conceptually going to be the same as having gay men in the military; conceptually it’s going to be the same way as when women and minorities got integrated. It’s a mindset, it’s about proving yourself. I’ve always been in the male-dominated roles; I’ve had to prove myself every single time...”

—Senior Woman Service Member

“Speaking from experience, I was the only female in the battalion. Being in that environment, it’s proving yourself, speaking their lingo, and once you gain that respect... I was cursing with them, speaking their language, and once I got in there and they saw that I was not in there as a female but as a team member, they saw that I was their brother, not their sister; their fellow soldier.”

—Senior Woman Service Member

Men’s desire to protect women

Several study participants, both women and men, said that they think men have an instinct to protect women, and that this may be a challenge if women were to be fully integrated into combat units.

“At first it can seem paternalistic, and you may want to protect them. That will turn into a brother, sister thing where you are leading them like all your other soldiers.”

—Senior Man Service Member

“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 Woman Service Member

“There’s more of a need to protect the women. As men we all protect each other,
but with a woman you have to protect and impress her.”

—Senior Man Service Member

“I think certain males depending on upbringing will think they have to protect the
women.”

—Junior Woman Service Member

Sexual Harassment and Assault

Some participants mentioned sexual harassment and assault as a potential challenge to the full integration of women into combat units.

“The guys are worried about sexual harassment going through the group.”

—Junior Woman Service Member

“There’s the fear of some type of sexual harassment that may happen.”

—Senior Man Service Member

“There was a fair amount of sexual misconduct on the FOB. It really had to do
more with harassment, and not necessarily reported rapes, that I knew about.”

—Junior Woman Service Member

“Sexual assault and sexual harassment... there’s a lot of harassment with them
going down-range.”

—Senior Woman Service Member

“...the first that comes in mind is sexual harassment.”

—Junior Woman Service Member

Logistics: Facilities, Hygiene and Access to Quality Healthcare

Frequently, DACOWITS 2011 study participants cited logistical issues, such as facilities, hygiene, and access to quality healthcare, as potential challenges to the full integration of women into combat units.

Facilities

“In a different setting, logistics can be an issue, like facilities.”

—Senior Man Service Member

“If they fully integrate, they just need some privacy...”

—Senior Man Service Member

“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 Man Service Member

Hygiene

“Female hygiene [is a] big issue (infantry or whoever). Not have a shower for 30 days or 60 days. Can females really handle that?”

—Senior Woman Service Member

“Their housing and hygiene things, that’s the biggest issue. How to have integration with privacy. Harassment and hygiene and things.”

—Junior Man Service Member

“Personal hygiene. You can only do so much with baby wipes.”

—Senior Woman Service Member

“Just relieving yourself – a guy can stand off to the side of the road. You can get a UTI...”

—Junior Woman Service Member

Access to quality healthcare

“Women’s health issues, especially with smaller deck ships. Women are being taken care of by the male IDC’s (Independent Duty Corpsman), and they look at the women from the top-up only, and these women have abnormal pap smears, and these [male IDC’s] don’t get in for the colostomies [sic], and yes, they say that as long as you do the test, you’re fine; it’s a check in the box, and these junior women don’t have the confidence to fight for their health care.”

—Senior Woman Service Member

“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 Woman Service Member

Fraternization

Several focus group participants believed that fraternization would be a challenge to the full integration of women into combat units. A few mentioned pregnancy resulting from fraternization as a challenge as well.

“I think the biggest problem regarding female officers is when they sleep with someone, it’s seen as something everyone does. And that’s a huge hurdle to overcome.”

—Senior Woman Service Member

“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 Woman Service Member

“People see you out with another platoon leader...maybe at dinner and you’re going to get a reputation.”

—Senior Woman Service Member

“On fraternization: you just can’t stop it. Every deployment that happens, whether it’s reported or not, as they work closer and get closer and start training more, the line that separates [everyone] disappears, and the next thing you know, it’s late at night, and you’re going home together. When that happens and you’re alone, even if you’re not fraternizing, the appearance of fraternization creates a distraction.”

—Junior Man Service Member

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 Woman Service Member

“The dynamics with women on ship, when that happens during or before deployment; when a woman gets pregnant, that is a huge issue - multiply that exponentially when [a pregnancy] happens on a ground combat unit and taking away that person from the unit.”

—Senior Woman Service Member

“With family planning, I got calls from officers about the female pregnancy rate. When these women are getting on the ship and learning the rate is when they get pregnant, and they get removed after 20 weeks [into the pregnancy], and then they are back on the ship one year later after having the newborn. A lot of these females are single females; a lot of these parents have to take care of the children, and this is tough on the sailors when they are behind on their rate. There is birth control available, and I don’t know what to say about it other than mentoring.”

—Senior Woman Service Member

Leadership

During the discussion on potential challenges if women were to be fully integrated into combat units, a few focus group participants mentioned unintended consequences of practices implemented by leadership, such as requiring all women to walk around with a whistle and a buddy while on base.

“And there was this issue where these females were running a convoy, and she got attacked in the showers, and they made it look like it was her fault because she took a shower alone, and he didn’t bring up the fact that one of her eight battle buddies could have stood outside there, and after that he made us wear a whistle - just the females - and how am I going to wear the whistle in the shower? With this little rape whistle, you can’t even hear it! I would just point out [spots] where you don’t want to be alone where you could get raped, and I just wouldn’t go there. And he brought all the females out with us on the FOB’s, telling us not to go out alone, but still, he’s holding us accountable for not getting raped, and he’s telling them not to rape their battle buddies. And then they ran out of whistles. I felt like it was one of those things that was fairly ridiculous.”

—Junior Woman Service Member

Summary: Potential Implications of Revising the Assignment Policy to Fully Integrate Women into All Combat Units

This section summarizes DACOWITS’ findings on the potential implications of fully integrating women into all combat units.

Views on Revising the Assignment Policy

Although DACOWITS did not explicitly ask study participants their opinions concerning revising the current assignment policy of women in the military, this topic arose during several of the focus group discussions. Of those who shared their thoughts on this, most were in support of revising the policy to open all MOSs, including combat positions, to women. A few also

expressed opposition to women serving in combat. Some believed that women will be able to successfully serve in combat as long as the standards are the same for both men and women. A few expressed discontent that women who have served in combat are currently not receiving due recognition.

Possible Impact on Readiness

DACOWITS asked study participants to share their thoughts on the potential impact on military readiness if women were to be fully integrated into combat units. Most focus group participants said that they thought it would either have a positive or no impact on military readiness, and a few thought it would have a negative impact. Some also believed that there may be an impact during the transition of women into combat units, but that this would lessen over time.

Possible Challenges

DACOWITS asked focus group participants to consider, if women were to be fully integrated into combat units, what challenges may arise. Specific challenges of interest to the Committee included: (a) the success of the unit and its mission, (b) the careers of women, and (c) the well-being of women. Although most focus group participants were in support of fully integrating women into combat units, many noted several potential barriers to integration, such as cultural issues in a male-dominated environment, sexual harassment and assault, logistical issues (including facilities, hygiene, access to healthcare), and fraternization.

D. HOW TO MAKE THE FULL INTEGRATION OF WOMEN INTO COMBAT UNITS A SUCCESS

DACOWITS asked women study participants who have served in combat ships or aircraft, as well as men who have served alongside women in combat ships and aircraft, to share their experiences and lessons learned from these experiences, in an effort to gather ideas that may be applied in the future if women were to be fully integrated into combat units. These ideas on how to make the full integration of women into combat units a success are presented below.

Need for consistent performance metrics and qualification criteria

Several focus group participants expressed a need for consistent and equal performance metrics and qualification criteria, regardless of gender, in order to successfully integrate women into all combat units.

“I think the standard should be the same. If I have to carry a person [who weighs] 250lbs, then fine. I shouldn’t volunteer to be in a unit and I can’t pick up that guy...So the standards should be the same. The problems come if you go into these units and you don’t expect to meet the same standards. Then that’s not fair...”

—Senior Woman Service Member

“I think having measurable metrics would be good, and consistent performance [indicators] so you can say that we have a rolling average and it is 3.2, for example, and if you fall within that [range], you are qualified, so if the women make the grade, they have that number to back them up. So, if you have that number as a cutoff to maintain credibility, when you come into a male organization... the default is they assume that you are not having that credibility.”

—Senior Woman Service Member

“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 Woman Service Member

Leadership needs to play a role

Many participants also believed that in order for the integration of women into all combat units to be a success, leadership needs to play a key role in the process.

“If the leadership shows support it will be better integration.”

—Junior Woman Service Member

“It starts with the leadership; they set the standards, and we follow them.”

—Senior Man Service Member

“It’s leadership all the way to the top, the top level folks setting equality standards.”

—Senior Man Service Member

“I think that the potential commander in these units should have extra training, because if they support it, then it makes it even better.”

—Senior Woman Service Member

“We are always going to be viewed a certain way by men, and it is always going to be up to the command to put that to rest. It is all the higher-ups. If there is a guy saying something, they have to tell them to shut up. It’s up to them to determine how we are viewed. And that is everyone, and it starts with NCOs all the way up to staff NCOs. It’s up to them to cut it off.”

—Junior Woman Service Member

Benefit to large integration, as opposed to only one or two women at a time

A few participants said that if women were to be fully integrated into combat units, a large-scale integration would be more successful than integrating only a small number of women at a time.

“We don’t [want to] bring them in by ‘one-sies and two-sies’; you do it as a herd. You bring a quality group that meets a standard, but a group [nonetheless].”

—Senior Woman Service Member

“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 Woman Service Member

Training

Only a minority of participants mentioned training as a way to make the full integration of women into combat units a success. Of those who brought up training, their comments were mixed on whether training would successfully mediate potential challenges anticipated with the full integration of women into combat units.

“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 Woman Service Member

“The issues will be what we already have – sexual assault and harassment. You don’t assume there will be new things; you need to wait and see before jumping to conclusions. It not like women, or gays and lesbians just showed up in the military, they’ve always been there. To provide training on how you treat someone, when they’ve been sitting next to you all along, it’s not needed...”

—Senior Woman Service Member

Mentoring

DACOWITS asked focus group participants a few questions relating to mentoring of women in the military, including in what ways they think mentoring would be helpful if women were fully integrated into combat units, what forms would be most helpful, and about mentorship experiences of those who have served on combat ship or aircraft. Overall, study participants thought that mentoring would be helpful to both men and women if women were to be fully integrated into combat units.

“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 Woman Service Member

“It starts with the NCO. They should be training and mentoring the soldier.”

—Junior Woman Service Member

Several mentioned the importance of gender neutrality in mentoring.

“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 Man Service Member

“I think the worst thing you could do, is set up special times and things. Every soldier gets a mentor, so you shouldn’t break the status quo.”

—Senior Man Service Member

“Everyone should have a mentor, not just the women; it helps the whole unit.”

—Junior Man Service Member

“If a female wants to be treated as a soldier, she will be treated as a soldier, not a female, and with that being said, everyone soldier needs a mentor, regards if they are male or female.”

—Junior Man Service Member

Some participants stated a preference for women mentors while others held no preference by gender.

“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 Man Service Member

“I have had really great female and male mentors both. A woman tells me what to expect, and I had a male department head who took me under his wing professionally, and sometimes that’s all you need professionally. And that’s all he did he just told me what I needed to do professionally. And again, there are just not enough women; we’re not retaining enough women.”

—Senior Woman Service Member

“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 Woman Service Member

“It is harder to mentor the opposite sex, because it’s always going to be looked upon that they have a relationship. I find it less drama to mentor same sex, but I’ll continue to do it. I really don’t care. It’s easier on everyone, especially some of the males, if they try to do it. It’s easier with same sex.”

—Senior Woman Service Member

A few participants expressed that informal mentoring is preferred over formal mentoring.

“[I prefer] informal [mentoring], because then you know that they mean it and they aren’t forced to do it.”

—Senior Woman Service Member

“With the mentoring, it depends on the mentee. There’s a program that has been established [for mentoring], and it’s like a check in the box, and I want someone to care about [mentoring] and do it in my interests, and a lot of people are doing it as a check in the box because they have been told to do it. And they get promoted and I get left behind.”

—Junior Woman Service Member

“This one guy that was my unofficial mentor, he was one of those people that actually pushed me.”

—Junior Woman Service Member

Summary: How to Make the Full Integration of Women into Combat Units a Success

DACOWITS acknowledges that lessons learned from the past may help facilitate successful change in the future of our military. As such, the Committee asked women study participants who have served in combat ships or aircraft, as well as men who have served alongside women in combat ships and aircraft, to share their experiences and lessons learned from these experiences, in the hopes that the military may apply these lessons to the full integration of women into ground combat units. These discussions led to several ideas on how to make full integration a success. These ideas include having consistent and equal performance metrics and qualification criteria for both men and women, leadership playing a strong role in supporting this transition, integrating women in large numbers rather than one or two at a time, training, and mentoring.

DACOWITS understands the important role that mentoring often plays in the success of any military career, and wanted to know what role women and men in the military think mentoring can play in helping to make the full integration of women in combat units a success. Most study participants acknowledged that mentoring would be helpful, to both women and men, if women were to be fully integrated into ground combat units. Several also noted that any mentoring program needs to be gender-neutral, as to not single out women. When asked about what forms of mentoring would be helpful, some participants said that same-gender mentors are preferable, while others believed that mentors of both genders would be helpful. A few also said that informal mentoring is better than check-the-box formal mentoring programs.