DACOWITS 2014 FOCUS GROUP FINDINGS

Military Culture, Prevention of Sexual Harassment, Accession of Enlisted Women, and Career Progression

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

12 June 2014

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Overview of presentation

- Research topics
- Methodology
- Demographics of study participants
- Results
  - Military Culture
  - Prevention of Sexual Harassment
  - Accession of Enlisted Women
  - Career Progression
  - General Comments
- Questions/ Discussion

Research topics

- DACOWITS focus groups explored four main topics in 2014:
  - Military Culture
    - Culture among women, changes to military culture, impact of military culture on sexual harassment and integration of women
  - Prevention of Sexual Harassment
    - Perceptions of incidence of sexual harassment, circumstances that lead to harassment, ways to prevent harassment and assault, perception of system to hold perpetrators accountable
  - Accession of Enlisted Women
    - Factors influencing the decision to enlist, recruitment procedures and satisfaction with recruitment, perceived importance of women in leadership
  - Career Progression
    - Professional military and civilian education, gender barriers to education, role of developmental assignments, facilitators and barriers to career progression

Methodology

- Focus Groups
  - 40 Focus Groups in 8 locations
  - Total n = 369
  - Junior Enlisted, Senior Enlisted, Officers
- Method of data analysis
  - Generate transcripts from each focus group
  - Identify major themes and subthemes within each focus group
  - Determine salient comments across focus group sessions

Demographics of study participants

Gender	Percent
Female	49%
Male	51%
Total	100% (n=363)*

Service	Women	Total (Women and Men)
Air Force	23%	25%
Army	13%	10%
Marine Corps	19%	21%
Navy	25%	25%
Coast Guard	19%	18%
Army National Guard	0%	1%
Marine Corps Reserve	1%	0%
Total	100% (n=177)	100% (n=363)

* A total of 369 individuals participated in the focus groups; 6 elected to not complete the mini-survey.

MILITARY CULTURE

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Military culture

- Positive
  - Tradition, teamwork, camaraderie, adaptability, structure, drive and discipline

"It's our family, it's important to us that we maintain and keep our traditions as you would in your own family…" – Junior Enlisted Woman

- Negative
  - Adjusting to lifestyle, frequent moves, being away from family, favoritism

- Leadership sets the tone and dictates culture

"I agree that it's the leadership. All it takes is your NCO to say let's get together this weekend to have a good time." – Junior Enlisted Woman

Changes in military culture

- Participants observed changes over the past 10-15 years
  - Women are more widely accepted

"When coming up [the ranks] I never saw more than one or two female [senior leaders]. To constantly run into other female [senior leaders] is a huge change." – Senior Enlisted Woman

  - Accommodations for pregnant and breastfeeding women are improving

"Pregnancy isn't looked at as an epidemic like it used to [be]." – Senior Enlisted Woman

Changes in military culture

- Military has become “softer” and less tough
  - Decline in standards, lack of ability to discipline, a difficult environment for leaders

“When I came in I had a lot of structure. They come in now and you can’t tell them anything. We are losing discipline in our structure.” – Senior Enlisted Woman

“The new junior [Service members] coming in, there’s been a push from up above to be gentler with them…” – Senior Enlisted Man

Military culture among women

- Women feel a need to prove themselves

"When I started, I was told 'you'll have to work harder.' They look more at what you do wrong than what you do right. There are higher expectations of you to get to the same level as the guys." – Junior Enlisted Woman

- Women's relationships with other women
  - Generally positive and supportive
  - Heightened competition among women
- Unmet need for women mentors

"One of my big disappointments in the [Service] is that it's almost impossible to find mentorship." – Junior Enlisted Woman

Impact of culture on integration of women

- Continued integration will foster more women joining the Services
- If a woman is capable of doing the job, she should be given the opportunity

"The people who have issues with it are the ones who haven't had women working with them before. The majority of the guys who don't want women haven't fought with them before; they just hear stuff from other people." – Senior Enlisted Woman

- Important to see more women in leadership roles; signifies a cultural shift

"Why do we have so many women in the military with 37 years… but no female [leader in charge]?... It's empty words." – Senior Enlisted Woman

Impact of culture on sexual harassment and assault

- Military culture considered by some to be conducive to sexual harassment
- Men have a sense of safety from being reported if they are part of a “good old boys” network
  - Certain groups may cover for each other, fail to report inappropriate behavior to protect friends
- It is time for the military to adapt to the integration of women
- Women assimilate to fit into military culture

“As a female in the [Service], we can’t be too nice. Being polite and being nice is misconstrued as flirtation. I have to be a certain way… it’s something we have to deal with…” – Senior Enlisted Woman

Impact of culture on sexual harassment and assault

- Leadership sets the precedence

"You need to make sure there is no tolerance for that [sexual harassment]. And if there is word of it, you need to address that with the whole [organization]." – Woman Officer

- Stigma against women prevents them from reporting
- Men avoid interacting with women

"No matter when I talk to a female, it's always in the back of my mind that something could be taken the wrong way." – Junior Enlisted Man

PREVENTION OF SEXUAL HARASSMENT

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Perceptions of incidence of sexual harassment and assault

- Variety of perceptions regarding the incidence of sexual harassment and assault
- Underreporting due to lack of confidence in holding perpetrators accountable and ostracizing survivors

"I think a lot of people don't report it, and they just don't want to deal with the repercussions. It would be more of a headache to report it than just fix it for yourself." – Woman Officer

- Reporting has increased in recent years; incidence has stayed the same
- Perceived frequency of sexual harassment and assault to be no higher than in the civilian population

Circumstances increasing the likelihood of sexual harassment and assault

- Sexual harassment can lead to sexual assault
- Deployments/ living in close quarters
- Alcohol
- Lack of leadership
- Silence/ lack of bystander intervention
- Young Service members
- Few women

Preventing sexual harassment and assault

- Individual level
  - Establish boundaries

"I think it's up to the person getting harassed. If you don't say anything, it's on you. I know you didn't ask for it, but what do you expect to happen if you don't establish how you want to be treated?" – Junior Enlisted Woman

  - Intervene

"The biggest thing that we all need to do is instead of being afraid to interject when we see something, instead we need to police one another and not let it go as far as needing command to step in." –Junior Enlisted Woman

Preventing sexual harassment and assault

- Systemic level
  - Increase transparency
  - Reduce fear of reporting
  - Administer consistent and appropriate punishment
  - Improve training
    - Amount of training is excessive
    - Interactive, realistic trainings were well received
    - Showing the survivor's point of view has a greater impact

"A lot of training focuses on trying to intervene or repercussions. No one is discussing the victims. I don't think it should be focused on punishment; I think they're missing the point." – Senior Enlisted Woman

  - Leaders should attend trainings to set a good example

Confidence in system to hold perpetrators accountable

- System is working well (minority opinion)
- Double standards
  - Favoritism
  - Cases brought forward by women are given greater attention
  - Men are automatically assumed guilty

"If it is her word against mine, they'll take hers over mine. I've always been advised if you're going to talk to a female [Service member], have a witness." –Man Officer

- Lack of accountability
  - Women mistrust the system
- Abuse of the system (i.e., false reporting)

ACCESSION OF ENLISTED WOMEN

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Factors influencing enlistment decision

- Personal and career factors
  - Educational benefits
  - Job opportunities and career skills

"I was going to school part time and needed a way to pay for it. I also realized I'd be able to get a job in the [Service] that would help my career path that I wanted to do." – Junior Enlisted

  - Alternative to college
  - ROTC experience/ early interest
  - Avoid/ escape a bad situation
  - Travel
- Family/ friends

Factors influencing enlistment decision

- Service selection
  - Family members in the same Service

"Mine was just family legacy. It was kind of ingrained in me from when I was young that I was going into the [Service] and that was all there was to it."
– Senior Enlisted

  - Family members in other Services
  - Not their first choice
- Impact of rescinding the combat exclusion policy
  - No direct impact

"It didn't play a factor for me. It's a good opportunity for women now; if they can meet the same standards I say go for it, it's amazing." – Junior Enlisted

  - Increases desire to remain in the Service (women only, minority view)

Recruitment of enlisted women

- Positive experiences (majority opinion)
  - Accurate information
  - Working to get the recruits the jobs they wanted
  - Easy process
  - Honesty

"A lot of people have horror stories. Mine was good. I remember the name [of my recruiter] because she helped me out a lot….They didn't try to force me to do something else. They took my preferences and made it work out." – Senior Enlisted

- Negative experiences (sizable minority opinion)
  - Recruiters who lied or told only half-truths (predominantly among senior enlisted)

Recruitment of enlisted women

- Interaction with recruiters
  - Most participants sought out their recruiters

"I jogged to my recruiting office. I wanted to go into it. He [my recruiter] didn't have to sell me anything." – Junior Enlisted Woman

  - Other participants had recruiters come to their high schools

"There's a lot of active recruitment in my school. I didn't know I wanted to join until they came to my school." – Junior Enlisted

Improving the recruitment of women

- Women to recruit other women
  - Women recruiters
  - Non-recruiter women to visit high schools

"For a lot of women, would be having a female recruiter, would make them more comfortable..." – Junior Enlisted

- Emphasis on job variety
  - Important roles women can play, including leadership roles
  - Variety of combat and non-combat related jobs available
- Advertising with women

Women in leadership roles

- Highly important (majority opinion)
  - Inspire other women to advance, add balance, ensure key assignments are given out fairly
- Women recruiters
- Women at military training
  - Address women-specific training issues with recruits, minimize occurrence of sexual harassment and assault, ensure oversight and fair enforcement of standards across genders
  - Women are often tougher than men, especially on women recruits

CAREER PROGRESSION

Professional military education

- Lack of availability at unit level (enlisted participants)

"Your unit has to pay for you to go to it, and your unit doesn't always receive a lot of money. There are a lot of schools that we'd love to go to military-wise, and you need for your own professional development, but the units don't have the funding, or they don't have the personnel to cover for us when we're there." – Senior Enlisted

- Command determines who attends

"My [organization] commander just won't sign those request forms. We have a deployment coming up, and in my opinion, they're selfish in looking only at the unit's needs and not the [Service Member]'s needs." – Woman Officer

- Lack of time

Civilian education

- Available, but…
  - Lack of time
  - Logistical barriers such as deployment and field training

"I think the educational opportunities are awesome. Just because the military has 1,000 programs, I can get a degree in anything, especially with all the educational funding." – Junior Enlisted

"Work schedules hurt sometimes…There are ways to take classes while you deploy but the military comes first, education is second." – Junior Enlisted

Gender differences in access to education

- No differences (majority opinion)

"In our unit, it's really small. It's mostly officers. There are maybe 10 females in the unit. We have the same opportunities as the males. We're offered the same schools. If we're capable of going, they send us." – Junior Enlisted Woman

"The mindset is it's not about male or female; it's about being good at what you do and you have to put yourself in front of the pack…It's that kind of stuff that you have to do." – Woman Officer

Developmental assignments

- Facilitators
  - Access to needed information on career progression
    - Branch managers/career counselors, online system specific to one Service, advancement center, unit leadership
- Barriers
  - Lack of information/ someone to guide

"There was stuff I was looking into to further my career… this is my first duty station, and there's no one here to teach me what to do. It's just rough trying to figure out how to progress in my field." – Junior Enlisted Woman

  - Too many people in career field

Developmental assignments

- Gender differences
  - Perceived equality (overwhelming majority)

"I've had only positive in my career. At the [Service] Academy I never felt threatened. Always equal opportunities for male and female. My first command was equal opportunity. I don't see any priority on males over females – all merit-based, which I appreciate. Anyone can excel in that. Can this person do the job and do they care? That's the most important thing. In all my commands I've never felt threatened or biased. I only have good things to say." – Woman Officer

  - Facilitators for women
    - Women reported: ability to get key positions has improved
    - Men reported: easier for women to get positions due to need for women leaders
  - Barriers for women
    - Berthing issues on ships, men in leadership playing favorites with their male friends

Career progression for women

- Facilitators
  - Mentors, same or opposite sex (primarily senior women participants)
  - Supportive senior leadership

"Our supervisors who help us achieve our goals is greatly appreciated. A lot of times you don't get that." – Junior Enlisted

- Barriers
  - Few institutional barriers
  - Internal barriers

"Ultimately, we want to have a balanced life, but a lot of us view senior roles as more demanding. That's an internal struggle for us. The external barriers have been removed…I still struggle with do I really want a command because I also want to see my kids." – Woman Officer

GENERAL COMMENTS

Biggest challenges for women

- Transition period while opening new positions to women
- Need for equal physical fitness standards
- Pregnancy/ breastfeeding concerns
- Lack of respect

Recommendations

- Need for more women in leadership and combat positions
- Change physical fitness and height/weight standards
- Healthcare access
- Uniform concerns
- Need for improving recruitment and screening procedures
- Need for more programs for male military spouses

QUESTIONS/ DISCUSSION

BACKUP SLIDES: DEFENSE ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON WOMEN IN THE SERVICES (DACOWITS) 2014 FOCUS GROUP FINDINGS

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Demographics of study participants: Pay grade

Pay Grade	Women	Total (Women and Men)
E1-E3	19%	21%
E4-E6	40%	36%
E7-E9	16%	17%
O1-O3 (including Warrant and Chief Warrant Officers)	17%	19%
O4 or higher	8%	7%
Total	(n=177)	(n=363)

Demographics of study participants: Length of service

Length of Service	Women*	Total (Women and Men)*
Under 3 years	20%	20%
3-5 years	19%	20%
6-9 years	12%	14%
10-14 years	20%	16%
15-19 years	14%	15%
20 or more years	14%	14%
Total	100% (n=177)	100% (n=363)

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

Deployment experiences of study participants

Ever been deployed?	Women	Total (Women and Men)
Yes	62%	64%
No	38%	36%
Total	100% (n=177)	100% (n=363)

Retention plans of study participants with less than 20 years of experience

Military Career Intention	Women*	Total (Women and Men)*
Staying until eligible for retirement	51%	53%
Staying beyond present obligation, but not necessarily until retirement	14%	13%
Probably leaving after current obligation	10%	10%
Definitely leaving after current obligation	5%	5%
Leaving active component to join Guard or Reserve	6%	4%
Undecided/ Not sure	15%	14%
Total	100% (n=147)	100% (n=304)

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

Retention plans of study participants with more than 20 years of experience

Military Career Intention	Women	Total (Women and Men)*
Staying until eligible for retirement	100%	75%
Staying beyond present obligation, but not necessarily until retirement	0%	12%
Undecided/ Not sure	0%	12%
Total	100% (n=5)	100% (n=8)

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

Experiences of military culture compared to expectations

- Work experiences (e.g., types of jobs participants actually do) were different than expected

"I thought I'd be doing my job. All I do is sweep the floor half the time… we've been told to stay late to pull weeds before." –Junior Enlisted Woman

Recommended changes to military culture

- Improve access to child care

"Child care. It doesn't tailor to the military at all… my son has to be in private child care the whole time. CDC [Child Development Centers] opens up at 6 but my [job] starts at 6." –Senior Enlisted Woman

- Improve grooming standards for women

"I feel, like, that the instructions as far as grooming and appearances, for males it's simple… for females it goes into detail of can and cannot. It's geared toward a certain female. I have to wear my hair certain ways. It's pulling my hair out. It's very unfair." –Junior Enlisted Woman