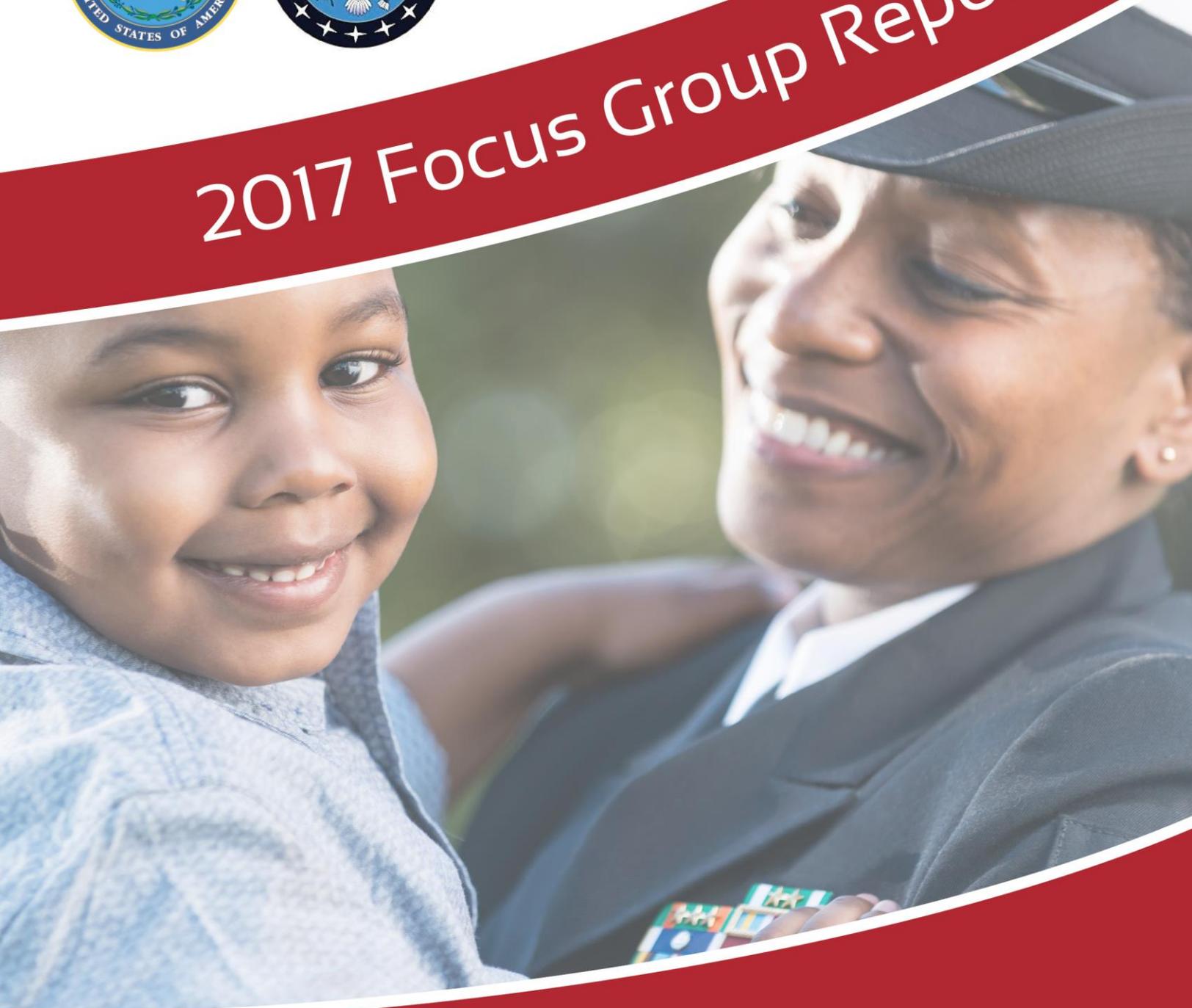


DACOWITS

Defense Advisory Committee on Women in the Services



2017 Focus Group Report



2017 Focus Group Report

Defense Advisory Committee on Women in the Services (DACOWITS)



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Contents

Executive Summary.....	i
Chapter 1. Introduction and Methods.....	1
A. Focus Group Overview.....	1
B. Focus Group Participant Characteristics.....	2
C. Analysis.....	4
Chapter 2. Propensity to Serve.....	6
A. When Service Members First Considered Joining.....	6
B. Motivations to Join the Military.....	8
C. Factors That Influenced Selection of a Service.....	13
D. Alternatives to Joining the Military.....	16
E. Concerns About Joining the Military.....	18
F. Advice for Others Considering Joining the Military.....	21
G. Perceived Impact of Recent Policy Changes and Events on Propensity.....	25
H. Suggestions for Improving Recruitment.....	29
Chapter 3. Mid-Career Retention.....	33
A. Many Intended to Stay in the Military.....	33
B. Personal Factors That Influenced Retention.....	34
C. Professional Factors That Influenced Retention.....	37
D. Suggestions for Improving Mid-Career Retention.....	45
Chapter 4. Parental Leave.....	48
A. Most Had Direct Experience With Parental Leave.....	49
B. Knowledge and Perceptions of Parental Leave Policies Varied.....	51
C. Several Factors Affected Need for and Experience With Leave, and Effects on the Military Varied.....	56
D. Benefits of Parental Leave.....	62
E. Drawbacks of and Pressures Against Taking Parental Leave.....	65
F. Most Would Encourage Women to Take at Least Some Maternity Leave.....	68
G. Suggestions for Improving Parental Leave.....	69
Chapter 5. Childcare.....	72
A. Many Participants Had Experienced Parenthood.....	72
B. Certain Populations Had Particular Difficulty Obtaining Childcare.....	72
C. Women Were More Likely Than Men to Feel That Childcare Has Put Strain on Career.....	75

D. Some Believed Childcare Affected Unit Readiness.....	77
E. Sources of Childcare Varied	79
F. A Range of Factors Influenced Satisfaction With DoD Childcare.....	81
G. Weighing All Factors, Many Felt DoD Childcare Was a Better Option Than Civilian Childcare	88
H. Arranging Childcare Has Been an Ongoing Struggle for Families	89
Chapter 6. Family Care Plans	93
A. Mixed Experiences With Implementation of Family Care Plans.....	93
B. Perceived Value of Family Care Plans Varied.....	94
C. Participants Faced Challenges Completing Family Care Plans.....	97
D. Decision to Implement Family Care Plan Was at Leader’s Discretion	98
E. Family Care Plans Affected Service Members’ Careers	100
Chapter 7. General Comments	102
A. Overall Opinions of Gender Integration	102
B. Challenges for Women in the Military.....	108
C. Proper Use of Social Media.....	112
D. Recommendations for the Secretary of Defense	115
Chapter 8. Gender Integration at Fort Hood: A Case Study	120
A. Most Participants Felt the Integration Process Has Gone Smoothly Overall	121
B. Challenges With the Gender Integration Process.....	121
C. Most Observed Little Preparation for Units Prior to Gender Integration	123
D. Initial Communications About Gender Integration Were Minimal	124
E. Suggestions for Future Process Improvements	124
Appendix A. Installations Visited	A-1
Appendix B. Mini-Survey.....	B-1
Appendix C. Focus Group Protocols.....	C-1

Tables

Table 1.1. Focus Group Participant Demographics.....	3
Table 4.1. Amount of Leave Taken by Participants.....	49
Table 8.1. Fort Hood Case Study Participant Demographics	120

Figures

Figure 1.1. Focus Group Breakdown.....	2
Figure 2.1. Importance of Various Factors When Thinking About Joining the Military.....	9
Figure 2.2. Percent of Participants That Rated Various Factors as Extremely Important When Thinking About Joining the Military.....	9
Figure 2.3. Alternative Career Options to Joining the Military	16
Figure 2.4. Participants' Concerns About Joining the Military.....	18
Figure 3.1. Participants' Career Intentions	34
Figure 4.1. Amount of Leave Taken Among Women Who Took Maternity Leave	50
Figure 4.2. Amount of Leave Taken Among Men Who Took Paternity Leave	51
Figure 5.1. Percentage of Participants Who Had Dependent Children at Home.....	72
Figure 5.2. Sources Regularly Used for Full- or Part-Time Childcare	79
Figure 5.3. Factors That Affected Satisfaction With DoD Childcare	82
Figure 6.1. Experience With Family Care Plans.....	93
Figure 7.1. Common Challenges Faced by Women in the Military.....	108

Executive Summary

This summary outlines findings from the 2017 Defense Advisory Committee on Women in the Services (DACOWITS) focus groups. DACOWITS collected qualitative and quantitative data during visits in April and May 2017 to five military installations representing all four DoD (U.S. Department of Defense) Service branches (Air Force, Army, Marine Corps, Navy) and the Coast Guard. During these focus groups, which were held at Naval Base San Diego, Camp Pendleton, Fort Hood, Joint Base San Antonio, and Sector Hampton Roads, Committee members addressed the following topics:

- ▶ Propensity to Serve
- ▶ Mid-Career Retention
- ▶ Parental Leave
- ▶ Childcare, including Family Care Plans
- ▶ Gender Integration

DACOWITS also conducted a case study for which it held focus groups at Fort Hood with participants from units that were integrating the first women into the newly opened combat arms specialties of infantry and armor. Chapters 2–8 discuss the findings for each topic.

Propensity to Serve

When did participants first consider joining the military?

Participants first considered joining at a range of ages, from 6 to 31 years old. Most first thought of joining while in high school.

What factors motivated participants to take the next step and join the military?

The opportunity for education was an extremely important motivator, especially for women. Other factors rated as important included benefits, the desire to “get away” or travel, patriotism (especially among men), and

the desire to change one’s life. Equal employment opportunity was more important for women than for men.

How did participants decide which Service to join?

Recruiters were a key influence on the selection of a Service; participants described how recruiting experiences drew them to or drove them away from specific Services. Other factors that influenced the selection of a Service included family experiences with the military (both good and bad), the relative challenge compared with other Services, and the perceived treatment by the Service of its members.

What options, other than the military, had participants considered?

College was, by far, the most common alternative participants considered, followed by various careers that could be pursued in a military context (i.e., health professions, law enforcement, and aviation). Less frequently mentioned career fields ranged from accounting to opera.

What concerns did participants have when they were thinking about joining the military?

Fear of failure was the most common concern, followed by leaving one’s family, fear of the unknown, and war and/or death. Sexual harassment and sexual assault were also concerns, particularly among women.

Would participants advise young people in their lives to join the military?

Despite the concerns they expressed, many participants said they would encourage others to join the military, but their advice would depend on factors such as the individual’s motivations, expectations, choice of Service or rank, and gender. Some said they would not encourage others to join.

What recent changes or events could encourage more people to join, or push people away from, the military?

Participants cited several recent policy changes that they believed might affect propensity. Changes such as relaxed tattoo restrictions and updates to parental leave were expected to have a positive impact. Expectations were mixed for the new retirement system and the increased emphasis on diversity. Some participants anticipated that recent events (e.g., the Marines United social media scandal) might negatively affect propensity.

What could recruiters or senior leaders do to motivate more people to join?

Participants suggested recruiters and senior leaders could entice more people into the Services by better explaining the range of career opportunities, more effectively marketing the option to join as an officer after participating in a Reserve Officer Training Corps program, and personalizing recruitment. Other recommendations were for recruiters to focus on attracting the right people or to continue the good work they were already doing.

Mid-Career Retention

What were participants' career intentions?

Most respondents planned to serve beyond their current obligations, and many planned to stay until retirement. Only a few participants were undecided about their futures in the military. Of participants who had served 20 years or more, many indicated they would stay in the military indefinitely; others, mainly men, said they planned to retire as soon as possible.

What personal factors most commonly influenced retention?

Most participants cited at least one personal factor that influenced their decisions about whether to stay in the military. One frequently mentioned issue was the tension between

balancing family life and career, particularly for families with children and dual-military families. Participants also cited the benefits afforded by the military to families and Service members.

What professional factors most commonly influenced retention?

Participants identified several professional factors that affected their decisions about whether to stay in the military; these included career progression and control over career trajectory, the quality of leadership, and the lack of availability and relevancy of training opportunities. The perceived value of participants' skills and experiences influenced retention, as did the availability of jobs in the civilian sector and the ability to attend networking opportunities.

What could help increase retention?

Many participants suggested the Services should afford their members greater flexibility to help them achieve work-life balance, particularly with respect to geographic location. Several participants thought the Services could retain and recruit quality Service members by providing more opportunities to cross-train and increasing funding for pay raises and equipment upgrades.

Parental Leave

Did participants have direct experience with parental leave?

DoD has established policies that dictate the terms and conditions of leave available to parents (i.e., biological mothers, biological fathers, same-sex parents, and adoptive parents), which is referred to as "parental leave" throughout this report. Nearly all participants had direct experience with parental leave from either working with someone who had taken leave or taking leave themselves. Of the participants who had taken leave, more than 90 percent took the maximum amount of leave allotted to them. Many had taken leave under past policies; for example, mothers

described taking 6 weeks or 18 weeks of maternity leave before the current policy, which provides mothers 12 weeks of leave, was instituted in 2016.

How much did participants know about DoD leave policies?

Participant knowledge about military parental leave policies varied. Maternity-leave policies were best understood, and most participants were aware of the 2016 policy changes that led all Services to offer 12 weeks of leave. However, some participants had questions or were uncertain about aspects of maternity leave. Paternity-leave policies were also very well understood, although changes to increase leave for fathers under the fiscal year 2017 National Defense Authorization Act¹ caused some confusion. Most groups knew little about leave policies for adoptive and same-sex parents. Participants in several groups felt that all leave, regardless of type, was subject to leaders' discretion and dependent on unit needs and circumstances.

What were participants' perceptions of leave policies?

Although participants acknowledged the challenges associated with increasing parental leave, such as the burden that absences place on smaller units, they generally approved of efforts to give parents more time with their families and to let new parents adjust to their increased responsibilities at home. Despite recent improvements, many thought current leave policies were still inadequate. Most participants agreed paternity leave was far too short, and others expressed concerns about eligibility requirements for unwed fathers. Moreover, several fathers reported using or wanting family backup (e.g., flying a

¹ Pub. L. 114–328; see <https://www.congress.gov/114/crpt/hrpt840/CRPT-114hrpt840.pdf> or <https://www.congress.gov/bill/114th-congress/senate-bill/2943/text>

grandparent into town) for additional support when they were unable to take any or enough leave after the birth of a child. Several participants suggested increasing paternity leave to at least 1 month.

What personal factors affected Service members' leave-related needs and experiences?

Participants commonly noted that each parental leave situation was different and described how families' leave-related needs and experiences varied widely. Some families needed a great deal of support, whereas others adjusted relatively quickly following the birth of a child. Participants described several personal or family-related circumstances that could affect individual Service members' needs and experiences, such as the health of the mother and her infant, the availability of a partner and/or family to provide support, and the availability of childcare.

What leave-related professional factors affected individuals and their units?

Work-related factors mentioned as affecting units and individuals included whether parents were in smaller units or specialized positions that made taking leave more difficult; the current operations tempo and whether the parent's unit was preparing to deploy or deployed often; and whether leadership was supportive. Some participants noted that leaders who were also parents were particularly supportive. Some participants believed it was more difficult for senior personnel to take leave given their responsibilities, but a few others countered that taking leave was likely easier for senior personnel given their increased ability to control the work environment. Many felt it was the military's responsibility to prepare for and accommodate leave. Several likened parental leave to any other type of absence the military must routinely cover (e.g., absences because of injuries or to attend training).

What were the perceived benefits of parental leave for families and the military?

Participants cited the benefits of leave for parents and families as well as the military. Respondents described several ways maternity leave supported women's physical recovery from childbirth and allowed new mothers and their families to establish routines and bond with the new infant. Participants also noted that the military is not a typical job and that it requires full commitment and focus. Many thought giving Service members time to attend to personal matters would permit them to focus when they returned, and some felt it might even foster a long-term commitment to the military.

What were some of the perceived drawbacks of taking leave?

Participants acknowledged several drawbacks or sources of pressure that Service members faced when taking leave. They acknowledged that women faced stigma surrounding pregnancy and felt pressure to time their pregnancies (or avoid having children) to prevent being viewed negatively. Junior-level servicewomen, in particular, were often perceived as using pregnancy to avoid work or deployments. Many participants described ways that taking leave could have a negative impact on women's career progression, discussed pressures that women faced (e.g., quickly regaining optimal fitness after childbirth), and commented on the sacrifices women made to advance. Many parents felt pressure to return to work before the end of their allotted leave. This complaint was especially common among mothers, whose longer leave time posed a greater burden for their units, but was also mentioned by fathers.

Would participants advise female peers to take maternity leave?

Despite the drawbacks and worries noted in previous sections, most participants said they would encourage female peers to take at least some leave. Many participants would advise a

peer to take the full amount of maternity leave available. However, to mitigate potential challenges, many other participants said they would encourage a peer to take leave as needed to recover and adjust but to come back early if necessary and possible.

What were participants' suggestions for improving parental leave?

Participants offered several suggestions for improving parental leave. Most participants felt strongly that the Services should increase the amount of paternity leave, and some recommended increasing maternity leave on a case-by-case basis when necessary or appropriate. Participants recommended revising leave policies for adoptive, same-sex, or unmarried parents and noted the challenges associated with leave for these groups. Many participants thought leave amounts for all parents should be more flexible. A few officers recommended making at least some types of parental leave mandatory to alleviate the stigma associated with taking leave and the pressure many parents feel to return to work as early as possible. Participants also suggested the Services should find creative ways to fill billets or cover members who are on leave, allow new parents to split up leave rather than take it all at once, and improve communications around leave policies.

Childcare

How many participants were parents?

Approximately one in two participants had dependent children living at home. One of the most common themes participants mentioned was feeling torn between their families and careers.

Which groups faced the greatest challenges obtaining childcare?

Obtaining childcare has been more difficult for certain populations than others, including dual-military families, single parents, junior Service members, parents of children with special

needs, and parents who worked in jobs that did not offer flexible hours or locations.

How did childcare affect participants' careers?

Female participants were more likely than male participants to feel that childcare needs were taxing on their careers. They often felt that tending to their children's needs gave the appearance that they were avoiding work. Participants also believed military culture is rigid and does not allow for workplace flexibility to accommodate childcare needs. A few participants felt the military did not support men as caregivers.

What effect did childcare have on unit readiness?

Participants were asked to describe how day-to-day childcare issues affected unit readiness. They described how units found it difficult to accommodate absences, especially recurring ones. Some also believed childcare challenges negatively affected morale. Participants described how it was easier for larger units to accommodate recurring childcare challenges, and they believed leaders could play a key role by offering flexibility and additional support around childcare needs.

Where did participants obtain childcare?

Friends and family were the most common sources of childcare. Examples included stay-at-home spouses, family members moving in with Service members to provide care, and children moving in with and being cared for by family members other than their parents. Many participants also obtained childcare from DoD Child Development Centers (CDCs) or civilian childcare providers. A few participants described using nannies or au pairs.

Which factors influenced satisfaction with DoD childcare?

Participants were asked to describe what they liked and disliked about DoD childcare. A range of factors influenced their satisfaction. Limited availability and wait lists were mentioned most

frequently. Participants described how CDCs prioritized some Service members, such as dual-military parents, who as a result were less affected by limited availability. Wait lists were also longer in certain geographic locations and for children of particular ages. Although wait lists were particularly challenging for parents using DoD childcare centers, a few participants described a lack of availability in civilian childcare centers as well. The next most commonly cited factor that affected satisfaction with DoD childcare was operating hours, followed by cost; convenience and location; and the quality of providers, facilities, and programming. Generally, participants tended to prefer DoD childcare to civilian options.

How did families address the ongoing challenges associated with childcare?

Families found it difficult to obtain safe, reliable, affordable childcare. Many said it was difficult to arrange care for children when they were sick. Participants described making sacrifices to address childcare needs. For example, some parents brought their children to work with them when care was unavailable. Most participants were not aware of the childcare resources offered by their Services. Participants suggested the military should better educate its members about childcare resources, improve childcare options, and increase the capacity of CDCs.

Family Care Plans

What were participants' experiences with Family Care Plans?

About 3 in 10 participants reported ever having a Family Care Plan (FCP). Participants reported that FCP implementation varied by Service.

What was the perceived value of Family Care Plans?

Many believed FCPs were not helpful and were solely a formality that did not reflect families' real plans and intentions. However, some felt FCPs were valuable for certain situations and

populations. Participants believed FCPs were helpful during deployments, field trainings, and emergencies and were useful for single parents, new parents, and dual-military families. Leaders found FCPs to be helpful, especially if they took the time to verify the plans. A few said the plans could provide guidance for general family issues (e.g., elder care), not just those related to children.

What challenges did participants face in completing their Family Care Plans?

Many participants shared frustrations about the difficulties of completing their FCPs, which could include tasks such as assigning a guardian for dependents; signing up for life insurance; and arranging for housing, food, and emergency needs. They found it hard to find trusted individuals to list and to keep the plans up to date, and they complained of not having enough time to complete their plans. Several senior enlisted and officer participants recommended the Services provide additional training on the proper use and purpose of FCPs.

Who decided if and when to implement Family Care Plans?

Generally, there was a perception among participants that leaders chose whether and when to implement an FCP, and some believed leaders were not well versed on FCP policies and procedures. Participants described cases in which leaders misused FCPs to reprimand subordinates.

How did Family Care Plans affect Service members' careers?

Participants frequently gave examples of how noncompliance with the FCP had consequences for their careers. In some cases, noncompliance caused members to switch career fields; in others, it led members to separate from the military. Participants from two Services, however, reported their FCPs had no effect on their careers. Participants noted how FCPs disproportionately affected certain populations, including dual-military families, single parents,

younger or enlisted Service members, and women.

General Comments

What were participants' perceptions of gender integration?

In general, participants saw gender integration as a positive step for the military, and several participants indicated the process seemed to be going well thus far. However, several participants emphasized the importance of maintaining equal standards for men and women; they felt it was right to open formerly closed positions to women as long as the women who were placed in those positions were held to the existing standards. Echoing comments provided in past years, some participants suggested that although the gender integration process would take time, they envisioned it would eventually succeed. In fact, some participants, particularly men, indicated they felt gender integration was not as significant to Service members as it was often made to seem.

What challenges did military women face?

Participants mentioned a variety of challenges, including work-life balance and raising a family; military culture, which was often perceived as being unaccepting of women, especially in nontraditional roles; difficulty obtaining positions key to career progression; and the lingering perception that women are unable to meet physical standards.

What guidance had participants received regarding the proper use of social media?

Some participants mentioned the Marines United photo-sharing scandal (which the press first reported on in March 2017, a few weeks before some of the focus groups were held). Others had not yet heard about it. Most indicated they had been trained on the appropriate use of social media, but the topics of the training varied somewhat. In some Services, the training focused on what content

not to post on social media, typically for operational security reasons or to ensure the Service was portrayed in a positive light. Several participants asserted Service members should be more cautious about posting information on social media and recommended more severe consequences and more consistent enforcement and punishment for improper use of social media. Several participants suggested additional training and guidance to ensure the appropriate use of social media, though some participants feared that frequent social media training might lead Service members to become immune to the messages.

What other recommendations did participants offer?

Participants offered additional recommendations at the end of each focus group session when time permitted. Many of these issues were also raised in the topic-specific discussions. Participants suggested the Services increase the length of paternity leave; support extra staffing to help units accommodate pregnancies; normalize interactions between men and women; end the frequent changes to uniforms; improve the performance review system; increase the amount and availability of job-specific training and the number of jobs within each career field; reevaluate height-weight standards; implement better screening during recruitment; and extend DoD childcare hours.

Gender Integration at Fort Hood: A Case Study

How did participants view the gender integration process at Fort Hood, and what were the perceived challenges to successful integration?

Most participants in the focus groups at Fort Hood felt gender integration there has gone

smoothly overall. The feedback was generally positive but included some concerns. Some participants felt the Army's "leaders first" approach— which calls for integrating female leaders to units prior to assigning junior enlisted women—had pushed qualified men out of line for leadership positions so women could fill those roles. Despite the potential for animosity, male and female participants recognized the importance of placing female leaders in these units and felt leaders were doing their best to reassign those men to other leadership positions. Another concern was that the Army's focus on ensuring a minimum number of women in a unit could lead to women being grouped into a small number of units and could result in some units having few experienced members. A few participants felt some Service members continued to believe that physical standards had been lowered to allow women to meet the requirements for these newly opened units, although this perception was attributed to Service members outside of the integrating units.

What could be done to ensure the success of future integration efforts?

Participants made several recommendations on how to ensure the success of women entering the newly opened career fields and units. The Services could focus less attention on the first women to attend newly opened schools, and the military could integrate units with female noncommissioned officers rather than female officers so junior enlisted women would have access to Service members with whom they felt comfortable.

Chapter 1. Introduction and Methods

This report outlines the findings from the 2017 Defense Advisory Committee on Women in the Services (DACOWITS) focus groups. Chapter 1 provides the introduction and methods, which consist of an overview of the focus groups, the characteristics of the focus group participants, and the analysis approach. Chapters 2 through 9 present the findings on the propensity to serve, mid-career retention, parental leave, childcare, Family Care Plans, general focus group comments, and gender integration (including a case study conducted at Fort Hood), respectively.

A. Focus Group Overview

DACOWITS collected qualitative and quantitative data during site visits in April and May 2017 to five military installations² representing all four U.S. Department of Defense (DoD) Service branches (Air Force, Army, Marine Corps, Navy) and the Coast Guard (see Appendix A). During the focus groups at these sites, the Committee addressed five topics:

1. Propensity to Serve
2. Mid-Career Retention
3. Parental Leave
4. Childcare, including Family Care Plans
5. Gender Integration

DACOWITS also conducted a case study for which it held focus groups at Fort Hood with participants from units that were integrating the first women into the newly opened combat arms specialties of infantry and armor.

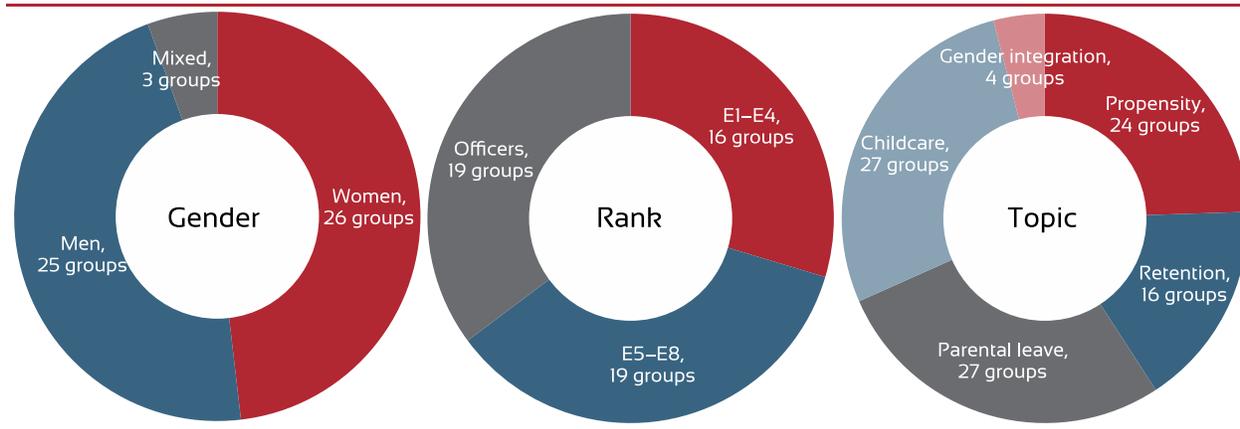
In partnership with researchers from Insight Policy Research and ICF, the Committee developed a series of focus group protocols (see Appendix C); each protocol consisted of either one or two topic modules to ensure each study topic was addressed by each Service, gender, and pay grade group. Protocols with two topic modules were used for 90-minute focus groups; protocols with one topic module were used for 60-minute focus groups. Committee members facilitated focus group discussions to elicit and assess views, attitudes, and experiences of Service members on the selected study topics. The Committee also distributed mini-surveys to participants to determine the demographic composition of groups (see Appendix B). All data collection instruments were approved by ICF's institutional review board, with concurrence from DoD's Office of the Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness, to ensure the protection of human subjects.

In 2017, DACOWITS conducted 54 focus groups. Of the 54 groups, 25 were held with men, 26 were held with women, and 3 were comprised of participants of both genders. Sixteen groups were conducted with junior enlisted participants (E1–E4), 19 groups were held with senior enlisted participants (E5–E8), and 19 were conducted with officers. There were 563 participants with an average of 10 participants per session. DACOWITS used the gender integration module in 4 groups, the propensity to serve module in 24 groups, the mid-career retention module in 16 groups, the parental leave module in 27 groups, and

²The five installations were Naval Base San Diego, Camp Pendleton, Fort Hood, Joint Base San Antonio, and Sector Hampton Roads. The focus group protocols were pretested at Fort Belvoir.

the childcare module in 27 groups. Participants were asked to indicate their responses for selected questions by raising their hands, and focus group staff conducted a hand count of respondents. Each installation was responsible for recruiting focus group participants from the demographic categories specified by DACOWITS (see Figure 1.1).

Figure 1.1. Focus Group Breakdown



B. Focus Group Participant Characteristics

The research team analyzed the qualitative data from the focus groups and compiled a demographic profile of the focus group participants using responses from the mini-surveys (see Table 1.1). Approximately half of the participants were men (44 percent), and half were women (56 percent). Four Services—the Air Force (23 percent), the Army (25 percent), the Marine Corps (24 percent), and the Navy (21 percent)—were nearly equally represented; the Coast Guard was least represented (7 percent). Participants ranged widely in age, although younger (aged 18–20) and older (aged 40 and older) participants composed smaller percentages of the group.

Enlisted Service members represented more than half of focus group participants: Service members with pay grades E4–E6 made up the largest proportion of enlisted participants, followed by those with pay grades E1–E3 and E7–E9. The largest subset of officers was composed of those with pay grades O1–O3, followed by those with pay grades of O4 or higher and those with pay grades WO1–WO5.

Focus group participants represented varying levels of tenure in the Military Services and were relatively equally distributed across all categories. Those with 20 or more years of service were least represented, whereas the remaining tenures were nearly equally represented. A majority of participants identified as White; smaller proportions identified as Black, Asian, American Indian or Alaska Native, other, or multiple races. About one in five participants identified as Hispanic. Subsequent chapters in this report provide the results for the topic-specific mini-survey questions.

Table 1.1. Focus Group Participant Demographics

Participant Characteristic	Women		Total (Men and Women)	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Gender				
Male	N/A	N/A	250	44%
Female	N/A	N/A	313	56%
Total	N/A	N/A	563	100%
Service Branch				
Air Force	68	22%	131	23%
Army	80	26%	140	25%
Coast Guard	41	13%	41	7%
Marine Corps	67	21%	133	24%
Navy	57	18%	118	21%
Total	313	100%	563	100%
National Guard or Reserves				
Yes	8	3%	9	2%
No	304	97%	551	98%
Total	312	100%	560	100%
Age				
18–20	22	7%	36	6%
21–24	70	22%	124	22%
25–29	74	24%	138	25%
30–34	57	18%	108	19%
35–39	49	16%	91	16%
40 or older	41	13%	66	12%
Total	313	100%	563	100%
Pay Grade				
E1–E3	37	12%	72	13%
E4–E6	123	39%	221	39%
E7–E9	31	10%	57	10%
WO1–WO5	6	2%	10	2%
O1–O3	75	24%	135	24%
O4 or higher	41	13%	68	12%
Total	313	100%	563	100%
Length of Military Service				
Less than 3 years	44	14%	82	15%
3–5 years	86	28%	146	27%
6–9 years	50	16%	90	16%
10–14 years	52	17%	103	19%
15–19 years	58	19%	92	17%
20 years or more	15	5%	34	6%
Total	305	100%	547	100%

Participant Characteristic	Women		Total (Men and Women)	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Race				
Asian	16	5%	24	4%
Black	62	20%	106	19%
American Indian or Alaska Native	3	1%	6	1%
Pacific Islander	2	1%	2	0%
White	176	57%	338	61%
Other	29	9%	45	8%
Multiple Races	21	7%	35	6%
Total	309	100%	556	100%
Hispanic				
Yes	73	23%	117	21%
No	238	77%	443	79%
Total	311	100%	560	100%

Some percentages do not sum to 100 because of rounding.

N/A = not applicable

Source: DACOWITS mini-survey (data from all groups)

C. Analysis

The focus group analysis process involved several steps. During each focus group, research staff captured verbatim discussions between focus group participants and Committee facilitators; the research team cleaned and redacted the transcripts. Next, the team identified themes and subthemes by reviewing all transcripts for a given focus group topic and noting common responses that arose. Once the themes were identified, the data were entered into qualitative analysis software (NVivo and Atlas.ti), and the transcripts were coded by themes. This allowed the research team to explore whether certain responses were more common among subgroups (e.g., gender, pay grade, Military Service). Unless otherwise specified, focus group themes were common across pay grades, Military Services, and genders. The quotes provided throughout the report were chosen from hundreds of illustrative examples to exemplify the findings for each theme.

Strengths and Limitations of Focus Groups as a Methodology

Focus groups are a key tool for DACOWITS to gauge Service members' perceptions and assess their knowledge, attitudes, and opinions. They provide an interactive way to explore topics deeply and obtain detailed information in Service members' own words. Focus groups also allow researchers to collect data on groups that are underrepresented in the military, such as women, that may not be represented statistically through surveys that examine the military as a whole.

Unlike survey research (e.g., the DACOWITS mini-survey), which gathers information on the numbers or proportions of respondents who answer particular questions in a certain way, focus group research does not gather information on concurrence across all respondents, and findings are not generalizable to a larger population. Furthermore, the recruitment of participants for a focus group cannot be replicated, identical questions cannot be asked in each group, and the results of one group cannot be compared precisely with other groups. Despite these limitations, the results can add greatly to an existing body of

knowledge on a topic, or they can serve as a first step toward developing a more statistical study of a new topic.

The small sample size means the groups might not represent the larger population accurately; this effect can sometimes be beneficial if the desire is to obtain data from underrepresented groups that may not be represented statistically through surveys and other means. Group discussions can be difficult to direct and control, and many subjects are addressed during each discussion; as a result, not all questions are asked in all groups, and not all participants are able to answer each question.

To give a rough indication of the frequency with which a particular theme was mentioned, several key terms and phrases are used throughout the report. For example, to indicate how frequently a theme was raised during the focus groups that addressed specific topics, the report uses “many” for themes covered in at least half of the groups, “several” or “many” for themes discussed in 25–50 percent of the groups, “some” for themes covered in approximately 25 percent of the groups, “a few” for themes covered in fewer than 25 percent of the groups, and “a couple” for themes discussed in two focus groups. When comparing multiple responses for a given question, the report uses phrases that give a rough sense of the proportion of participants who expressed a given opinion—such as “nearly all of the participants who responded to this question” or “the most commonly mentioned theme”—rather than phrases with a fixed meaning that imply every participant provided a response. It is important to keep in mind that the purpose of focus groups is to obtain rich detail on a topic rather than to precisely measure the frequency and types of responses.

Chapter 2. Propensity to Serve

DACOWITS has studied for many years the factors that influence potential Service members' propensity to serve. The Committee examined the accessions of female officers in 2013, the accessions of enlisted women in 2014, and the accessions of women overall in 2015. To enhance its understanding of the issue, the Committee chose to conduct a broad examination of propensity in the 2017 focus groups.

The Committee conducted 24 focus groups on the topic of propensity (see Appendices C.1 and C.2 for the focus group protocols). This chapter discusses the focus group findings on the propensity to serve and is organized into the following sections:

- ▶ When Service Members First Considered Joining
- ▶ Motivations to Join the Military
- ▶ Factors That Influenced Selection of a Service
- ▶ Alternatives to Joining the Military
- ▶ Concerns About Joining the Military
- ▶ Advice for Others Considering Joining the Military
- ▶ Perceived Impact of Recent Policy Changes and Events on Propensity
- ▶ Suggestions for Improving Recruitment

When interpreting the findings outlined in this chapter, it is important to consider that these focus groups consisted only of participants who had joined the military. It is possible that individuals who did not join the military would provide different perspectives on these topics.

A. When Service Members First Considered Joining

DACOWITS asked participants when they first began to consider joining the military and what factors prompted them to explore the military as a possible career option. Participants considered joining at a range of ages, from 6 to 31 years old. Most first thought of joining while in high school.

1. During High School

Most participants first considered joining the military while in high school. Some of these individuals became aware of the military through its advertising efforts.

"[I learned about the military [through] recruiters coming to [high] school, and commercials and shows about it. . . . The sound effects and music in those commercials got to me, and it's just something I always wanted to do."

–Junior Enlisted Woman

"I thought about the military in high school when I saw the [Service] come to my school and do the pull-up challenge at our gym. I started looking into them after that. My friend was joining, and he took me with him to the recruiter, and that's pretty much how I started."

–Junior Enlisted Woman

Some who first considered joining during high school were looking for a more appealing alternative to college.

"I was a junior in high school. People wanted to go to college, and that didn't sound interesting. . . . My grandpa had served in the [Service A], and then I decided on the [Service B]. I've been here ever since."

–Male Officer

"I decided to join in . . . my junior year of high school. I had been considering the military because I didn't think I wanted to go to college. I would have a chance to get out in the world, have a job that was cool to me, get to travel, and see the country."

–Senior Enlisted Woman

Others who first considered joining while in high school saw the military as a path out of troubled circumstances.

"I joined because I didn't have any other options. I was homeless at 16, and my grandparents took me in. . . . After going through all of that, I didn't do well in school, and I had dreams but not any money. I knew I wanted to do something with my life, and a lot of people I grew up with . . . couldn't see past the end of the street that we lived on. I went to get ice cream one day and saw the recruiting station, and I made the decision that day."

–Senior Enlisted Woman

"I was 18 [when I joined] because I got kicked out of school, and I was like, 'Man, my life isn't going anywhere,' so I wanted to do something because I was always a troublemaker, and I wanted my mom to be proud of me."

–Junior Enlisted Man

2. As Young Adults

Many participants first considered joining after high school as young adults. Those individuals often reported being unfulfilled by college or unable to afford college.

"I met my recruiter in college. . . . [The recruiter] had something that none of the professors had. I dropped out to enlist in the [Service]. It was the hardest thing I could do and the greatest challenge."

–Female Officer

"I was 19 when I started thinking about it. I was in college for a year, and I wasn't happy, and then I had to drop out for financial purposes, which I think happens to a lot of people. I didn't really have another direction to go, and DoD helped me out. . . . They promised me a job, and I was all set."

–Junior Enlisted Man

3. During Childhood

Several participants reported that the military was always an option for them, or that they first considered joining the military during childhood. Those who first considered joining during childhood

often came from military families. Female participants were about twice as likely to first consider this option as children.

"I was raised by my grandparents, and my grandpa served in [World War II]. . . . I remember his stories about being overseas, and I was always interested in war stories, so [because of] him, I was always interested."

–Senior Enlisted Woman

"I knew I was joining the [Service] since I was 7. . . . My dad said it was when I got GI Joe sheets. I come from a strong military family background. My . . . great-grandfather was a general. . . . There's a sense of pride to continue that on."

–Female Officer

4. Later in Life

Although the majority had already considered joining by the time they were young adults, several participants first considered joining later in life, in their thirties. These individuals often saw the military as a means to support their families or deal with situations that arose in their lives.

"My husband served for 8 years and was stationed at [installation] for about 6–7 years. Then, my husband . . . went to prison, and I had to make a decision. . . . I [had] 6 months of savings. I had to do something. . . . I had kids, a house . . . , so I joined the [Service]. . . . From that point on, I wasn't [a] housewife anymore, and I realized I am capable of so many things. I love it. . . . I'll be staying as long as I can."

–Senior Enlisted Woman

"I really didn't start thinking about joining until I was . . . in the age range where they would kick me out. . . . I told my younger brother . . . , if they [raise the age limit for enlisting], I'll join in a heartbeat, because [he] was doing well [in the military]. . . . [When] he called me and said . . . they changed the age [limit] . . . , I decided it was the right time to make a change. I talked it over with my wife, and we agreed."

–Junior Enlisted Man

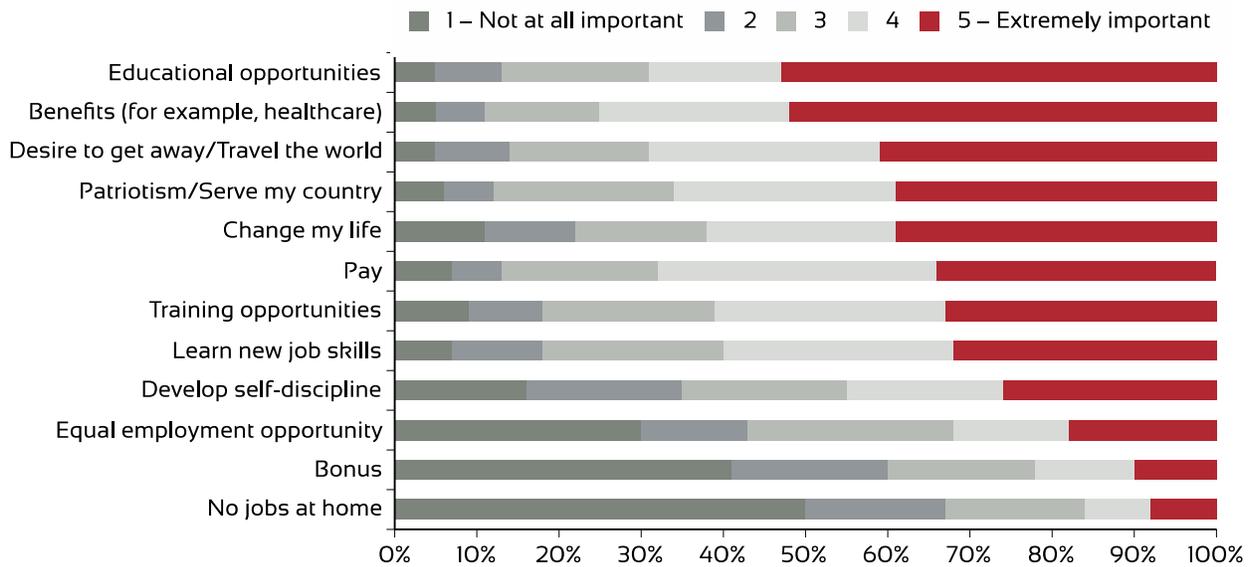
"I joined at 31. . . . This is my second career. I joined the [Service] because [of] the job market [where I lived]; it was impossible to get work. . . . I had two kids at the time. . . . My son has special needs and needs to take medication. . . . [I thought,] 'I can't do this anymore . . . ; what's the better option?' So, I sat down and did the numbers, [and decided to join]."

–Senior Enlisted Woman

B. Motivations to Join the Military

DACOWITS asked participants how important various factors were when thinking about joining the military. As shown in Figure 2.1, educational opportunities and benefits were extremely important to a majority of respondents (54 percent and 53 percent, respectively). Other factors rated as extremely important included the desire to “get away” or travel (42 percent), patriotism (39 percent), and the desire to change one’s life (39 percent).

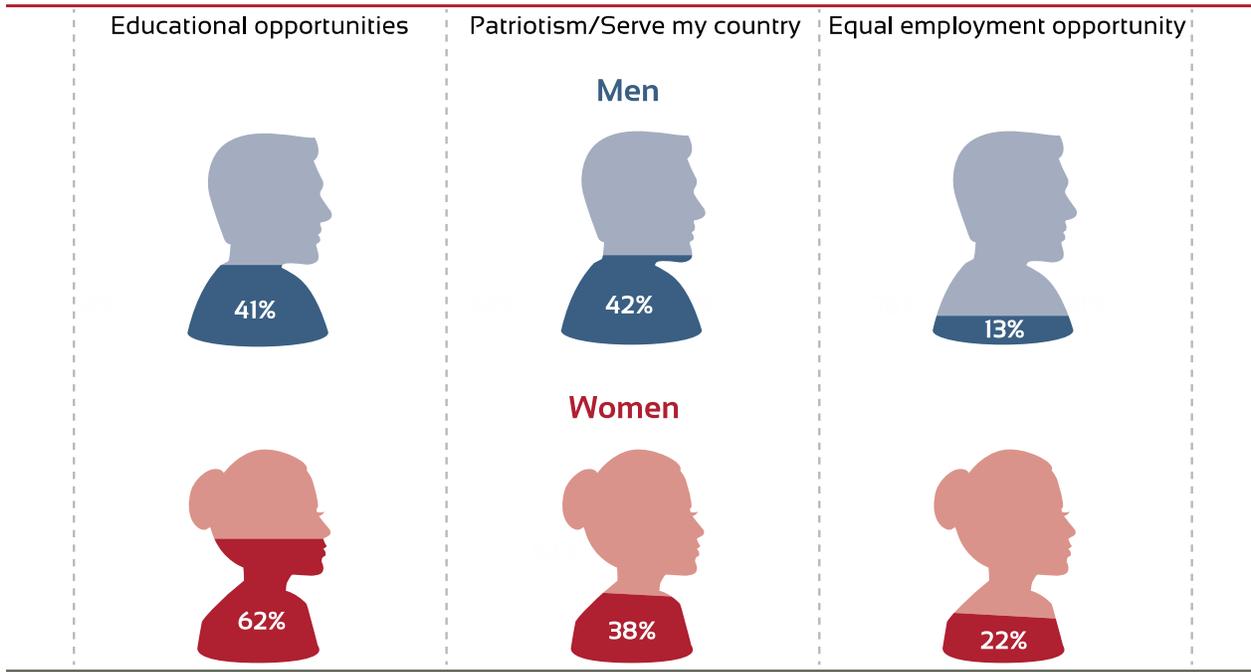
Figure 2.1. Importance of Various Factors When Thinking About Joining the Military



Source: DACOWITS mini-survey (data from groups participating in propensity discussion only)

When examining differences by participant gender, results indicated that educational opportunities and equal employment opportunities were more important for women than for men, whereas patriotism was more important for men than for women (see Figure 2.2). Women and men rated the remaining factors similarly.

Figure 2.2. Percent of Participants That Rated Various Factors as Extremely Important When Thinking About Joining the Military



Source: DACOWITS mini-survey (data from groups participating in propensity discussion only)

1. Educational Opportunities

Consistent with mini-survey results, the most commonly mentioned factor that motivated participants to join the military was educational opportunities.

"I finished my bachelor's, but I wasn't done with school. I wanted to get a master's [degree], but it was just taking too long, and it was too expensive. So, I decided to join the military, and then they could pay for it, and I could just finish school while in the military."

–Junior Enlisted Woman

"[I joined for] my education. I'm a first-generation American. . . . Someone told me to go to school through the military. I was in the Academy. It was nice not having to work through college."

–Female Officer

"It was education . . . [that] was really important to me. . . . I wasn't considering the military before. I went to college for a year, and [the other college students] weren't mature. . . . I didn't like it, and I was looking for something different. I wanted something that would help me pay my bills and be structured, [and I thought the military would] be able to help with my education, too, so I locked in on that."

–Senior Enlisted Woman

2. Travel

Another common response was that participants joined the military to travel or get away. This included travel both internationally and domestically, as some simply saw the military as a way to leave their often-small hometowns. Some considered the opportunity to travel as something that set them apart from their civilian peers.

"For me, it's an opportunity to see the world. When you go on deployments, you can see multiple ports. I had an opportunity to travel. The [Service] . . . gave the opportunity to go to multiple different areas."

–Male Officer

"It was about adventure for me because I come from a small town, and I hadn't seen much of the world. . . . I wanted to go to Okinawa, and that was totally different from what I knew."

–Junior Enlisted Man

"From a young age, I could see that this isn't what I want. A lot of people in my town just stay, and I thought, 'I can't do this for the rest of my life.'"

–Senior Enlisted Woman

"I had the courage to leave. Before I joined the [Service], I had never left my city, ridden [in] a plane, [or] seen a beach . . . ; I was just in [my home State]. It's a big world out there."

–Senior Enlisted Woman

3. Opportunity to Change Their Lives

Several participants acknowledged having troubled lives in the past and indicated that the military presented an opportunity to change their lives, and in turn, better themselves. This response was particularly common among enlisted participants.

"I needed a change. I did go to college first, but then I got in trouble. I was going to court, and I knew I was going to be getting in more trouble if I didn't do something. I didn't join because I wanted to serve the country or anything like that. I joined because I didn't have a job and I just needed to get out [of] there."

–Junior Enlisted Woman

"After I flamed out of college, I went back to [State]. . . . I was broke, and I didn't want to be homeless, so I started talking to recruiters so I could do something with my life."

–Senior Enlisted Woman

"Most of the people that were my friends back home are in jail now, or worse, some of them just are no more. When I talk to them now, they're like, 'Man, I should have joined when you did. I could have got away instead of staying.' My stepdad was a [Service member]. . . . He always wanted me to join the military so I could leave and have a chance to expand and grow."

–Junior Enlisted Man

4. Pay, Benefits, or a Perceived Lack of Civilian Jobs

The desire for an immediate and steady income motivated several participants to join the military. This sentiment was most common among junior enlisted Service members and among women.

"[In the military, you are] starting your career right away and not having to wait through school; you start making money right away."

–Junior Enlisted Woman

"I knew that I was going to have a steady paycheck, and I was able to help myself and my mom."

–Junior Enlisted Woman

"I didn't grow up in an environment where people had a lot of money. Everyone lives simply, and I didn't have a crutch to fall back on . . . , whereas other people had a family they could fall back on."

–Senior Enlisted Woman

Health care and other benefits were a common draw for junior enlisted Service members.

"For me, the benefits were good, like health benefits. . . . I was working part time at [chain retail store] before I joined . . . , and it was . . . disappointing having to work the part-time job and not getting much out of it. . . . When the recruiter came to my door, I liked the idea of the health benefits."

–Junior Enlisted Woman

"I was on tour with [Service] at the end of Afghanistan and Iraq, and [the members] were more interested in benefits—education, health—than they were in actually deploying. For a long time, it was about patriotism, and now, I think there was a shift towards doing this to get something."

–Male Officer

The mini-survey results indicated that nearly two-thirds of group participants had served 10 years or less; this suggests that they had joined during or since the recession of 2007–2009. During the recession, jobs became scarce,³ and national unemployment reached its highest rate in more than 25 years.⁴ Focus group discussions indicated that some participants turned to the military when jobs were hard to come by elsewhere.

"I learned 21 years ago that there were no jobs out there, and there are still no jobs out there."

–Senior Enlisted Man

"The lack of jobs at home [led me to join]. With my siblings, my mom and dad [had to] kick them off the couch."

–Senior Enlisted Woman

5. Patriotism or a Desire to Serve Others

Several participants reported they joined the military for selfless reasons such as patriotism and the "greater good." Such responses were more common among officers than enlisted Service members.

"I think I did it for the greater good. It's not about you; it's selfless service. It was my calling. I come from a patriotic family."

–Female Officer

"When I came in . . . , it was about wanting to do something bigger. . . . I didn't do a lot of research before I came in. I just wanted to serve."

–Female Officer

"9/11 had a huge impact, and so you have people serving for patriotic reasons."

–Male Officer

6. To Pursue a Career or Learn Job Skills

Specific career aspirations motivated several participants to join the military. Participants described how the military presented job opportunities that may have been less attainable in the civilian sector.

³ Klemmer, K. (2010). Job availability during a recession: an examination of the number of unemployed persons per job opening [Article]. Retrieved from U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics website: https://www.bls.gov/opub/ils/summary_10_03/job_availability.htm

⁴ U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics. (2017). *Labor force statistics from the Current Population Survey* [Dataset]. Retrieved from <https://data.bls.gov/timeseries/LNS14000000>

"I always wanted to fly. The military is [the] best place to do that. . . . That was the reason for me."

–Male Officer

"I did want to be a cop. You can't be a cop until you're 21, but you can in the military, so I joined at 18 because I knew that I could be a cop."

–Senior Enlisted Man

"I did college and everything and thought I would be a chef, and there was a retired [military leader] in culinary school, and he saw something in me and said, 'You can go cook for President Bush [in the military],' and I got an offer [from] President Bush to go cook."

–Senior Enlisted Man

"They are coming to get into a specific career field. . . . They can [do online searches on] all kinds of stuff, and it seems like they know more about these career fields than the recruiters do. . . . It seems like wanting very specific jobs is what motivates a lot of people now."

–Female Officer

C. Factors That Influenced Selection of a Service

DACOWITS asked participants how they decided which Service to join. Factors that affected Service selection included recruiters, family experiences, the perceived level of challenge, and the perceived treatment by the Service of its members.

1. Recruiters Were a Key Influence When Selecting a Service

Many participants said recruiting experiences, both good and bad, played a substantial role in the selection of a Service.

a. Positive Recruiting Experiences Drew Participants to Services

Several participants reported positive experiences with recruiters that attracted them to a particular Service.

"My recruiter did an amazing job, and there wasn't any other choice. The commercial got me, and the recruiter got me. The way he carried himself just came across."

–Senior Enlisted Man

"I talked to all of the branches, and [the recruiters for my Service] were just better recruiters. They followed up and called me often. Keeping the contact weekly was important."

–Junior Enlisted Woman

"I dropped out of college, and my recruiter came with me to the admissions office. . . . He was so determined, and I thought, 'I'm going to be like that, too.' . . . You see the clear difference in the recruiters. We [Service members] 'drink the Kool-Aid' from the beginning. We want to be better."

–Female Officer

b. Negative Recruiting Experiences Drove Participants Away From Services

By contrast, several participants cited negative experiences with recruiters that dissuaded them from joining a Service. For example, they described recruiters who were unavailable, unresponsive, rude, pushy, or otherwise uninspiring.

"I was going to join [another Service], I didn't even know about [my Service]. I went to the [Service A] recruiter and had an appointment at noon. I was there, but the doors were locked, [and] no one was there. I was hanging out for 20 minutes and wasn't sure what to do. There was a . . . recruiting office [for my Service] right next door, so I went over there."

–Senior Enlisted Woman

"At first, I was thinking about going [into another Service], but that recruiter was actually very rude. He told me he didn't think I could cut it, so I walked out of there and talked to [my Service's] recruiter."

–Senior Enlisted Woman

"I was thinking about [joining another Service]. I talked to a recruiter, and then I brought my mother in to talk to him. . . . My mom asked . . . question after question, and she didn't like the way he was answering them, so after that meeting, she told me to do some research into the other branches."

–Junior Enlisted Woman

2. Family Experiences Affected Service Selection

Many participants said their family members' experiences with a specific Service influenced their decisions. Some were attracted to one Service over another because of family tradition or because their family members had positive experiences with that Service. Others were dissuaded from a specific Service because of a family member's negative experiences.

"My father was in [my Service]. He did 27 years. My brother [is] in [my Service]. He's been in 16 years. My grandfather was in [my Service]. If I did any other branch, I would have been disowned."

–Senior Enlisted Woman

"My dad was in [another Service]. He had some bad relationships [there]. He didn't really have a good time. I think the culture just didn't work for him. [My Service] seemed like a better way to go for me."

–Senior Enlisted Woman

3. Several Chose a Service Based on Available Career Options

Participants' career aspirations also played a key role in the selection of a Service. Several participants said they chose one Service over another based on the availability of jobs that interested them.

"They guaranteed me a job in the career field that I wanted. I couldn't get that in the other Services."

–Male Officer

"I had a friend who was in the [Service A], and he told me, 'I see you in the [Service B]. You want to do stuff with computers, you can do that in the [Service B],' so I . . . got some information about it."

–Junior Enlisted Woman

"I talked to a recruiter in high school [and explained I wanted to go into the] medical field. . . . He [said that field wasn't offered in that Service, so I joined my Service, and I am] able to do what I want to do, provide care to men and women who protect my country and my rights, [and] still serve."

–Female Officer

4. Participants Chose the Service Perceived to Offer the Greatest Challenge

Similar to those who reported joining the military to challenge themselves, some chose a Service because they felt it offered the greatest challenge. This sentiment was particularly common among members of one Service.

"All the branches gave those benefits, but with [my Service], it was the title. It was harder to get there. Some were faster or easier, but for me, I wanted to choose the hardest one."

–Junior Enlisted Woman

"What pushed me was the challenge. I have friends in other Services, and [my Service] holds you to another standard. It's different academically, mentally, and physically. . . . That was another reason why I joined. It was like a personal accomplishment for me."

–Junior Enlisted Man

"I didn't know what I wanted to do, but every [Service] officer went above and beyond to be a support person and be there for you. [Members of my Service] are in shape, they look the best, and they hold themselves to a higher standard. It was a greater challenge."

–Female Officer

5. Participants Chose a Service Based on Its Perceived Treatment of Members

Some participants felt certain Services treated their members better than other Services treated theirs, and this perception influenced some participants' choice of Service. This response was particularly common among members of two Services.

"[My Service] is very focused on . . . developing the entire person. The other Services are just not like that. . . . [My Service] was a clear choice for me."

–Senior Enlisted Woman

"My dad told me to go [into my Service]. He said they take care of their people."

–Female Officer

"[My Service] takes better care of people. Even [when deployed], we get buildings when others are sleeping in tents. The [Service] was the way to go—they really do look out for people and look out for family. They take that extra step."

–Senior Enlisted Man

"I was thinking about going to school, but I realized that . . . mentally, I can't just sit in a classroom. I can't do tests. I'm a hands-on kind of person. So, I kept looking at other things I could do."

–Junior Enlisted Man

"I was a recruited athlete out of high school, and I didn't know where I was going to go, so I went on a trip to see some of the places that were recruiting me, and the [Service] Academy was one of the places that I decided to visit. . . . I had thought I would go to Yale, or Brown, somewhere Ivy League. Instead, I joined the [Service]."

–Female Officer

"I was in college [and] living alone, and it was expensive. My cross-country coach was a retired [Service member], and he told me about the [Service], and I thought, 'If I can get education for free, why am I doing this?' If I didn't join, I'd still be in school and paying for it."

–Junior Enlisted Woman

"At one point in time, I wanted to be an accounting major. I thought that would be a good idea for some reason. I went to class 3–4 times . . . ; then I just stopped showing up. After that, I really didn't have any idea where I was going, so I decided to it was time to join the military and do something with my life."

–Senior Enlisted Man

2. A Few Considered Careers in Healthcare, Law Enforcement, or Aviation

A few female participants considered pursuing careers in fields that could also be pursued in a military context, such as healthcare, law enforcement, or aviation. A few also held jobs in the health professions but left to join the military.

"[I had] always dreamed of being [a] doctor . . . , [I] needed a break from school, [so I thought I'd] go into the [Service]."

–Female Officer

"I had a job at [the National Institutes of Health], but I felt like something was missing, [so] I drove by the recruiting station."

–Female Officer

"I left nursing for the [Service]. . . . I figured I could always go back to nursing and maybe go back to [being a health services technician]."

–Female Officer

A few participants had planned to work in law enforcement before joining the military.

"I wanted to pursue being a police officer. . . . It was all about helping and giving back to the community. Then I saw that the military does that on a larger scale."

–Junior Enlisted Man

"I wanted to [join the Federal Bureau of Investigation]. . . . I actually interviewed at this field office. I had a degree, and I have interned at halfway houses and detention centers. My resume was strong, but they said I needed [to know a foreign] language, so I came [into the military] with a guaranteed job as a linguist."

–Senior Enlisted Woman

Working in aviation was an option a few participants had thought about pursuing.

"I wanted to be a pilot, so I looked at the commercial side, but [flight training] is expensive. . . . When I realized I could do it with the [Service], then I went that way."

–Female Officer

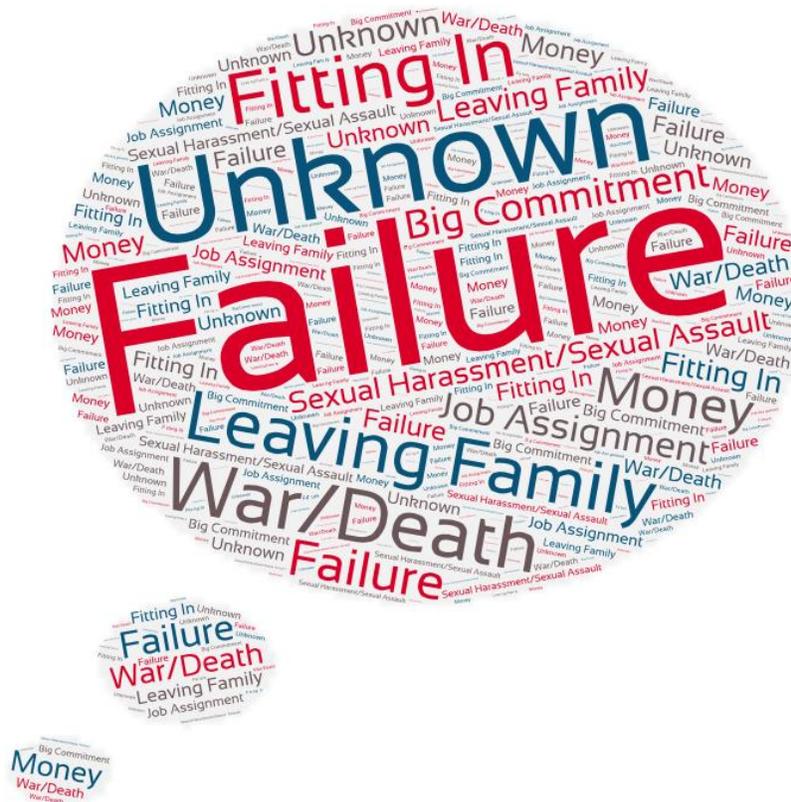
"I wanted to [work for] the airlines, but [I heard] the [Service] could pay for [training], so I did that."

–Male Officer

E. Concerns About Joining the Military

DACOWITS asked participants what concerns they had about joining the military prior to enlisting or commissioning. Fear of failure was the most commonly cited concern, followed by leaving one's family, fear of the unknown, anxiety about war and/or death, and sexual harassment and sexual assault (see Figure 2.4).

Figure 2.4. Participants' Concerns About Joining the Military



Source: Focus group transcripts (data from groups participating in propensity discussion only)

1. Fear of Failure

Many participants recalled worrying that military life might be too difficult and that they might not succeed.

"I didn't want to go home and say I didn't achieve it. . . . I didn't want to fail. I knew it was challenging. The pressure was put on me, and I felt like I couldn't fail my recruiter."

–Female Officer

"[There are] lots of rumors that people won't make it or that you won't meet standards. . . . I didn't want to let the [Service], my family, or myself down."

–Junior Enlisted Man

"That little video at boot camp makes you nervous. You're scared of not being able to make it. You have a goal, but there's a huge obstacle. You have a fear of the unknown."

–Senior Enlisted Man

Among the women who expressed a fear of failure, some mentioned the importance of succeeding as a woman.

"I was more afraid of failure and the [resulting] stigma. When you go [into the Service] as a female, you have to be able to do everything as a male [would]."

–Female Officer

"I was probably concerned when I joined the military that I wouldn't be tough enough. I came from a strict religious family with traditional gender roles, so a woman doing anything other than getting married and having children is out of the ordinary."

–Female Officer

"The recruiter told me I'm joining a male-dominated [occupational specialty]. He told me I'd be surrounded by males. . . . I was nervous about holding my own."

–Senior Enlisted Woman

2. Leaving One's Family

Several participants had feared leaving their parents, spouses, and children, and some described their families' concerns about being separated.

"I come from such a close-knit family, so I didn't know how I was going to survive without them close to me. . . . The biggest challenge was adjusting to them all not being right there with me."

–Junior Enlisted Woman

"The biggest obstacle for me was just leaving the family. I thought about it after college, and the recruiter was telling me about the berthing rooms, and I was terrified of leaving my new wife."

–Male Officer

“My biggest concern was when I joined, I already had two boys who were 6 and 8 years old, and their father was already traveling a lot. I didn’t know how I was going to do things and not be apart from them. . . . At first, I was really worried about their mental state. I didn’t know what would happen because they would not be used to mom being gone.”

–Senior Enlisted Woman

“My concern was my future wife’s resistance to change. It sounded awesome to me, but she wasn’t into it. The future of me going to Iraq a couple of times was a fear. She didn’t want to leave where we were.”

–Senior Enlisted Man

3. Fear of the Unknown

Several participants said they were unfamiliar with military life before joining a Service, which fostered a fear of the unknown.

“For me, it was the unknown. I don’t have family who are prior military, so . . . I didn’t know what it was going to be like.”

–Senior Enlisted Man

“It was fear of the unknown for me. I didn’t know what would happen when I joined.”

–Junior Enlisted Man

4. Going to War and the Possibility of Death or Injury

Some participants described how they and their family members had been anxious about the possibility of war and/or death; women were more likely than men to report that family members had these concerns.

“I joined [during] the period of peace that ran from about [1993 through 2004]. . . . I’ll be honest, I had no interest in serving in a war. I was afraid to go to war.”

–Female Officer

“My biggest concern was telling my mom. . . . When I told her, my mom burst into tears and was really scared. She asked if I was going to get hurt.”

–Junior Enlisted Woman

“When I first started [Reserve Officer Training Corps for my Service] . . . , my mom freaked out because she was afraid [that] with Iraq and Afghanistan, [I would be] deploying and fighting.”

–Female Officer

5. Sexual Harassment and/or Sexual Assault

A few female participants had been concerned about sexual harassment and/or sexual assault.

"Shortly after I came to active duty, big news broke about the [Service] Academy and some of their traditions, which they now recognize as sexual harassment. There was a documentary talking about the military's role [with respect to] sexual assault, [and] there was hyper media attention. People were blaming the victim, [and there was a] cultural shift during that time. [It was a] worry for me."

–Female Officer

"The scandal where trainers were sexually abusing their trainees . . . made me consider not joining."

–Junior Enlisted Woman

Women described how their friends and families had been worried about the possibility of them being sexually harassed or sexually abused.

"It was more my family who had concerns. We don't have people in our family that are in, so they didn't get it when I brought it up, and they'd ask me if I was going to go get . . . assaulted, and I said, well, I can get assaulted in college or anywhere else, too."

–Junior Enlisted Woman

"When I told people I had joined, they were scared [for me] because of stuff they had seen on TV about how females got raped and stuff like that in the military."

–Junior Enlisted Woman

"They did not want me to go, especially with the [Service]. . . . They did not want me to go because of the rumors of how they treat women."

–Female Officer

6. Lack of Support From One's Family

Some participants reported a general lack of support from family members.

"My dad didn't support me. I made it through [Officer Candidate School] to show [my parents] I could."

–Female Officer

"My father and I weren't speaking at the time that I left, so he thought, 'Well, I don't care what you do, you just need to get out of my house.'"

–Junior Enlisted Woman

F. Advice for Others Considering Joining the Military

DACOWITS asked participants what they would tell young people in their lives who asked whether they should join the military. Despite the concerns they expressed, many said they would encourage others to join the military, but their advice would depend on factors such as the individual's motivations. Some said they would not encourage others to join.

1. Many Would Encourage Others to Join

Many participants said they would tell young people in their lives to join the military. Some championed the value of the experience Service members gain. A few touted the benefits of joining for women in particular.

"It's an invaluable experience. It's something that sets you apart from the rest of the American civilians. . . . You learn life skills while in the job and develop maturity from such a young age. . . . It's just a unique experience and gives insight into what you value as a person. . . . Not everyone can say that they have served in the military."

–Female Officer

"When I was young, I was wearing my uniform at a gas station, and this little kid saluted me. That stuck with me. I'm a patriot; I love my country, and I love serving it. If anyone asked me, I'd tell them if they want to [serve], don't let anyone get in your way."

–Senior Enlisted Man

"I'd drive them to the recruiter's office right now. I do that monthly, actually."

–Female Officer

"I would say yes. I'm all about women empowerment. [In my] Hispanic culture, for the most part, you live and do by what your husband says. It's very seldom to have a career of your own. . . . I come from a line of strong women, and I have big shoes to fill, and I feel like I'm doing that now. It's just a good feeling overall."

–Junior Enlisted Woman

a. Most Said Their Advice About Whether to Join Would Depend on a Variety of Factors

The most common response by participants on how they would advise a young person interested in joining the military was that their advice would depend on factors such as the individual's motivations, expectations, the specific Service or rank being considered, and gender.

Motivations

Many participants said the individual's reasons and end goal for wanting to join a Service would guide their responses.

"When I'm asked that question, my first reaction to them is, 'Why do you want to? Why are you interested? What do you want to get out of it?' Depending on the answer. . . . depends on how I proceed after that."

–Senior Enlisted Man

"The first conversation with them is, 'Why the military? Why is this your final decision?' . . . I try to find out if they are coming in to utilize it for personal gain; they need to give a little to take."

–Senior Enlisted Woman

Personality

Several participants felt that it takes a certain type of personality to make it in the military. As such, they said their advice would depend on whether the individual was the type of person who could handle military life.

"Depends on the person. . . . A lot of people ask me, and it depends. There are some people who mentally can't handle it."

–Male Officer

"It would depend on their personality. I met a server who was really professional, and I thought he would make a phenomenal [Service member], so I went up and told him that. It really depends on the person."

–Senior Enlisted Woman

Expectations

Several participants indicated they would not encourage young people to join who expected military service to be easy, lucrative, or glamorous.

"My mom took me to go talk to an afterschool program . . . , and they were like 15 [years old], and I told them, 'Don't come in thinking that everything will be handed to you; sometimes, you will have to clean toilets and stay up late.' It's not a job. It's a lifestyle change."

–Junior Enlisted Man

"Younger people, they think we make so much money, and we don't, not at first—it takes a while. . . . I've had to explain that to them. . . . It's not all about financial stuff, or what kind of discounts you can get. They have to get past that and think about what they really want to do, and where they really want to go in their life."

–Senior Enlisted Woman

"I feel like it's been glamorized because of the movies. Everything is about being 'G.I. Jane.'"

–Senior Enlisted Woman

Choice of Service

Some participants suggested there are advantages to different Services. As such, their advice to a young person would depend on which Service the person planned to join.

"I ask people what they like to do and help them pick a Service that way . . . I ask them, 'What do you want [to do]? Where do you want to live?'"

–Senior Enlisted Woman

"It depends on what you want. If you're looking for benefits, join the [Service A], but if you want a challenge and want to feel better about yourself, then join the [Service B]."

–Male Officer

Plan to Join as Enlisted or Officer

Some participants expressed the belief that officers are treated better and are offered better opportunities.

"My son's 20, and he wanted to enlist, and I told him he needs to be an officer. I talk to him about what [enlisted Service members] have to go through, and I want something better for him. . . . I want him to use more of his brain."

–Female Officer

"[Become an] officer. I don't mean to talk bad about enlisted, but the [Service] needs to change the way that they [recruit to the] officer side and the enlisted side. . . . You are treated different as an officer versus enlisted. . . . I have a 17-year-old daughter, [and] I'm not against her joining, [but I told her to] go to college, then join as an officer. . . ."

–Female Officer

Gender

Although not a common response, a few participants said they would be more cautious about encouraging young women to join versus young men.

"I would tell [a] female to choose wisely. People are still marginalized in the [Service], and I think women are treated differently."

–Senior Enlisted Man

"Sometimes, I'm more hesitant with young women. I wish I didn't feel that way. . . . With men, there is a lot less risk."

–Female Officer

2. Some Would Not Encourage Others to Join

In contrast to those who would recommend military service to others, some participants said they would not tell young people in their lives to join. Reasons for discouraging others from joining ranged from viewing college as a better option to perceiving a decline in the rigor of military life.

"I think people should go to school. You can learn there, you can be mentored there and grow up. Get a mentor and really explore what you want to do before jumping into [the military]."

–Junior Enlisted Woman

"I think college is the best option. Then, you can think about the career you really want."

–Junior Enlisted Woman

"Don't [join], not now. . . . [Serving in the military is] not hard anymore. Back in 2000, when my brothers were in . . . , they walked with pride, their chest was out. It's not something as serious anymore. It's kind of a joke."

–Junior Enlisted Man

G. Perceived Impact of Recent Policy Changes and Events on Propensity

DACOWITS asked participants whether any recent policy changes made by DoD or the Services would encourage more people to join, or push people away from, the military. Participants cited several recent policy changes that they believed might affect propensity; these included modifications to the retirement system, the increased emphasis on diversity, relaxed tattoo restrictions, and updates to parental leave policies. Some anticipated that recent scandals could negatively affect propensity.

1. New Retirement Policy Could Have Mixed Effects on Propensity

The fiscal year (FY) 2016 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA)⁵ created a new retirement system for Service members. Under this new “blended” system, DoD will automatically contribute a percentage of Service members’ salaries into their Thrift Savings Plan (TSP) accounts⁶ and will match up to 5 percent of contributions. Upon retirement, a Service member will receive the traditional retirement pension plus the assets in the member’s TSP. Under the current system, which will remain in effect until January 1, 2018, Service members are not required to contribute to the TSP, and the pensions that members receive upon retirement are larger than those that will be provided under the new system, but members who do not serve at least 20 years are not eligible for a pension.⁷ Many participants believed this change to the retirement policy could affect the propensity to serve,⁸ and they held mixed expectations about the outcome. Several thought the new retirement plan might discourage enlistment, whereas others thought the plan might encourage more people to join.

a. New Retirement Policy Could Negatively Affect Propensity

Several participants thought the new retirement system would put Service members at greater financial risk than the traditional retirement policy and, subsequently, deter new recruits.

“You can’t predict the stock market. With a 401k, if the stock market tanks right before you retire, there goes your 401k.”

–Male Officer

“[For] the 401K thing, it used to be [that] if you served and put in the time [that] you were set for life. . . . Now, you don’t have that guarantee. Now, it’s like you’re back on the outside.”

–Senior Enlisted Woman

“I think . . . the fact that [the retirement plan is] changing may have an impact on people coming in. It’s not as gold plated.”

–Female Officer

⁵ Pub. L. 114–92

⁶ The TSP is similar to a civilian 401k account.

⁷ DoD. (n.d.). Frequently asked questions regarding the new blended retirement system [Web page]. Retrieved from http://www.militaryonesource.mil/footer?content_id=290760

⁸ DoD. (2015). *The U.S. Uniformed Services Blended Retirement System: At a glance* [Flyer]. Retrieved from http://www.35fss.com/images_folder/afrc/blended_retirement_system/flyer.pdf

b. New Retirement Policy Could Positively Affect Propensity

By contrast, some participants thought the new retirement system might attract new recruits because members will no longer need to serve at least 20 years to receive any retirement benefits.

"The blended retirement system [is a positive change]. Before, to get anything back [for retirement], you had to do 20 or more years or [be] medically retired. Now, you can do a 401k and can fill that Service desire, and if I [choose] to get out and do something else, I can take something with me. They are on the cusp of that decision. For new members coming in, that could be a driver for them."

–Female Officer

"Twenty years [of service] is daunting. If people know they can get out early, they will join."

–Male Officer

"I think the new blended retirement system is a big push to entice new recruits. It's like a 401K match."

–Senior Enlisted Woman

2. Increased Emphasis on Diversity Could Have Mixed Effects on Propensity

The military has enhanced its efforts to diversify the force in recent years; for example, DoD has implemented policies designed to increase opportunities for female⁹ and gay and lesbian Service members.¹⁰ Some Services have also relaxed restrictions on hairstyles and headwear in an effort to be more inclusive of minority religions and cultures.^{11,12} Many participants thought this increased emphasis on diversity could affect the propensity to serve. Several thought it could improve propensity, but some felt it could have a negative impact.

a. Increased Emphasis on Diversity Could Positively Affect Propensity

Several participants thought greater inclusion of Service members of different genders, sexual orientations, religions, and cultures might help attract new recruits.

"Yeah, I think opening up all the jobs to females makes more people want to join."

–Junior Enlisted Woman

⁹ DoD. (2015). *Implementation guidance for the full integration of women in the Armed Forces* [Memorandum]. Retrieved from <https://www.defense.gov/Portals/1/Documents/pubs/OSD014303-15.pdf>

¹⁰ Office of the Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness. (2011). *Repeal of "Don't Ask, Don't Tell"* [Memorandum]. Retrieved from http://archive.defense.gov/home/features/2010/0610_dadt/USD-PR-DADT_Repeal_Day_Memo_20Sep.pdf

¹¹ AD 2017-03, Policy for Brigade-Level Approval of Certain Requests for Religious Accommodation (January 3, 2017).

¹² NAVADMIN 271/14, Uniform Update Female Hair Grooming Policy (December 2014).

"Females can now wear [dread]locks or braids. . . . Homosexuals and gays will get the same benefits [as other Service members] . . . , and they can serve openly. . . . We celebrate diversity. . . . We [have] great leaders, not just women but Hispanic, Filipino, [and] Black. . . . [The military] has done a whole [180]."

–Senior Enlisted Man

"We actually recruit women now. Recruiters didn't recruit women before. We didn't go up and talk to women and call them. Recruiters were told that fathers didn't want [them] calling their daughters."

–Female Officer

"Benefits for same-sex partners [are a draw]. Now, same-sex partners can get healthcare, they can get everything, even if they're not married."

–Junior Enlisted Woman

"Eliminating 'Don't Ask, Don't Tell'¹³ . . . is huge for recruitment and retention. The transgender policy is coming out, and we are just waiting to be briefed [on] it."

–Senior Enlisted Woman

b. Increased Emphasis on Diversity Could Negatively Affect Propensity

By contrast, some participants thought too much emphasis on diversity might deter recruits.

"There are people who don't want to join because all of the [occupational specialties] are being opened up to women. There are both males and females that think this."

–Senior Enlisted Woman

"The whole gender equality thing . . . might make certain ethnic groups averse to joining."

–Senior Enlisted Man

"I feel like they are extremely lenient on the transgender [people] to get through . . . , and I don't see that as fair personally. If you can't identify yourself, then why would I want to stand or serve alongside of you?"

–Junior Enlisted Woman

"The outside world sees those policies, but if you make it acceptable for [lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender individuals to serve], it doesn't mean the military accepts it and welcomes them in. There is reality, and there is policy."

–Female Officer

3. Recently Relaxed Tattoo Restrictions Could Positively Affect Propensity

All Services have eased their regulations on tattoos in recent years.^{14,15,16,17,18} Several participants expected these changes to attract recruits.

¹³ DoD, Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness. (2011). *Repeal of Don't Ask, Don't Tell: Quick reference guide*. Retrieved from http://archive.defense.gov/home/features/2010/0610_dadt/Quick_Reference_Guide_Repeal_of_DADT_APPROVE_D.pdf

"The tattoo policy was changed. That is going to impact people coming up. . . . As soon as that changed, [a guy I know] went out and got a full sleeve [tattoo]. This guy is smart, brilliant, an intelligence analyst, and having a sleeve or no sleeve, or tattoo or no tattoo, that doesn't change his intellect or capability. I was actually very happy about that change, and so were most people I know. I think that was an unnecessary hindrance to recruiting."

–Senior Enlisted Woman

"When I worked with the recruitment assistance program, I saw a lot of people come in with tattoos. Maybe 50 percent of the people had tattoos that were not authorized. . . . This will help a lot."

–Senior Enlisted Woman

"They changed the tattoo policy. That will make more people want to join."

–Junior Enlisted Man

4. Updates to Parental Leave Policies Could Positively Affect Propensity

DoD recently standardized parental leave across the Services. All Services now offer 12 weeks of paid maternity leave for mothers following childbirth. DoD has also issued announcements about potential increases in parental leave.¹⁹ Some participants, women in particular, believed these policy updates could have a positive effect on propensity. For more information on parental leave, see chapter 4.

5. Social Media Scandals, Sexual Harassment, and Sexual Assault Could Negatively Affect Propensity

Some anticipated that recent scandals, including the one involving severe misconduct by Marines United private social media group members who shared explicit photographs of female Service members,²⁰ could have a negative effect on the propensity to serve.

"The latest social media events haven't helped. Female officers graduating from infantry and armor schools propelled us forward, but the social media stuff hurt it."

–Female Officer

"The recent Marines United scandal . . . was very discouraging. . . . If I was thinking of joining, I would maybe look at something else."

–Female Officer

¹⁴ AFGM 2017-01, Air Force Guidance Memorandum to AFI 36-2903, Dress and Personal Appearance of Air Force Personnel (February 9, 2016).

¹⁵ AR 670-1, Uniform and Insignia: Wear and Appearance of Army Uniforms and Insignia (March 31, 2014).

¹⁶ COMDTINST 1000.1C, Tattoo, Body Marking, Body Piercing, and Mutilation Policy (December 29, 2016).

¹⁷ MCBul 1020, Marine Corps Tattoo Policy (June 3, 2017).

¹⁸ NAVADMIN 082/16, Navy Tattoo and NWU Type II and III Ball Cap Policy Change (March 2016).

¹⁹ DoDI 1327.06, Leave and Liberty Policy and Procedures (June 16, 2009), Incorporating Change 3 (May 19, 2016).

²⁰ Ferdinando, L. (2017, March 14). Marine Corps leaders express outrage about 'Marines United' activity. *DoD News*. Retrieved from DoD website: <https://www.defense.gov/News/Article/Article/1112647/marine-corps-leaders-express-outrage-about-marines-united-activity/>

“Sexual assault stuff is everywhere. I would not join if I was a woman with all that.”

–Female Officer

“The whole social media scandal . . . kind of gave us a black eye.”

–Senior Enlisted Man

6. Less Commonly Cited Changes That Could Affect Propensity

Participants also expected the following factors to affect propensity:

- ▶ Threat of war or deployment
- ▶ New Physical Fitness Test standards
- ▶ Bonuses
- ▶ Change in administration following the 2016 presidential election
- ▶ Policy changes allowing individuals with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder to serve
- ▶ Newly relaxed policy on prior use of marijuana
- ▶ Government health insurance requirement (i.e., the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act²¹)

H. Suggestions for Improving Recruitment

DACOWITS asked participants what recruiters or senior leaders in their Services could do to interest more people in joining the military. Suggestions included better explaining the spectrum of career possibilities, more effectively marketing the option to join as an officer after participating in a Reserve Officer Training Corps (ROTC) program, and personalizing recruitment. Others felt that recruiters should focus on attracting the right people or that the recruitment process is working well and requires no improvements.

1. Recruiters Should Better Explain the Range of Career Possibilities

Several participants, particularly women, suggested civilians might have a limited understanding of the careers one can pursue in the military. They posited that the Services might attract more recruits if they emphasized the full spectrum of career options available.

“Most civilians don’t understand the array of careers available. You see the commercials and think everyone is a Navy SEAL²² and don’t understand that there are nurses, cooks, [and people working in information technology].”

–Senior Enlisted Woman

“If I was the recruiter, I would talk about all the opportunities the [Service] can give you. I would talk about all advantages. You can learn skills—really, any skill you want to learn.”

–Senior Enlisted Woman

²¹ Pub. L. 111–148

²² Navy Sea, Air, and Land special operations force member

“When I talked to the recruiter, he gave me a list of all the jobs I could do. Then I could go and put down my top five, and they would see where there were openings. That’s how they did things with me.”

–Junior Enlisted Woman

2. Recruiters Should More Effectively Advertise the Officer/ROTC Option

A few female participants suggested many civilians might think enlistment is the only option because the option of joining as an officer after participating in an ROTC program has not been sufficiently advertised. They argued that the Services might improve propensity if the officer/ROTC route was more effectively marketed.

“I didn’t know about the Service Academies and officer school. My best friend joined, and she didn’t know that either until she joined. . . . I don’t know if that information is out here.”

–Female Officer

“From an observational standpoint . . . , a lot of [people] go [the] enlisted route and not [the] officer route because they don’t know that it exists. This is anecdotal. . . . Those that have grown up in an officer family tend to follow that route, and those in an enlisted family go enlisted. The military at large seems to advertise the enlisted routes versus the officer routes.”

–Female Officer

“We need more ROTCs. There are not many [Service] ROTCs in high schools, and that is a great way to advertise.”

–Senior Enlisted Woman

3. Recruiting Should Be More Personalized

Another suggestion offered by a few participants was to personalize the recruiting process by tailoring incentives to specific individuals.

“It should be personalized depending on the person looking to join. They need to figure out what they are looking for, and [the recruiter needs to determine if] they will be a good fit for the organization.”

–Female Officer

“We all basically work on incentives. . . . Whatever [their] motivation is, if you want people to join, you have to figure it out . . . , if it’s money, or training opportunities. It’s different for everyone. . . . You need to know what incentivizes that person, and that person needs to know what incentivizes themselves. . . . That’s what the recruiters have to do. Figure out what people want and how to offer it to them.”

–Male Officer

4. Recruiters Should Attract the Right People Rather Than More People

Although the Committee asked for suggestions on ways to interest more people in joining the military, many participants countered that recruiters should instead focus on attracting the right people.

Participants shared beliefs that recruiters should be more honest and also emphasize the service mission over the benefits to the individual.

Participants told stories of their recruiters misleading them with big promises. Participants felt that if recruiters were more honest about the downsides of military life, they could better attract people who were prepared to deal with those downsides.

"They didn't really tell you the truth about what you are getting into. It would help to know what you are going to be doing. I got in [boot camp] and was folding clothes. I was told that going [into a specific occupational specialty], I would be able to [pick a career] right away, but I have to wait until a year after."

–Junior Enlisted Woman

"Instead of trying to make it more interesting, be more truthful about what you're getting into. What I was told is that I was going to be a nurse, and I'm a combat medic, and that's totally different."

–Junior Enlisted Man

"Lay it all on the table—"You have to go on details; you will be required to pick up trash and mow a lawn." . . . If I was to become a recruiter, I would be a little more honest."

–Junior Enlisted Man

Participants also suggested that by emphasizing the mission and the idea of serving one's country, recruiters could avoid attracting people who are interested in joining the military for the "wrong" reasons.

"I think for recruiting now, [the recruiters] try to push benefits and education, but I don't think that's what needs to be done for someone who wants to join. I think it's more about serving your country. If you're going to join, you have to be sold on how you're going to serve your country."

–Senior Enlisted Woman

"We can point out what makes us unique and special and what we do. We can highlight one mission. We care about . . . our mission set. This is what we do in that field. We can highlight how we serve and what we do to help the environment and people."

–Female Officer

5. Recruiting Is Working Well, and Current Approaches Should Be Maintained

Although the Committee asked for suggestions to interest more people in joining the military, some participants responded that recruitment is going well and that recruiters should not change anything.

"I think we advertise well. The person that would be attracted to those types of things is going to be attracted to the [Service]. I think we do a good job."

–Senior Enlisted Man

"I really don't think the [Service recruiters] could have done anything better. They allowed me to take time to make my decision."

–Junior Enlisted Man

6. Less Commonly Offered Suggestions to Increase Propensity

Participants also suggested the following changes to increase propensity:

- ▶ Offer better incentives
- ▶ Get involved (i.e., recruit) in the community
- ▶ Emphasize the community feeling of the Services
- ▶ Allow more flexibility (e.g., provide opportunities to relocate—i.e., to obtain a permanent change of station)
- ▶ Point out the exciting aspects of serving in the military
- ▶ Offer more predictable schedules
- ▶ Avoid being too pushy
- ▶ Further relax the policy on prior marijuana use

Chapter 3. Mid-Career Retention

The dearth of female representation in the higher ranks of each Service has been a longstanding concern for DACOWITS. As of April 2017, just 17.4 percent of officers and 15.73 percent of enlisted Service members were women, and across all Services, only 17 women held O9/O10 rank compared with 161 men.²³ DACOWITS is concerned that women are more likely than their male counterparts to separate from the military at the mid-point of their careers. To explore this issue further, the Committee decided to study mid-career retention in the 2017 focus groups.

The following findings are drawn from responses to questions about mid-career retention (see Appendix C.2 for the focus group protocol) that the Committee asked during 16 focus groups across all Services. This chapter is organized into the following sections:

- ▶ Many Intended to Stay in the Military
- ▶ Personal Factors That Influenced Retention
- ▶ Professional Factors That Influenced Retention
- ▶ Suggestions for Improving Mid-Career Retention

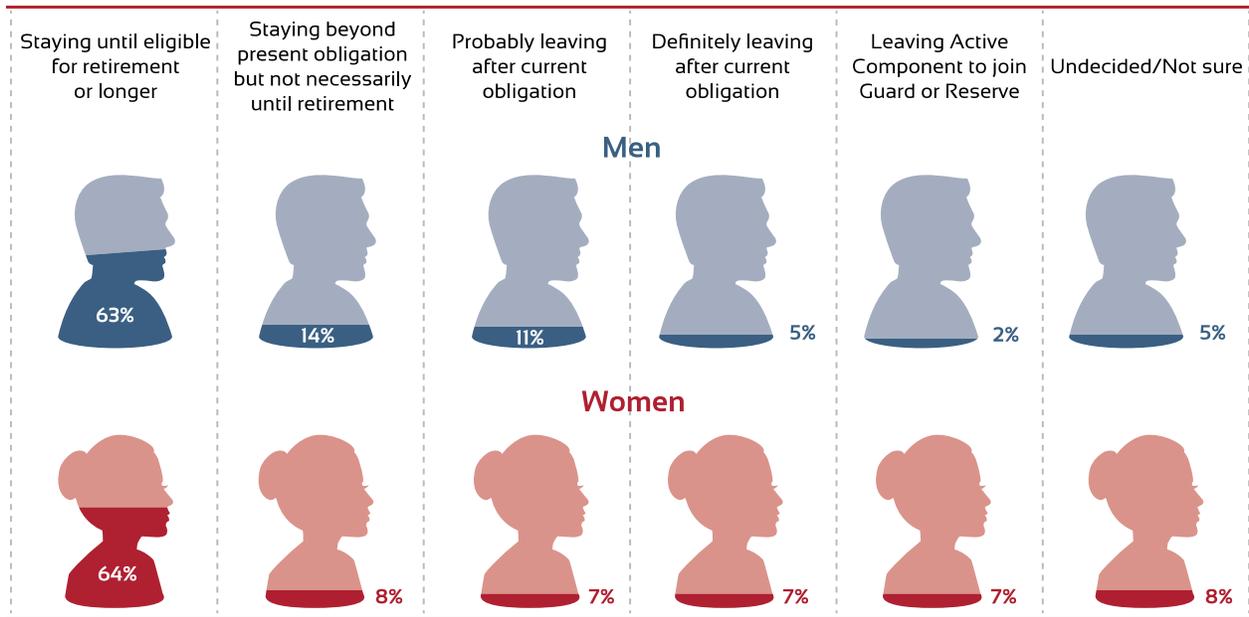
When interpreting the findings outlined in this chapter, it is important to consider that these focus groups consisted only of senior enlisted Service members (E5–E8) and officers (O1–O5) because junior enlisted Service members had not yet reached the mid-point of their careers. These questions aimed to elicit Service members' reasons for deciding to remain in or separate from their Services at or after the mid-point of their careers.

A. Many Intended to Stay in the Military

When asked to describe their intentions for staying in or leaving the military and to indicate the number of years served to date, nearly two-thirds of all participants reported that they intended to stay in the military at least until retirement (see Figure 3.1).

²³ DoD. (2017). Active duty master personnel file [Data]. Retrieved from https://www.dmdc.osd.mil/appj/dwp/dwp_reports.jsp

Figure 3.1. Participants' Career Intentions



Source: DACOWITS mini-survey (data from groups participating in mid-career retention discussion only)

Even among those who had served 20 years or more (and were therefore eligible for retirement), nearly half indicated they planned to stay in the military indefinitely. Of participants who had served for 20 or more years, men were more than three times as likely as women to indicate they planned to retire as soon as possible.

B. Personal Factors That Influenced Retention

The Committee asked participants to describe the reasons they planned to stay in or leave the military. The most common factors participants identified fell into two categories: personal and professional. Most participants cited at least one personal factor that influenced their decisions about whether to stay in the military. These factors included the tension between balancing family life and career, particularly for families with children and dual-military families, as well as the benefits afforded by the military to families and Service members.

1. Most Cited Challenges Balancing Family Life and Career

Tension between career progression and having a balanced life outside the military was the factor participants mentioned most frequently. Though men did express concern about this issue, it was mentioned more often by women. Participants described how military service was hard on their families and said dual-military spouses were pressured to prioritize one career over another.

a. Military Service Was Difficult For Families

Many participants discussed the strain military service placed on their families, particularly for individuals who were deployed or asked to relocate. Some participants, especially those with high school-aged children, mentioned plans to separate from the military for more geographic stability and consistency for their children. Some participants acknowledged that pursuing this stability for their children could limit their career progression.

"At this point in my career, I have about one box left to check to make O-6, but that would mean that I would have to [do] another . . . deployment, and after that, [do a permanent change of station]. . . . I don't want to do that to my family at this point. It's not worth it. It's more important for me to stay here for them."

–Male Officer

"Before I had kids, I couldn't imagine [what it would be like] being a mom in the military. I have a different expectation [now] . . . as a mother. I can't give everything up for the mission and have nothing for my kids."

–Senior Enlisted Woman

"I just applied to separate. . . . I am also thinking about family stuff. I'm single, and I don't have a family. . . . Looking down the road, if I get out now, when I have a family, they won't have to move all the time, so I think this is a good decision in that sense too."

–Male Officer

"There is a heavy back-and-forth rotation to [deployments], and a lot of people get out because of that. You can't take your family, and even if you're single, it's still a constant back and forth that just wears on them over time, and so a lot of people decide to get out. You do make more money when you go over there, so there is that, but then if you have a family, you're separated from them for so long."

–Senior Enlisted Woman

b. Dual-Military Families Felt Pressured to Prioritize Career Over Family

A desire for co-location and geographic stability was most acute for dual-military households, particularly those with children. Several participants said they had to make sacrifices by prioritizing either one or both parents' careers or the stability of the family. This sentiment was expressed almost exclusively by women.

"[Dual-military couples discuss] whose career is more important because you just don't see military marriages where both of them are [senior leaders]. That just doesn't happen very often. At some point, one career is just on a different path. I just think that is a reality of the military."

–Female Officer

"I'm a joint spouse. My husband and I have both been in for 19 years. . . . We stay in because we are called to do this. We don't stay in for rank or position because . . . there's just things you can't achieve when you are joint. But, at 17 years, I almost got out . . . [because we were geographically separated]. . . . I want to serve. Find us any place together, I will happily do that. We'll be ok as long as you keep us together. . . . If you want a command, you give up all your rights as a family."

–Female Officer

“Getting to the 20-year mark is . . . really important. . . . I was pregnant, and my husband was going to [a different location than me]. If I could have gotten out at that point, I would have. The detailer was not working with us. Instead, I came here and have been geo-batching²⁴ with an infant.”

–Female Officer

2. Military Benefits Were a Key Retention Factor

Many participants acknowledged that although they sometimes found military life challenging, the Services provided them and their families with benefits that would be harder to obtain in the civilian sector.

a. Family Benefits Had a Positive Effect on Retention

Many participants cited benefits for their families (e.g., monetary benefits, healthcare) as a key reason they had stayed in the military.

“If I stay in, it will be because of my family, too. I keep thinking about what the [Service] can do for my family. If they support my family, I might stay in.”

–Male Officer

“I’m staying in because I have a little one, and everything has been paid for. . . . I have stability being a single mom. I don’t have to struggle like I would on the outside.”

–Senior Enlisted Woman

“I’m a mom with special needs kids. We are getting services and therapies for our kids. There was no way to do it [without DoD health insurance], and I have a great job.”

–Female Officer

b. Personal Benefits Had a Positive Effect on Retention

Many participants said they planned to stay in the military because it provided significant personal benefits such as education, financial stability, and healthcare that would be more difficult to obtain in the civilian sector. A few respondents stayed in the military because it provided opportunities for travel. Men were much more likely than women to cite money (e.g., pay, bonuses, pensions) as a key reason for staying in the military.

“The [Service] will take care of me . . . [through] the GI Bill. I want to go back to school . . . , and with [the Basic Allowance for Housing], I won’t have to worry about [financial] stability.”

–Senior Enlisted Man

“On top of the leadership aspect and educational opportunities, I had the opportunity to go to school, and there were really exciting jobs that I had the chance to do. . . . [I like] the opportunity to jump in and learn new things; then they give you equal opportunity to work with stuff.”

–Female Officer

²⁴ Living as a “geographic bachelor”—i.e., living apart from a spouse who is in a different location

"I have three things that contribute [to my staying in]. . . . [First], I still like my job. [Second], I have a special needs daughter, and she gets amazing care. Without her, it would be a different train of thought. The third . . . is the pension. There isn't as much pressure to make as much money [as in a] civilian job."

–Male Officer

"The benefits [were a big factor for me to stay]. I could have a paycheck to rely on every month and take my kids to the hospital every time. I could also take the kids on adventures. . . . I wanted to be able to travel, and I like the military lifestyle plus the benefits that come along with it at this time and at retirement."

–Female Officer

C. Professional Factors That Influenced Retention

Participants identified several professional factors they felt were relevant to retention; these included career progression and control over career trajectory, the quality of leadership, and a lack of availability and relevancy of training opportunities. Several participants also cited the perceived value of their skills and experiences, as well as the availability of jobs in the civilian sector and the ability to attend networking opportunities, as an influence on retention.

1. Career Progression and Perceived Control Over One's Career Trajectory Influenced Retention

Nearly all participants said the ability to progress in their careers was a major determinant in their desire to continue serving. Participants were very motivated by the potential for career advancement and said they would continue to serve as long as they continued to progress in their careers. Participants said understanding the requirements for advancement and having some influence over their career progression were critical factors in deciding whether to remain in the military. A few participants were also discouraged by the lack of objectivity in the promotions process and the promotions backlog created by a lack of available billets and training.

a. Upward Mobility and Understanding of Requirements for Promotion Positively Affected Retention

Several participants noted that understanding the requirements for promotion and being consistently promoted influenced them to stay in the military. One participant felt career advancement opportunities varied by occupational specialty. Senior enlisted Service members were more likely than officers to report that career progression was important, and women were nearly twice as likely as men to mention this issue.

"Personally, I feel that my career has progressed very fast, which is a motivation for me to stay in. I see my chain of command pulling for me, and I've always felt that that's been a big motivation for me."

–Senior Enlisted Woman

"[I will stay] if I get promoted. . . . I know not everyone can get promoted, but that's what it will take for me to stay in."

–Senior Enlisted Man

“There are lots of opportunities in some career fields, but then in others, there isn't as much room for growth. If you didn't get in the right [occupational specialty] from the beginning, then there are some limitations to how far you can reach.”

–Female Officer

b. Lack of Perceived Control Over One's Career Progression Negatively Affected Retention

Many participants felt they had little control over the manner or speed of their own career progression, which reduced their desire to remain in service. Despite “doing what they are supposed to do,” there was a perception that factors such as a lack of objectivity by promotion boards and the length of time in a Service can weigh more heavily on promotion decisions than an individual's capacity to do the job. Participants also felt that a lack of objectivity in the promotions process was frustrating and noted how in some cases, a lack of available billets led to a backlog list for promotions.

“[Lack of control over my career] is part of the reason I am getting out. I agree I have control over my ability to check the boxes, and if I did that, I would [be promoted]. . . . To do that, you must choose early the path that you are going to take, and then, you have [to] commit to that and check those boxes, and it might not be doing the things that you like to do and that motivate you. . . . That's a big part of what is driving me out.”

–Male Officer

“If I have less control than I do now [in my current position], I would separate.”

–Senior Enlisted Woman

“I'm coming up on the end of my commitment next year, and one of the things that's an important factor is that I have zero control. . . . When you're in contracting, you're in contracting, and they are going to choose your assignments. If you want to make rank, it's a very strict path you have to walk. We don't have a lot of flexibility because [there are few people in the division] . . . , so that will factor into my decision.”

–Male Officer

Although many participants were aware of what they needed to do to be promoted and were generally aware of the career trajectories for their positions, a few felt that junior enlisted Service members needed more guidance on career progression.

“I know the requirements. I know exactly what I need to do.”

–Male Officer

“Each of the communities are a little different. . . . There hasn't been a lot of guidance or training for junior officers in the medical field for them to know what they should be doing to progress.”

–Male Officer

Lack of Objectivity in Promotions Process Was Discouraging

A few participants believed the promotions process lacked objectivity, which caused frustration and resulted in the promotion of under- or unqualified individuals who would eventually become leaders.

“You have some people at senior levels who worked through that checklist. They got promoted, but they never had a leadership job. They worked their way up through the grades, but they’ve never led anything in their life. . . . These could be good people but not experienced leaders. I’ve led at every level I’ve been at, but I won’t be checking that last box, so I won’t get promoted to the O-6 level.”

–Male Officer

“[Junior] officers, they have no idea [what to do]. Even super-high-performing ones get passed over. There is all this unknown and worry. When you are at the mid-part of your career, whether you’ll make it, it feels scarier as you move up.”

–Female Officer

Lack of Available Billets and Poor Coordination Created a Backlog List for Promotions

A couple of participants voiced frustration that they worked hard to qualify for promotions by attending trainings and obtaining certifications, but because of the lack of available positions, they were not promoted. A few noted that Service members felt there was a disconnect between hard work and career progression.

“There’s frustration from that. For my board in September, they changed the program in January. . . . I [qualified for promotion] but could not get promoted because there was no slot. It was so frustrating. There was [the] potential to sit around waiting for a whole year. . . . You get a lot of people working so hard [to qualify for promotion]. They did the right things; they are just waiting for the seat—then [they] think, ‘Why do I try so hard?’”

–Senior Enlisted Woman

“There are only a few slots per year in [my occupational specialty]. . . . It’s very restricted. I know my world. There’s low density, and it’s hard to get a slot, and for years and years, people are held back. . . . Good [Service members] aren’t promoted because of the backlog.”

–Senior Enlisted Woman

2. Leaders Influenced Retention

Leaders had positive as well as negative effects on retention. Several participants lamented that leaders dictated important aspects of their lives within the military, including location and deployments. Participants described how some leaders were not strong advocates actively working to advance their subordinates’ careers, and this led some to believe that the Services did not look after their members. This was most frequently mentioned by senior enlisted women. However, participants felt good leadership could mitigate the frustration caused by a lack of control over location and job duties.

“[When I was] in my first duty station, I had bad leadership, and I stayed because I wanted to be better than them. [Bad leadership] makes people get out.”

–Senior Enlisted Woman

“I see so many junior [Service members] who don’t have anyone to look up to. . . . [As a leader], you have to care and show them you care. Show them there’s a reason they’re in the [Service]. We’re not deploying much now, so you have to show them the bigger picture.”

–Senior Enlisted Man

"Whether staying or going, every place I've been stationed, if there was a crappy command climate, [Service members] hated being there. I just know from the current command, they're always pushing."

–Senior Enlisted Woman

3. Lack of Availability, Prioritization, and Relevancy of Training Was Discouraging

Many participants indicated that the quality and accessibility of training opportunities was not a significant factor in their decisions whether to stay in the military. Participants said that much of the time, training was simply not available. When it was available, participants noted that it was neither career enhancing nor skill building.

a. Training Was Not Available

Although most participants indicated training was not a significant factor in the decision to stay in the military, many Service members said training was often not prioritized or even available. Participants attributed this to an insufficient emphasis on appropriate, relevant training from leaders, or lack of funding. A few participants also expressed a desire for additional training and certifications to position them for the transition to the civilian sector.

"We need those skills to do the job, to support the mission. To me, you're just doing a disservice to those people if you aren't giving them the opportunities for training they need, and that's just not right."

–Senior Enlisted Woman

"I was never trained. I've felt the impact of the cut dollars because there is no money to train me."

–Female Officer

"Training is not widely offered in the [Service]. We don't get . . . those certifications or licenses so [Service members] can have that something that makes them valuable to industry. [Offering training] shows us that [the Service values us] as more than just a wrench. . . . We should be teaching them transferable skills for industry."

–Male Officer

A couple of participants mentioned that decisions about who receives training are based on the likely "return on investment" the Service will receive from training the individual.

"[If] somebody is either slated to [do a permanent change of station] in a certain amount of time, or they're considering separation in a certain amount of time, that person will not be considered [for training]. They will pick someone else who may not have put in the work, who may not benefit as much. . . . I understand that the [Service] has a budget and things like that, and you want to send the right person so that that person will use it to benefit the organization, [but] I think that training opportunities need to be available to everyone who [is] eligible."

–Senior Enlisted Woman

"For us [senior enlisted Service members], we don't get those training opportunities offered to us. That makes it very difficult for us. A lot of us pursue our education outside because we can't do it on the inside. . . . Our generation is leaving the Service to go to . . . school. They thought they'd have the opportunity to train and have those skills in the [Service, but they don't]."

–Senior Enlisted Woman

b. When Training Was Offered, It Was Neither Career Enhancing nor Skill Building

Some participants noted that when training was offered, it did not help with career advancement. Available training tended to focus on other facets of Service (e.g., leadership) or was general, one-size-fits-all training rather than skill building. Other participants realized they needed to pursue training outside of the military to remain competent in their career fields.

"Training is not career enhancing for us at all. If you're not in a command or leadership billet, you don't get promoted."

–Female Officer

"Training annually is ridiculous. It takes too much time. I have to do this annual tobacco cessation training, and I'm not a smoker. It's just a total waste of time."

–Male Officer

Other participants felt frustrated that despite the lack of career-enhancing training and certification opportunities, Service members could be passed over for promotion for not having obtained the training or certification.

"The availability of training is very important. We are pushed to do better, and sometimes, they can hang a standard on you, and you need to get a certification to meet that standard. Then, they need to make sure that training is consistently offered. Otherwise, they have hung a standard on you that you can't meet."

–Senior Enlisted Man

4. Perceived Value of Skills and Experiences Influenced Retention

Several participants identified a misalignment between skills, education, and Service members' actual job duties. Qualified individuals became frustrated when they were not called upon to complete their desired missions. In some cases, this disconnect caused participants to feel disenfranchised and express a desire to separate from the military altogether. This sentiment was expressed more often by men than women.

"There are these two pilots that are getting out, and they're super qualified. One of them didn't do a module, so he got passed over for promotion. The other pilot is transferring to [a different Service]. . . . Some people see better deals somewhere else while they utilize skills they have."

–Male Officer

"I joined the [Service] so I could go do something and deploy. Now, we're not doing those things. It's mundane."

–Male Officer

“You’d be surprised to find how many people would stay in if they could actually do the job they were trained to do.”

–Male Officer

5. Perceptions About Competition With Civilian Sector Varied

Several participants felt the military offered opportunities that were competitive with those in the civilian sector, though participants offered varying perspectives about whether those opportunities would lead them to separate from the military. Several participants noted that some occupational specialties provided training or certifications that could easily transfer into the civilian sector; others provided mixed opinions about whether training and pay were better in the military versus the civilian sector.

a. Some Perceived That Training Is Better in the Military Than in the Civilian Sector and Motivates Service Members to Continue Serving

Some participants believed that training opportunities in the military surpassed those in the civilian sector, and this served as a reason to stay in the military.

“Some people want to do trainings, but they can’t do it because it’s expensive. Your company won’t send you there, and the military will send you. I’ve had valuable training here that I wouldn’t have gotten otherwise.”

–Senior Enlisted Man

“The [Service] will send you to Cisco or Microsoft [training], and you’d have to pay money for it outside . . . , but it’s free for us, and it counts as college credits, too. [Service members] will get out working for Apple or Microsoft making six figures.”

–Senior Enlisted Woman

b. Several Perceived That Training Opportunities for Some Occupational Specialties Directly Apply to Civilian Jobs

Several participants noted that individuals with occupational specialties in high demand in the civilian world received more opportunities to train and further their education. They cited how the military has offered training in some occupational fields—for example, information technology, communications, and logistics—that was transferable to the civilian sector. This could cause Service members either to stay in the military and take advantage of the available training or to leave to take civilian jobs since their skills are directly transferable.

“For us, it’s the career field [that affects retention]. [Service members] get out because they have better job opportunities on the outside. Our skills transition well [into civilian jobs]. There are lots of data jobs, and there’s more money.”

–Senior Enlisted Woman

“We are offered training galore. . . . They are sending me to school and commissioning me. They are begging for more people. My unit spends money on professional civilian networking certifications, and those cost big bucks outside. It is a lot of money, and we are drowning in training. . . . I love it.”

–Senior Enlisted Woman

c. A Few Perceived That Training Is Better in the Civilian Sector and Entices Service Members to Leave the Military

Despite the availability of training, a few participants voiced concerns that certain fields in the military were falling behind their civilian counterparts, and trainings were not sufficiently preparing military personnel to keep pace with the civilian sector.

"Can the [Service members] take the training into the civilian world if we aren't keeping up [and] being competitive with the outside world? . . . I know from experience we aren't keeping up, so why would my [Service members] stay in?"

–Male Officer

6. Networking Opportunities Did Not Greatly Influence Retention

The Committee asked participants about their experiences with military-sponsored networking opportunities and if these played a role in their decisions whether to remain in the military. Participants indicated that networking opportunities varied substantially by occupational specialty and rank and that the usefulness of these opportunities also varied.

a. Availability of Networking Opportunities Varied by Occupational Specialty and Rank

Several senior enlisted women and female officers indicated that the ability to participate in networking opportunities varied substantially by geographical area, community, occupational specialty, and rank. Although attendance at formal networking opportunities was believed to be crucial for career advancement, these high-level networking opportunities were mostly available to individuals who were already in higher ranks.

"I know about a [networking group for women], but you have to be a senior [leader] or above [to attend]. They were all invited to meetings . . . , but you couldn't go if you weren't high enough. They would just shoot you down if you said you wanted to go."

–Senior Enlisted Woman

"It's like a secret society. If you want to get promoted, you must be involved in these [groups] . . . ; if you're not, you could be the best, but your performance [alone] is not going to reflect that. . . . [A colleague and I may] have the same job, so we both get the same [written] statement, but I have set myself ahead of him because I am involved in these outside organizations."

–Senior Enlisted Man

"They should encourage junior folks to come. When I was a [leader], I got three women to come with me, and they came back as entirely different people. When I came back, my unit wanted to report why they sent us and why it was good for them to send us."

–Senior Enlisted Woman

Many participants also noted that opportunities for networking varied by the size of the occupational specialty; in smaller communities, it was easier to both identify and take advantage of these events because the pool of interested individuals was small.

"The size of the community makes a big difference. My mentor knows me by name, and when he sees me on the waterfront, it's like a little club."

–Female Officer

"We're working with the [other Services]. . . . We're the smallest [occupational specialty] in the [Service], so it's a small network. You're a phone call away from other people in your rank. . . . That can be good or bad depending on your career path."

–Male Officer

Several senior enlisted participants noted that even if networking opportunities are offered, leaders decide who attends and when, and it is sometimes difficult for members to set time aside to participate.

"I just put in [to attend a networking event]. It costs \$3,500 to go, and units must fund it. I put in to go, and my command wanted me to go, but they cannot afford it."

–Senior Enlisted Woman

"It's tough to go to meetings because the timing is just the worst. . . . I work all day. I could go home to my family, or I could stay for some meeting that's probably an hour and a half [and] then have to sit in traffic."

–Senior Enlisted Man

b. Availability and Usefulness of Networking Opportunities Varied

A few participants noted that when networking opportunities were available, they were rarely helpful and seemed like formalities rather than genuine opportunities. These opportunities offer Service members a chance to "check the box" to demonstrate to promotion boards that they have participated in networking opportunities.

When asked about women-centric networking opportunities, many female participants had never heard of events such as the Joint Women's Leadership Symposium (JWLS). However, for those who had taken advantage of women-centric networking opportunities, some reported that they proved to be unhelpful, whereas others found them incredibly useful and linked their participation in those events to their decisions to stay in the military.

"I've been part of several women's groups across different bases, and I guess the disappointing thing is [that] you really never see any after action come out of it. . . . You have this big networking event, and then, nothing. . . . [You think.] 'Are we ever going to get together again?'"

–Female Officer

"It has been crucial to me staying in. I wouldn't be in if I didn't go to JWLS. I'm in a male-dominated [occupational specialty], and I'm ok with it, but things come up like being pregnant. I didn't know there was a policy, I didn't know I got uniform money. Someone I met at a networking event showed me what to do and taught me how to advocate for myself. . . . My command had no idea about these things. If it wasn't for people I met in senior positions with more experience, I would have gotten out."

–Senior Enlisted Woman

D. Suggestions for Improving Mid-Career Retention

Finally, the Committee asked participants what they thought the military might do to further entice individuals to continue their service. Many participants suggested the Services should afford their members greater flexibility to increase work-life balance, particularly with respect to geographic location. Several other participants recommended providing more opportunities to cross-train, and others recommended increasing the funding for pay raises and equipment upgrades. Participants also suggested improving the alignment between training and job duties.

1. Greater Flexibility to Increase Work-Life Balance

Many participants mentioned that they would like to see the Services take steps to help their members attain work-life balance. This suggestion was voiced more often by women than men. Some participants made suggestions related to geographic location, relocation, and co-location for dual-military couples, as well as recommendations for better childcare options (see Chapter 5 for more detail on childcare).

“Put that [permanent change of station swap program] back. That would help people get where they want to go. . . . You could submit an application, and if it was approved, and there was someone to fill your spot, it would work.”

–Senior Enlisted Woman

“Allow junior [Service members] to [do a permanent change of station] within their installation [Other participants nod in agreement]. They’ll probably stay longer.”

–Senior Enlisted Man

“It’s hard to be in the same command [with your spouse]. . . . [Co-location] may help out a little bit more.”

–Senior Enlisted Woman

“What about free childcare? It was talked about in the 70s. Maybe for the military, they could offer free childcare.”

–Senior Enlisted Woman

2. More Opportunities for Cross-Training

Several senior enlisted participants felt the Services should offer opportunities for members to cross-train to keep people engaged and to stay at the cutting edge of their occupational specialties.

“We’ve got to get rid of these constrained career fields. I’ve tried to get out of security forces. I’ve applied for retraining three times. They won’t let me out. If I could get into another career field, I would stay in the [Service] . . . , but they won’t let me [cross-train] . . . , so the chances of me getting out [of the military] are a lot higher.”

–Senior Enlisted Woman

“A lot of the younger generation, they want to try a lot of different things to see what they really want to do, and it can make them more effective people, more effective [Service members], to do something that they actually want to do, so [the Service] needs to figure out how to let [newer Service members] do that. For instance, they might want to switch over to something exciting like cyber warfare, and they want to go through the training, but they’re not allowed to do that.”

–Senior Enlisted Woman

“Most of these guys will be in [the Service] for 4 years, and it’s tough. [The Service has] to do a better job of training and preparing [Service members] for the option to stay in or get out. [The lack of cross-training creates] a lot of mediocrity and doesn’t get you curious on anything outside of your little bubble.”

–Senior Enlisted Man

“As you get higher and higher in rank, [the opportunity to cross-train] is limit[ed], so before somebody hits [E5 or E7 rank], they need to have an option to cross-train. Right now, you only get that [opportunity] if you are a very first-term [Service member]. Most of the time, that person is . . . not thinking long term. When you start getting long term, and you get in a career field, you don’t want to realize, ‘This is not the best path for me.’ I don’t know that [the Service] could allow multiple retrains . . . , but one opportunity for retrain should be offered to every single person in the [Service] at least once in their career.”

–Senior Enlisted Woman

3. More Funding for Pay Raises and Equipment Upgrades

Some participants recommended the military increase funding to allow for pay increases for Service members, and others suggested the military prioritize spending to upgrade equipment, which would both attract quality recruits and retain good Service members. This sentiment was almost exclusively voiced by senior enlisted participants.

“My personal belief is the military should be the highest paid because we are literally putting our life on the line. We should make more than a football player and basketball player. Please pay me what I’m worth.”

–Senior Enlisted Man

“I would like a pay raise. I think we are overworked and underpaid. . . . We work a lot, and if you put our working hours divided by our pay, we don’t make [enough].”

–Senior Enlisted Woman

“You want to bring people in the military, [then] you have to upgrade the military. Our Services are 10 years behind everyone else. You want people to join because we have the latest and greatest of everything . . . , with upgraded equipment. . . . Being in the military will be more enticing . . . because you have the best technology and schooling and all the benefits.”

–Senior Enlisted Man

4. Better Alignment Among Training, Job Descriptions, and Daily Tasks

Some participants reported they have been educated and trained to perform specific functions within the military but are often asked to perform other tasks that are unrelated to their positions. This sentiment was primarily expressed by members of two Services and was voiced more often by men.

“Some days are spent completely doing stuff that has absolutely nothing to do with my job. There is this program or that program, or this meeting or that meeting, and none of it has any actual relevance to what I am supposed to be doing.”

–Senior Enlisted Man

“If you let them do the job they're trained for, they'll stay in. People are begging for it. They should not spend time doing other things.”

–Male Officer

“It's the broken planes and low flight hours. I've only had 30 flight hours in the past year. That's a low amount, and it's concerning. When you're not flying, you're doing a ground job. Morale gets low; you expect to do the job you spent 2 years training to do, [and] now, you're doing a desk job.”

–Male Officer

“You'd be surprised to find how many people would stay in [the Service] if they could actually do the job they were trained to do.”

–Male Officer

Chapter 4. Parental Leave

DACOWITS studied parental leave in 2017, in part to explore Service members' longstanding concerns in this area. In 2015 and 2016, focus group participants often raised this topic as a general challenge facing women in the military. Participants worried that taking parental leave could negatively affect Service members' careers and discussed the ongoing stigma associated with taking parental leave, the staffing challenges it could pose for units, and the challenges parents faced with the limited amount of available leave.

The Committee also aimed to explore the effects of recent changes in DoD leave policies. The Services offer several types of leave for parents. The FY 2017 NDAA²⁵ includes changes to some of these policies, but as of July 2017, DoD was still determining how to implement the changes. DoD leave policies as of June 2017 were as follows:

- ▶ **Maternity Leave.** Biological mothers are allowed to take 12 consecutive weeks of maternity leave following childbirth. They may take additional, unrestricted leave if a health professional deems it necessary. When this policy was updated for all Services in 2016, it represented a 6-week decrease in maternity leave for Sailors and Marines but a 6-week increase for Soldiers, Airmen, and Coastguardsmen.^{26,27,28}
- ▶ **Adoption Leave.** Service members are allowed to take 21 days of adoption leave within 12 months of an adoption, which they can use in conjunction with ordinary leave. Only one member of a dual-military couple is eligible. However, the FY 2017 NDAA permits 6 weeks of leave for primary caregivers and up to 21 days of leave for a secondary caregiver.
- ▶ **Parental Leave for Secondary Caregivers.** A married Service member (including biological fathers and same-sex partners) on active duty whose spouse gives birth to a child is allowed to take 10 consecutive days of parental leave within a reasonable amount of time after a child's birth; the exact timeframe varies by Service. Although the FY 2017 NDAA permits up to 21 days of leave for secondary caregivers, DoD is considering permitting 14 days.

Although parental leave is tied to one specific policy, this report uses the term more broadly throughout the chapter to encompass the various types of leave that parents (e.g., biological mothers and fathers, adoptive parents, same-sex parents) can take. This report differentiates between maternity and paternity leave when referring to mothers and fathers and also differentiates between adoptive leave and same-sex parent leave.

²⁵ The FY 2017 NDAA (Pub. L. 114–328) was passed in December 2016. See <https://www.congress.gov/114/crpt/hrpt840/CRPT-114hrpt840.pdf> or <https://www.congress.gov/bill/114th-congress/senate-bill/2943/text>

²⁶ Ferdinando, L. (2016, January 28). Carter announces 12 weeks paid military maternity leave, other benefits. *DoD News*. Retrieved from DoD website: <https://www.defense.gov/News/Article/Article/645958/carter-announces-12-weeks-paid-military-maternity-leave-other-benefits/>

²⁷ Bushatz, A. (2016, January 28). Pentagon sets maternity leave at 12 weeks for all Services. Retrieved from Military.com website: <http://www.military.com/daily-news/2016/01/28/maternity-leave-slashed-for-sailors-marines.html>

²⁸ Bushatz, A. (2016, February 3). Coast Guard increases maternity leave to 12 weeks. Retrieved from Military.com website: <http://www.military.com/daily-news/2016/02/03/coast-guard-increases-maternity-leave-to-12-weeks.html>

To explore Service members’ longstanding concerns in greater detail as well as the effects of recent policy changes, the Committee asked participants about their understanding and opinions of, and their experiences with, current parental leave policies (see Appendix C.3 for the focus group protocol). This chapter discusses the focus group findings on parental leave and is organized into the following sections:

- ▶ Most Had Direct Experience With Parental Leave
- ▶ Knowledge and Perceptions of Parental Leave Policies Varied
- ▶ Several Factors Affected Need for and Experience With Leave, and Effects on the Military Varied
- ▶ Benefits of Parental Leave
- ▶ Drawbacks of and Pressures Against Taking Parental Leave
- ▶ Most Would Encourage Women to Take at Least Some Maternity Leave
- ▶ Suggestions for Improving Parental Leave

A. Most Had Direct Experience With Parental Leave

Nearly all participants had direct experience with parental leave. Hand count data revealed that most participants (about 9 in 10) had worked with someone who took leave. When asked about the birth or adoption of their youngest children, 35 percent of participants (and 42 percent of women) reported that they took parental leave. More than 90 percent of these participants took the maximum amount of time allotted to them (see Table 4.1).

Table 4.1. Amount of Leave Taken by Participants

With the birth/adoption of your youngest child, did you take parental leave (maternity/paternity/adoption) offered by the military?	Percent Women	Percent Total (Men and Women)
Took parental leave	42%	35%
Took maximum leave	97%	92%
Took some leave	3%	7%
Not specified	N/A	1%
Not applicable	58%	60%
Not a parent	69%	66%
Not available	1%	5%
Youngest child born/adopted pre-military	12%	8%
Not specified	18%	20%
Did not take available leave	N/A	5%
Total	100%	100%
Missing	N/A	1%

Some percentages do not sum to 100 because of rounding.

Source: DACOWITS mini-survey (data from groups participating in maternity leave discussion only)

Many participants—particularly senior enlisted women and female officers—took parental leave under former policies, thus taking more or less than the currently allotted 12 weeks. A few mentioned taking leave under as many as three different policies.

"I had [maternity leave] under all three policies. I had 6 weeks with my first baby, then 18 weeks, and now I'll take the 12-week leave with this pregnancy."

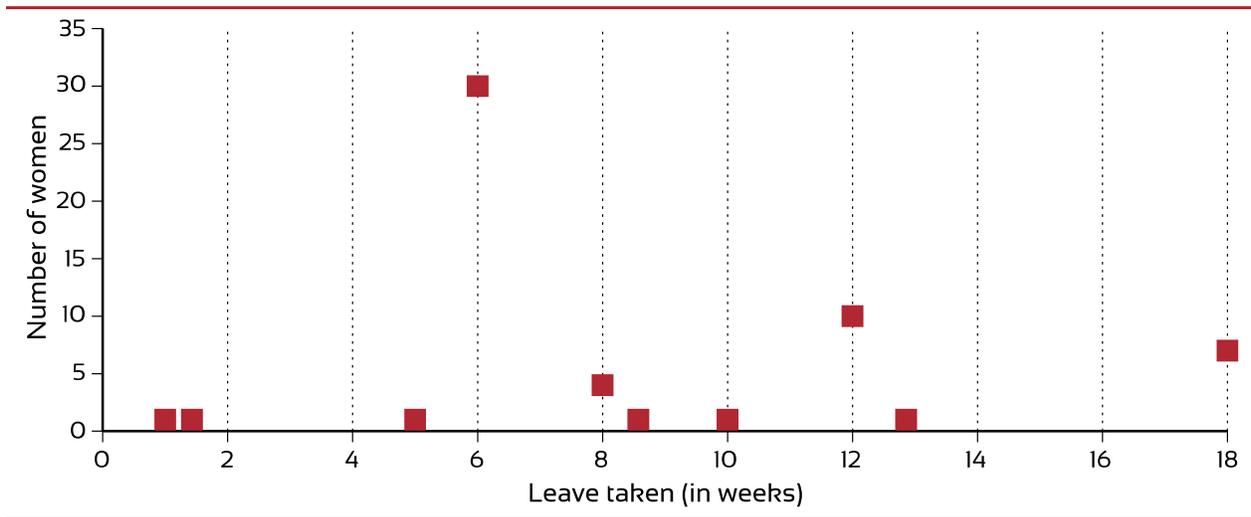
–Female Officer

"I have three boys, and with the first one, [my maternity leave] was 6 weeks, which wasn't a lot of time. . . . Putting him in daycare was heartbreaking. I got 18 weeks with my second, and that was amazing. They filled my spot in my shop, and I came in to see how things were going. My last one, which was a surprise, was the same."

–Senior Enlisted Woman

Among female participants who reported taking any maternity leave, the majority took 6 weeks (see Figure 4.1).

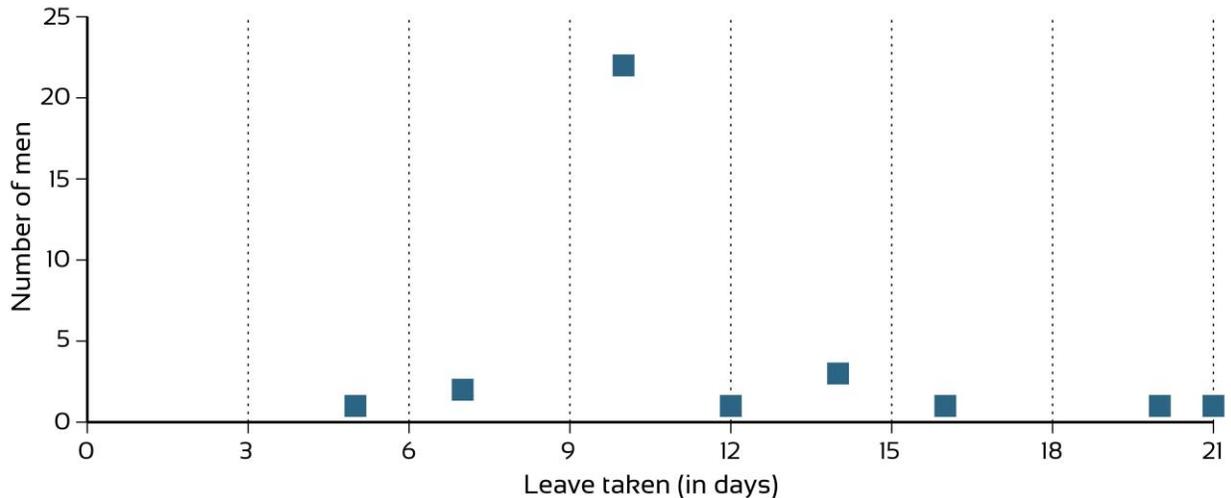
Figure 4.1. Amount of Leave Taken Among Women Who Took Maternity Leave



Source: DACOWITS mini-survey (data from groups participating in maternity leave discussion only)

Among male participants who reported taking any paternity leave, the majority took 10 days (see Figure 4.2).

Figure 4.2. Amount of Leave Taken Among Men Who Took Paternity Leave



Source: DACOWITS mini-survey (data from groups participating in parental leave discussion only)

B. Knowledge and Perceptions of Parental Leave Policies Varied

Participants had varying levels of knowledge about military parental leave policies. Most participants were aware of recent or potential changes to leave policies; they generally viewed recent or proposed increases in the amount of available leave positively but also expressed some concerns. Most knew biological mothers and fathers were eligible for leave, but they were uncertain about eligibility for adoptive and same-sex parents. There was a perception in many groups that all leave was subject to leaders' discretion and dependent on unit needs and circumstances.

1. Maternity Leave Policies Were Best Understood

Most participants, especially women, knew that biological mothers were eligible for maternity leave. There was some confusion regarding the finer points of the policy, such as whether mothers could split up leave instead of taking it all at once, and some participants were unsure of the exact number of weeks permitted. However, nearly all knew that mothers were eligible for several weeks of leave, and participants frequently knew that the allotted time for mothers had recently changed to 12 weeks.

a. Most Knew Maternity Policies Had Recently Changed

Participants from most groups were aware of recent changes to maternity leave policies across the Services.²⁹

²⁹ The establishment of a standardized 12-week maternity leave policy across all Services in 2016 represented a 6-week increase in leave for the Army, Air Force, and Coast Guard and a 6-week decrease in leave for the Navy and Marine Corps.

"I had the full 18 weeks, but I hear they changed back to 12 [weeks], which I don't think is fair."

–Junior Enlisted Woman

"[Maternity leave went from] 6 to 18 to 12 weeks. . . . They were looking at mid-career retention and realizing that at 10 years or more, they were losing officers and senior enlisted. . . . They were trying to retain people. The [Secretary of Defense changed it] to 12 [weeks] across all Services."

–Female Officer

"[Maternity leave] just changed to 3 months."

–Junior Enlisted Man

b. Some Were Uncertain About Specifics of Maternity Leave

Though maternity leave was the best understood policy, some participants had questions about it or were uncertain about some of the details, such as whether maternity leave could be split up. However, men were more likely than women to raise questions about maternity leave policies or have incorrect information about the policies.

"I heard [leave is] 1 year within 24 months [of the birth] for pregnant Service members. They can take leave for 24 months, but it is on and off."

–Senior Enlisted Man

"Females [can take] 30 days."

–Male Officer

2. Paternity Leave Policies Were Also Well Understood, Though Potential Changes Caused Some Confusion

Most participants knew about paternity leave policies and were aware that fathers could take 10 days of leave. However, pending changes to paternity leave policies authorized under the FY 2017 NDAA³⁰ caused some confusion. Many Service members had heard about possible increases to paternity leave but were uncertain whether they had already been implemented.

"I think they're trying to get [paternity leave] up to 14 or 21 [days]."

–Junior Enlisted Man

"[I think paternity leave is] 10 days. [With] the new policy, I know they're planning to do the 14 days, but our unit has been doing 10."

–Junior Enlisted Woman

"I thought they [recently] increased paternity leave. . . ."

–Female Officer

³⁰ The FY 2017 NDAA (Pub. L. 114–328) was passed in December 2016. See <https://www.congress.gov/114/crpt/hrpt840/CRPT-114hrpt840.pdf> or <https://www.congress.gov/bill/114th-congress/senate-bill/2943/text>

3. Adoptive and Same-Sex Leave Policies Were Not Well Understood

In most groups, participants expressed confusion about parental leave policies outside of leave for biological mothers and fathers. Many participants were uncertain about the details of the adoptive leave policy. A few participants also noted their confusion about policies for same-sex couples. Generally, given the lack of knowledge about parental leave for adoptive and same-sex parents, participants were unable to offer many details.

"[I] didn't know [adoptive leave] existed."

–Male Officer

"My wife and I are thinking about adopting. They don't tell us much. We have looked into that, but it's hard to find people who are knowledgeable about this in the military. People who I ask don't know. It's one of those issues that they say they'll ask someone else, and it never comes back."

–Junior Enlisted Man

4. Several Perceived Leave to Be Subject to Leader Discretion

Several participants thought that the amount of leave Service members could take could be extended or shortened based on commanders' judgment and unit needs.

"I think it still depends on your chain of command. They can still call you in and [make you] come in after [you have your baby]."

–Junior Enlisted Woman

"As far as I know, fathers can take 10 days. . . . My command allowed me 2 extra weeks, which was cool."

–Senior Enlisted Male

"[A male Service member] stretched out his 10 days [of paternity leave] because command was so lax. . . ."

–Female Officer

"The manning was terrible [when I had my first child], so I only got 10 days. I asked for more, and [leadership] denied it. . . . [When I had my second], we were not doing much, so they gave me extra time. . . . I was lucky there that they didn't need me."

–Senior Enlisted Man

5. Perceptions of Leave Increases Were Mostly Positive but Included Concerns

When asked how they felt about recent or pending changes to military parental leave policies, participants from most groups responded positively. However, despite the recent progress in this arena, many participants felt there were opportunities for further improvements; for example, to increase the leave allotment for fathers to at least 1 month and address the eligibility requirement that fathers must be married to take parental leave.

a. Most Approved of Efforts to Increase Parental Leave

Although Service members acknowledged the challenges parental leave could pose for units, they generally approved of efforts to increase the amount of time parents were allotted.³¹

"I thought [the increase to maternity leave] was great. . . . It showed the direction our society is heading. . . . I thought it was necessary. I think there is more that can be done, like [increasing] nondeployable status for up to a year and [improving] breastfeeding, but it's far ahead of most American companies and a step in the right direction."

–Senior Enlisted Woman

"Definitely a good deal [to increase leave]. Long overdue in my opinion. I understand the fastest growing demographic in the military is women, so if you want to recruit and retain, you have to have programs that appeal to them."

–Senior Enlisted Man

"[The increase in leave] was phenomenal. I've taken 6 weeks and 12 weeks [of maternity leave]. At 6 weeks, I felt like was dropping off a little creature I had [no] relationship with [at daycare]. I was still hurting. . . . I felt gross being at work. When I had 12 weeks, I felt ready, I felt great physically and mentally."

–Female Officer

b. Despite Improvements in Recent Years, Amount of Available Leave Was Often Inadequate

Many participants discussed the inadequacy of their leave—particularly leave for fathers, which was mentioned in most groups (and nearly all male groups). Participants discussed challenging situations that forced parents to find creative ways to support growing families, from taking personal leave while they resolved childcare issues to recruiting family members or babysitters to provide immediate support.

Leave for Fathers Was Perceived as Far Too Short

One of the most consistently reported challenges by participants was the inadequacy of leave for fathers. Most participants felt 10 days—the permitted amount of leave at the time the focus groups were held—was simply not enough time.

"[Paternity leave] needs to change. [My] husband was on deployment with our first kid. For the second kid, they [deployed] after about a month. It was nothing—he wasn't able to bond with the kid. . . . I'm glad they changed maternity leave, but paternity is as important."

–Senior Enlisted Woman

³¹ For two Services, 12 weeks of maternity leave represented a decrease. The Navy and Marine Corps allowed 18 weeks of maternity leave from 2015 to 2016.

"[I knew a Service member] who took paternity leave and came back and told us it was not enough at all. The mother just came through an absolute transformation. She is not mentally prepared to be alone with the baby by herself when the father goes back to work. . . . If that father had more time to help out the mother and kid, it would be better for the family."

–Junior Enlisted Man

"[The 10-day leave] was a real problem for me for both kids. I didn't bond with the child. My wife had a sense of, 'You're not helping out like you should.' That . . . left me with a sense of failure over something I couldn't control."

–Male Officer

"I think paternity [leave] should be longer. It's a lot to put on one parent, and 10 to 14 days [for the mother to have the father's full support] is not a lot of time."

–Junior Enlisted Woman

Several Fathers Sought At-Home Support From Family After the Birth of a Child

Often, fathers returning to work needed to find assistance for their families after the birth of a child. Several fathers recruited relatives for additional support when they could not provide it personally.

"We had grandma at home to help [since I couldn't take enough leave]."

–Senior Enlisted Man

"That seems to be the norm, bringing in family members to help out. [It] seems like [paternity leave] should be a little longer for that reason."

–Senior Enlisted Man

"I would say that's standard. I don't think I've encountered anyone where they have not flown in family, especially a [dual-military] couple."

–Senior Enlisted Man

In Several Groups, Participants Said at Least a Month of Leave Would Be Ideal for Fathers

Participants in several groups thought fathers should receive at least 1 month of leave to help their families adjust following the birth of a child. This included participants who recommended aligning leave for fathers more closely with leave for mothers.

"[I would recommend] 3–4 weeks [of paternity leave]. [A father is] not physically recovering, but he needs the time to bond. The wife is going through things—postpartum depression and everything else. It gives him time to make sure things are in order and [to] bond."

–Senior Enlisted Woman

"I think 30 days sounds a lot better; 10 days is definitely not enough time."

–Junior Enlisted Man

“A full month would be pretty sufficient. Maybe that’s a lot to ask, but [11 days] versus 30 days is a big difference. Whoever is watching the child, you don’t get used to a lot in 10 days. There is a lot going on in that first month. . . . I took about 30 days after my second child.”

–Senior Enlisted Man

“In an effort to really level the playing field, maternity leave and paternity leave should be same length.”

–Male Officer

Requiring Fathers to Be Married to Be Eligible for Parental Leave Presented Challenges

Many participants discussed the requirement for a father to be married to the child’s mother to take leave, which was challenging for some families. A few participants felt this was contradictory, noting that marriage was not a requirement for other family-related benefits.

“For paternal leave, you have to be married to the mother of the child. A fiancé doesn’t get chargeable leave.”

–Senior Enlisted Woman

“There has to be a legal beneficiary relationship with the mother. They have to be married.”

–Female Officer

“I know if you’re not married, you don’t get it. I have a daughter, and [her mother and I] are not married, but we live together, and I don’t get it.”

–Junior Enlisted Man

“Command did not give [a Service member] leave . . . so he had to get back on board the ship the day that his son was born because [he and the child’s mother were] not married.”

–Senior Enlisted Man

C. Several Factors Affected Need for and Experience With Leave, and Effects on the Military Varied

Participants discussed a range of factors that affected Service members’ needs and experiences regarding parental leave and also had effects on the military. Participants commonly noted that each parental leave situation is unique and can affect families and units in different ways. The circumstances surrounding a child’s arrival can vary widely; some families may need a great deal of support, whereas others can adjust relatively quickly. Some units may be able to absorb the impact of leave without affecting readiness, whereas others might struggle.

1. Personal or Family Factors Affected Leave-Related Needs and Experiences

Participants described several personal or family-related circumstances that could affect individual needs for and experiences with leave.

a. Child Health

Participants described a greater need for leave when babies had health challenges. For example, parents of premature babies or children born with other kinds of disabilities might need additional time to care for their children and make sure they are healthy before returning to work.

"No, [my leave wasn't long enough]. . . . We had twins with birth defects [and] a lot of issues going on. Ten days was not long enough to support my wife."

–Junior Enlisted Man

"[My friend's child had medical issues], so when the child was born, he took his regular leave and didn't really get to see his child because it was in the hospital, and by the time the child comes home, he's only got 2 days [of leave] left."

–Senior Enlisted Man

"My best friend [is in the military and] just had a baby 3 weeks ago. . . . It was premature. She spent 18 days in the hospital with the baby, so [leave increases can cover] some time with her baby when she is back and forth to the hospital."

–Senior Enlisted Woman

b. Maternal Health

Similarly, many participants noted that the need for leave would be greater for mothers with health challenges. Mothers recovering from cesarean sections would face longer recovery times than those who had vaginal births, for example, and mothers experiencing postpartum depression might require additional adjustment time before returning to work.

"Every woman's pregnancy is different, and [for] some, their body doesn't cope well, and they have to take more time."

–Junior Enlisted Man

"Even if your wife is a stay-at-home mom, some have postpartum [depression]. I didn't get to take any leave, and [my wife] did have postpartum. . . . That was a 'great welcome' to the [Service] for her [he said sarcastically]."

–Male Officer

"My wife had a C-section, so I needed to help out a lot longer. Ten days in, she couldn't even get out of bed yet."

–Junior Enlisted Man

"What they do to [a woman during a C-section] . . . , I don't know how she can heal in 12 weeks. . . . You can't even lift a baby after you have a cesarean, or [your sutures] will tear again."

–Junior Enlisted Woman

c. Availability of Partner and Family to Provide Support

Participants noted that returning to work might be easier for Service members with family nearby to assist with the transition. Conversely, those without family or a partner to provide support might need additional leave time to make arrangements.

“Just because . . . my husband is here and I have family here, it doesn't mean that my [colleague] will have the same opportunities [for support], so trying to understand [other people's situations] is important.”

–Senior Enlisted Woman

“I've taken maternity leave twice, and . . . [when] you're away from your family, I think it's different than for people who stay near their families.”

–Female Officer

“Depending on best-case scenario, when you get home from the hospital, you have 3 or 4 days to get things set up, and then you're leaving your significant other to fend for herself. A lot of people don't have family [nearby for support].”

–Senior Enlisted Man

d. Availability of Childcare

Participants observed that families struggling to find childcare might need to take more leave time to secure appropriate care. For more information on issues related to childcare, see Chapter 5.

“[At my installation], the wait list for childcare was over a year. . . . I would've tried to go back [to work] early but wasn't able to because the wait list was so long for childcare services.”

–Junior Enlisted Woman

“I had to take extra leave, 30 extra days, because I couldn't get childcare in time!”

–Senior Enlisted Woman

“[Extending leave] gave us more time to get childcare. The [Child Development Center] didn't have any openings for a while, and it was going to cost a whole lot more for other childcare places. . . . That helped out a lot to be able to really pick who watches your kid.”

–Senior Enlisted Man

“I had my son 7 weeks early, so the [Child Development Center] would not take him until his gestational age was old enough. Fortunately, I took personal leave . . . , and my husband's boss allowed him to take his personal leave after mine. There was no paternity leave at this time. . . . That was a stress for me.”

–Female Officer

2. Several Professional Factors Affected Ease of Taking Leave and Impact on Unit Readiness

Participants described several work-related factors that affected how easy or difficult it was for individuals to take leave as well as the effect taking leave could have on units.

a. Unit and Position Made a Difference

Participants described how smaller units had more difficulty adapting when Service members were out on parental leave; larger units, however, had flexibility and additional personnel available to fill the gaps.

More Difficult for Smaller Units and Individuals in Specialized Positions

Parental leave was seen as more challenging and placing a greater burden on small units and Service members with specialized positions.

"I have two daughters, but I didn't take any [leave]. I'm on a ship with only one [person in my position], so I can't leave."

–Senior Enlisted Man

"The interesting thing with our community is we have so few people on the crew . . . [that] some of these folks cannot [take leave]."

–Male Officer

"I enjoyed my 12 weeks off with my newborn, but . . . they didn't fill my position while I was away. It became a burden on the shop with my absence."

–Junior Enlisted Woman

Moreover, pregnant women who worked in risky or hazardous occupational specialties faced additional health and safety concerns that kept them away from work even before they gave birth.

"Every time we have a [Service member] get pregnant, they get removed [and sent] somewhere else. They always get transferred. We're in a new situation in my second shift for an increased risk of exposure to radiation, so I think getting them out is important."

–Female Officer

"You can't do this and that because you're pregnant. . . . My job is hazardous. [Others in my unit] basically just think I'm useless."

–Senior Enlisted Women

Easier for Larger Units and Those With More Common Positions

Larger units that routinely rotate personnel were seen as better able to accommodate leave. Relatedly, Service members in less specialized positions were better able to find other Service members who could cover in their absence.

"It depends on your crew size. On a normal ship, [someone taking leave has] no impact."

–Senior Enlisted Man

"I knew a [Service member] who took maternity leave. . . . It wasn't an issue because it was a big shop."

–Junior Enlisted Man

"In my unit, if one person is gone, we are all replaceable. Not to be offensive, but if I lose one, there are plenty of [Service members] to fill in. It all goes back to the type of job they hold."

–Senior Enlisted Woman

"Our [unit] was big, and . . . it was no problem for one [Service member] to take the allotted time. . . . We have people in and out all the time."

–Female Officer

b. More Difficult for Units With High Operations Tempo

Taking leave was more challenging for individuals and units preparing to deploy, engaging in training exercises, or during similarly critical times such as when units embark on high-priority missions.

"There are more restrictions [on leave] because of [operations tempo]. I had 10 days [of parental leave], and that was a stretch."

–Male Officer

"[Leave] doesn't affect mission readiness all the time . . . unless it's a deployable or an active shop, but if it not, then it shouldn't be an issue."

–Junior Enlisted Woman

"Last year, one of my [fellow Service members] had another baby, and it didn't affect us. This year, we have to deploy, so it's hurting us. If another female got pregnant, we'd be underwater because we have no one."

–Junior Enlisted Woman

c. Leaders Set the Tone Surrounding Parental Leave

Most participants commented on the influence of leadership; unit leaders could make it easier or harder for Service members to take leave, though participants also noted that leaders' decisions were often based on the circumstances and needs of their units.

"Fortunately, I have [a leader] who understood that when I was at work, my mind wasn't there. . . . He told me my job was to be at the medical center with my child. I'm thankful for the time that they gave me to spend at the hospital. Not all leadership would feel the same way."

–Male Officer

"We have a small shop . . . , and we are [a] tight group. My chain of command took care of me, and that's what determines [how smoothly things go] . . . I was taken care of, and it went smoothly."

–Junior Enlisted Man

"It goes back to if your chain of command supports it. If you have that support, you're good to go."

–Senior Enlisted Woman

Some groups noted that leaders who are parents might be especially supportive of leave.

"I did see one case about a year ago [in which] a [Service member] was pregnant, and a female [leader] who doesn't have any kids said, 'You're not going to . . . take all 12 weeks, are you?' She didn't understand."

–Senior Enlisted Woman

"I have that same feeling of not wanting to put junior [Service members] through what you went through [as a parent]. . . . I remember saying, 'I'm never going to be like that [leader]. He makes me feel this tall [indicating short height with his hands].'"

–Male Officer

d. Rank Affected Ability to Take Leave

Some senior-level leaders discussed whether rank affected their ability to take leave, and the impact that a leader taking leave might have on a unit; their feedback varied.

Some Thought It Was Harder for Leaders to Take Leave Given Their Responsibilities

Some higher ranking Service members felt that their career demands and responsibilities made taking leave more difficult. They worried about how their absences would affect their units.

"The higher you get up [the ranks], the more they look at you as a failure [for taking leave], at least what I've seen."

–Female Officer

"You get into leadership positions where a . . . leader gone that amount of time is killing combat effectiveness of that unit."

–Senior Enlisted Man

"For E7 and above, there will be a large impact on the unit. Below that [rank], you can move around and fill in places where you are gapped. Once you get to those vital positions, you don't have any more [leeway]."

–Male Officer

A Few Thought Leaders Were Better Able to Control and Plan for Leave

Other Service leaders thought their positions of relative power made it easier for them to take leave. Compared with more junior Service members, they felt leaders may have more control in their careers and may be better able to advocate for themselves.

"I put myself in a junior or senior enlisted [Service member]'s shoes. Am I going to go ask to go pump [breast milk]? I'm an officer. I go in my office and pump. . . . I'm comfortable having that conversation. . . . We don't make it easy for [enlisted Service members] at all."

–Female Officer

"I think there is [an] understanding that officers and senior enlisted are in a position where we [can] take care of ourselves better than the junior [Service members]."

–Male Officer

e. Services Should Be Responsible for Contingency Planning to Minimize Effect on Unit When Members Take Leave

Participants acknowledged the challenges a unit might face when a member takes leave, but many felt the military was responsible for preparing accordingly. Several likened parental leave to any other type of absence the military must routinely cover; for example, when a member leaves the unit to attend an extended training, recover from an injury, or take a vacation.

"[When a woman in a specialized unit went on maternity leave], it created leadership [issues] . . . to negotiate the workload in her absence, and we managed because we manage with everything else, and you always find a way. It does affect functionality [of the unit], but not to the point it can't be overcome."

–Senior Enlisted Man

"It's going to be challenging any time someone's gone. That's true with any leave . . . , but that's our job to pick up their slack so they can focus on the mission at home. Twelve weeks is really not that much in the grand scheme of things."

–Senior Enlisted Woman

Ensuring the unit is able to move forward seamlessly with the mission at hand was seen as the Service's job. Participants indicated that in the military, everyone should be replaceable at some level to ensure that the mission can be fulfilled.

"Whenever we have [Service members] go anywhere, they always get replaced. . . . If something happened, they are replaceable. The [Service] will always find someone."

–Junior Enlisted Woman

"If someone goes to school, people have to step up. It's what you have to do. . . . It's the military, that's what we deal with every day—people leaving and coming."

–Female Officer

"There's misplaced focus when we think about how [leave] affects the unit. We're meant to deploy. We're meant to be replaceable. If there's a mission stoppage, then there's a bigger issue."

–Senior Enlisted Woman

D. Benefits of Parental Leave

When asked about the benefits of parental leave, Service members cited positive impacts for parents and families as well as the military. Participants also noted that leave provided valuable time for families to bond with newborn children, develop new family routines, and support one another during the initial adjustment period.

1. Benefits to Parents and Family

Participants described several ways maternity leave supported women's physical recovery from childbirth, and the positive impact it had on establishing family routines and allowing time for families to bond with the new infant.

a. Maternity Leave Supported Physical Adjustments and Healing

Participants described several health-related maternity leave benefits for mothers. Taking adequate maternity leave time allowed mothers time to establish a breastfeeding routine and milk supply and prepare to pump milk upon returning to work. It also provided critical time for mothers to both recover from childbirth and return to their previous physical fitness standards.

Mothers Were Able to Establish Breastfeeding/Milk Supply

"I [had only 6 weeks of leave and] had a hard time breastfeeding because being the [leader] in a shop, I didn't have time. . . . If you're breastfeeding, it's a big part of being a mom. . . . so it really took a toll on me when I wasn't able to breastfeed [my daughter]. She was at daycare all day, and I couldn't breastfeed enough, so it was cut short."

–Senior Enlisted Woman

"With my first kid. . . , I just went back to work and was an extreme mess. Breastfeeding was not well established. . . . I was crying and stressed out, and I couldn't make enough milk to fill the bottles. . . . With longer time on maternity leave, I didn't have issues with my milk supply, and going back to work, I was more prepared. I wasn't stressed out; I breezed back in and felt like my old self."

–Female Officer

Mothers Were Able to Recover Physically and Regain Fitness

"We have some ladies in our unit who are rock stars, who would [use leave time to regain fitness] . . . we don't see them for 3 months, but it has no effect. . . . At the end, you have the return of a good [Service member]."

–Junior Enlisted Man

"The time you get after birth is important for you and the child because there is a lot to adjust with what happened with the woman's body."

–Junior Enlisted Woman

"When you give birth, you may need the extra [leave] time to recover. That's a lot of changes to a female body."

–Senior Enlisted Man

b. Families Were Able to Bond, Establish Routines, and Support One Another

"[If you take leave], you're not sleep deprived when you come back, and hopefully your baby will be on a schedule so your mind can be at work rather than thinking, 'I only got 2 hours of sleep last night.'"

–Senior Enlisted Woman

"From a pediatric standpoint, I think [increasing leave] . . . seems to be good from a newborn and family dynamic perspective."

–Male Officer

"[Having] more time allows that bond and that time to adjust. It's better for establishing a routine."

–Senior Enlisted Woman

"Teamwork [is a benefit of leave]. Babies are needy, and you don't know what their schedule is. Every baby is different. [It helps] having that relief [from your partner]. . . . Mom is with them, and then an hour later, dad."

–Male Officer

2. Benefits to the Military

Service members noted that the military is not a typical job, and it requires full commitment and focus. Many thought giving Service members time to attend to personal matters would permit them to focus when they returned, which could increase unit readiness, and some added that it might even secure Service members' long-term commitment to the military. Some suggested that deployment deferrals would further support a successful return to work.

a. Ensured Service Members Were Focused Upon Return to Work

Following the birth of a child, families must complete several tasks before they are ready to return to work. They must adjust to the new baby and establish routines, including sleep schedules; ensure the child's mother is healthy and recovered; complete a Family Care Plan; and secure childcare. According to participants, Service members that were given the time to address these issues returned to work committed and focused. Conversely, those that were not given enough time to adjust were distracted and felt pulled in too many directions to focus fully on their jobs.

"[Leave] can also be positive for readiness. . . . Part of readiness is having your family plan and situation squared away. . . . When they do get back into [their] job, they can focus more. You never get a day off really being a parent, but [leave] puts you in a better fighting position."

–Female Officer

"I, too, had to deploy at 5 months [after giving birth]. . . . In retrospect, [my daughter is] fine, but going through it then, it was traumatic, and I wasn't focused for the first month and a half of my deployment because I was thinking about how I failed my child."

–Senior Enlisted Woman

"The good news is when [parents] come back [from leave], they are ready to come back, and they look happy and healthy. There's no dropoff really in terms of mission capabilities."

–Male Officer

"[When a child is born], you're learning how to get a system down, get a plan going, setting up child development and childcare. If you didn't get leave, you'd be stressed out or doing it at work, which you shouldn't be doing. If you take paternity leave, you can be more focused on the mission."

–Junior Enlisted Man

b. Fostered Service Member's Goodwill and Commitment to the Military

Participants believed that Service members who felt supported by their leaders and the military as a whole were more committed and dedicated to the military in the long term.

"When someone gets pregnant, it might be frustrating [to others in the unit] at first, but in the end, if you support mothers and families, it helps. You give women a chance to be a mother, and if you support them, they will stay in the [Service]."

–Senior Enlisted Woman

“When you give [fathers] more than 10 days, they come back a happier person. They spent time with [their] family. . . . It’s a great morale booster even if only 10 days. When they come back and they are like, ‘They didn’t give me any leave,’ all of their morale drops.”

–Junior Enlisted Man

“People work harder for you if you take good care of them. It’s not all mission, mission, mission. If you act like this child is not important, and it’s all about the mission, they’re not going to work hard for you. It boils down to taking care of people.”

–Senior Enlisted Man

“I think if you were to discourage them, you might get that animosity later on, like, ‘You made me come back.’ You want them to have that time. You take care of your people, and then when you do need something, they’ll reciprocate.”

–Female Officer

E. Drawbacks of and Pressures Against Taking Parental Leave

Participants acknowledged that women faced stigma regarding pregnancy, that taking leave could affect women’s evaluations and career progression, and that men and women were pressured to take less leave than allowed.

1. Women Faced Stigma Surrounding Pregnancy

Many participants said they had heard comments from some Service members that women used pregnancy to avoid deployments or work. Although this finding was primarily directed toward junior-level women, even senior female participants reported pressure to avoid similar backlash by timing and planning their pregnancies carefully—or to avoid having children entirely so they didn’t have to sacrifice their careers.

a. Women Felt Pressure to Plan Pregnancies to Avoid Negative Perceptions

Many women commented on the tension between balancing their careers and their families and felt pressure to avoid inconveniencing their units to the greatest extent possible.

“I didn’t want anyone else to pick up the full ‘slack.’ I brought my breast pump everywhere. I made do. . . . You will time your pregnancy [to limit negative impacts on your unit]. . . . I took projects on maternity leave. I didn’t want to let anyone down.”

–Female Officer

“I know I’m pregnant, so before I go on leave, I volunteer [for assignments] . . . Take care of what you need to do so that your supervisor can’t say anything [about your leave].”

–Senior Enlisted Woman

“You always have that in your mind, about timing. I’m 41 and I don’t have kids. We all make sacrifices. . . . There are single moms who make it happen, but it’s not easy when you don’t have [a] second person or you are [dual-military] and both operational. Someone’s going to take a hit, and 9 out of 10 times, it’s going to be the female.”

–Female Officer

“Depending on when you take maternity leave, it really affects how you get rated. It was terrifying. My leadership told me to get [pregnancies] all out now [before reaching the higher ranks].”

–Junior Enlisted Woman

b. Perception That Some Women Became Pregnant to Avoid Work or Deployments

Participants noted that junior-level women were often perceived as using pregnancy to evade deployments or work that they did not find desirable. This is a stereotype that DACOWITS has heard in previous years as well.

“There is a negative stereotype that when a ship is about to deploy . . . some [servicewoman] will get herself pregnant to avoid deployment.”

–Female Officer

“[Women] are getting out of deployment . . . , and then [units] have to find . . . males to replace them, and they get a bad taste in their mouth.”

–Senior Enlisted Man

“There were so many, and I mean so many, an overwhelming number of females got pregnant just so they didn’t have to deploy. I would say something like 90 percent.”

–Junior Enlisted Man

“There are a lot of hard feelings. When you come back, it’s a hard transition . . . because people think you weren’t doing anything for 12 weeks. There are a lot of stigmas.”

–Junior Enlisted Woman

2. Many Felt Leave Could Have a Negative Impact on Women’s Performance and Evaluations

Many participants described ways that taking leave could have a negative impact on women’s career progression; discussed several pressures that women face such as quickly regaining optimal fitness; and commented on the sacrifices women made to advance.

“That comes with the nature of having kids. You have to make some sacrifices, and it can negatively impact [evaluations]. That’s a choice you make.”

–Senior Enlisted Man

“As a woman, you get a brief: ‘Don’t get pregnant if you care about your career, wait until you are 35, then you can do it.’ There were repercussions if you got pregnant before you got your qualifications. . . . It was briefed to me not to do that.”

–Female Officer

“There are these programs that you can’t be pregnant going into it. . . . My husband and I have been talking about it because we want to have a baby, but I want to do [one of these rigorous programs]. I have to decide which is more important, my career or a kid.”

–Junior Enlisted Woman

a. Female Participants Felt Pressured to Return to Physical Fitness Standards Quickly

Pregnancy and childbirth can have a significant effect on women's bodies, which worried many women given the pressure they felt to meet physical fitness requirements.

"My baby is due in September, my [fitness report is] in April. I'll come back right after the holidays, and then I'll have 3 months to perform for my [fitness report]. That is something I worry about."

–Female Officer

"The stigma is that you are supposed to be this fit person who can do anything. . . . I was out there sprinting at 8 months pregnant because I didn't want to look weak. After [maternity leave], your body is not the same. . . . It's almost like people are out there waiting for you to fail."

–Junior Enlisted Woman

b. Women Who Took Leave Were Viewed Less Favorably Compared With Peers Who Did Not

Participants noted that women who took leave were sometimes "out of sight, out of mind": they often missed critical formal and informal interactions with leadership, for example, compared with peers who did not take leave.

"[Women who take maternity leave] are not flying the same hours, doing the same things [as the rest of their unit]. . . . You don't have to work as hard, but you still get a good ranking after it. It did create tension. [Others think,] 'How are you above me when you didn't do as much as me?' It's kind of a weird situation."

–Male Officer

"When [a noncommissioned officer] . . . came to the unit . . . , she was pregnant, and . . . they don't want to [assign] her or anything. . . . It was like jeopardizing her career because she was pregnant."

–Junior Enlisted Woman

"I have a friend who does think that maternity leave impacted her [promotion board] because she had her baby right before the debates started, and her coworkers were getting in the last-minute, impactful events which were on the mind of everyone in the room while she was sort of 'out of sight, out of mind.'"

–Senior Enlisted Woman

"The commander will look at the [evaluation summary] and say, 'This person's been here for 9 months, they're sure . . . not up to par with someone who has been here for 12 months,' even though it's not supposed to be that way."

–Senior Enlisted Man

3. Parents Felt Pressured to Take Less Leave Than Allotted

Because of the drawbacks associated with taking leave, many parents felt they were expected to return to work before taking all of their allotted leave. This was especially common among mothers, whose longer leave times posted a greater burden for their units, but was also mentioned by fathers.

a. Mothers Felt Pressured to Take Less Leave

Many participants described situations in which they or someone they knew felt compelled to return to work without taking all of their allotted leave.

"My friend . . . was told that taking the full time could affect your career. . . . You still have this sense of obligation to your career."

–Female Officer

"Females, they try to cut their [leave] time short just so they won't be getting talked about."

–Junior Enlisted Man

"I think junior [women] and [those in] predominately male career fields . . . feel pressure to come back early and to not breastfeed."

–Senior Enlisted Woman

"[Women who take too much leave] lose [occupational] credibility, and there is room for people to make assumptions about work ethic even though they have been planning this, so . . . officers and senior enlisted [choose] to forgo their 12 weeks."

–Male Officer

b. Some Fathers Also Felt Pressured to Take Less Leave

Fathers receive much less leave than mothers following the birth of a child, but some still felt obliged to return to work before taking all of their allotted leave.

"I have seen firsthand field grade officers being pressured about the amount of leave they take, especially paternity leave, to where almost it's unwritten. . . . If you do take the full [leave], I guarantee, it was going to reflect [poorly on you]."

–Senior Enlisted Man

"If you have an . . . instructor . . . , and [his 10-day paternal leave would fall] in the middle of training, and he doesn't want to miss that because guys [might] think he's lazy . . . , he'll take [only] 4 days. . . . We have a weird culture about always working. . . . Guys will find a way to convince themselves they don't need to take the full time."

–Male Officer

F. Most Would Encourage Women to Take at Least Some Maternity Leave

Participants were asked what advice they would give a female peer about taking maternity leave. Despite the drawbacks and worries noted in previous sections, most participants said they would encourage peers to take at least some leave.

1. Many Would Advise Taking Full Amount of Maternity Leave

Many participants said they would advise a peer to take the full amount of allowable maternity leave.

"When they ask me, I tell them, 'You should take it, and take more if you need to.' . . . The [Service] will be here forever, but your family . . . comes first."

–Junior Enlisted Woman

"I would say she should take [the full amount of leave] to . . . get used to being a mom and spend time with her kid."

–Junior Enlisted Man

"Take the entire time you are allowed, period. You don't know what's around the corner. Take it while you have the opportunity."

–Senior Enlisted Man

2. Others Would Advise to Allow for Recovery Time but Return Earlier if Possible, Necessary, and/or Desired

To mitigate potential challenges associated with taking leave, many participants said they would encourage a peer to "take the leave they need" to recover and adjust but to come back early if necessary and if capable of doing so.

"[I would tell a female peer], 'Hey, you are authorized to take this amount of time to allow yourself to get better and maintain the [Service's] standards, so if it takes you less time [than allowed], come back and continue.'"

–Senior Enlisted Man

"I say take what you're comfortable with. If you don't think you need it, [or your] . . . husband is able to be there more, okay, but if you need to take the whole thing, then take it."

–Junior Enlisted Woman

"Leave it up to the individual whether they want to use it or not. They . . . can decide: 'Do you want to sacrifice your career to be with your family, or is your goal to focus on the mission?'"

–Senior Enlisted Man

"I would advise someone to take what they needed. . . . Some people do care about their career. . . . I wanted to get back in the cockpit. I was asking my [healthcare] provider to see me early to get me back to flying again. I wouldn't put that on someone. You can't presume to know what someone wants. . . . I will support people in their decisions."

–Female Officer

G. Suggestions for Improving Parental Leave

During the focus groups, DACOWITS asked participants what recommendations they had for improving parental leave; they offered a range of suggestions.

1. Revisit Leave Amounts and Clarify Leave Policies

Given the inadequate amount of leave allowed to many parents and the confusion surrounding certain aspects of parental leave, participants commonly recommended revisiting (and potentially increasing) leave amounts and suggested providing Service members additional clarification on leave policies.

a. Increase Leave for Parents, Particularly Fathers

As noted in Section B.5.b of this chapter, most participants felt strongly that paternity leave should be increased. However, some groups recommended revisiting maternity leave as well, at least on a case-by-case basis when necessary or appropriate.

"I think [the recently increased maternity leave policy is] better, but I don't think it's the goal that needs to be reached. They've done studies, and in England, parents get a year."

–Junior Enlisted Woman

"[New leave policies are] a step in the right direction, but it doesn't go far enough. I am a mother of multiples, and that type of pregnancy is different. . . . The military needs to go farther in allowing mothers of multiples to have the time they need to physically recuperate, and the bonding part of that is huge."

–Female Officer

"I would say go with the 12 weeks [of leave], but say the commander's discretion could allow them to take more than 12 weeks if they need an extension to help them out on a case-by-case basis."

–Senior Enlisted Man

b. Revisit Policies on Leave for Adoptive, Same-Sex, and Unmarried Parents

As noted in Section B.5.b of Chapter 4, several participants noted the challenges associated with leave for unmarried fathers. Participants recommended revisiting these policies as well as policies for adoptive and same-sex parents.

"I am in a same-sex relationship. . . . We used surrogacy, and [the policies] irked me. . . . Just because we didn't [give birth to] the baby doesn't mean that baby can go to childcare prior to 6 weeks. We also have a coworker in a heterosexual relationship who adopted, and they're in the same situation. . . . If you have a newborn, you have a newborn."

–Male Officer

"With same-sex [couples], one [partner] will be there longer [with the baby], and the other won't. It lowers morale. . . . It's unfair."

–Senior Enlisted Woman

2. Explore Appropriate Level of Flexibility in Leave Policies

Participants felt it was important to balance families' needs with Service needs and suggested further exploration in this area.

a. Many Thought Leave Amounts Should Be More Flexible

Because each family's situation is unique, many participants thought the military should consider requests for parental leave on a case-by-case basis as appropriate. This included leave for mothers, fathers, adoptive parents, and same-sex parents.

"It's hard to make [leave policies] blanket across [all Service members] if someone has a different situation. Some people need 4 weeks and they are up and running, and some people after 18 [weeks] are still struggling."

–Senior Enlisted Man

"[It] makes a lot of sense to me to go by a case-by-case basis [when determining parental leave]. . . . Maybe they need the full 12 [weeks]. [Conversely, with] my last child, 6 weeks later, my wife was back doing CrossFit."

–Male Officer

"I think a little more time wouldn't hurt, but I would leave that more on the command to say, 'Yes, this is appropriate,' or 'We can afford to do more time,' as opposed to a policy that you will take X number of days, so there can be some fluctuation."

–Senior Enlisted Man

b. A Few Officers Thought Some Leave Should Be Mandatory so New Parents Would Not Be Pressured to Return Early

A few officers recommended making at least some parental leave mandatory to ease the stigma and pressure many parents felt to return to work as early as possible.

"If it were required that males and females both take mandatory leave . . . , then they might not pass over a female for a task because they might take maternity leave. . . . At the end of the day, you can take care of [your] newborn but don't have to worry about how [you are perceived]. . . ."

–Male Officer

"Make [leave] mandatory based off deployments and certifications. Like, if a guy has a baby, make him take leave."

–Male Officer

"Make it mandatory to take it all."

–Female Officer

3. DoD Should Make Additional Adjustments to Better Support Service Members

Participants mentioned several additional changes that the Services could make to facilitate leave-taking experiences; these included—

- ▶ Find creative ways to fill billets and cover members who are out on leave
- ▶ Allow parents to split up leave rather than take it all at once
- ▶ Improve communications around leave policies (e.g., education for leaders about available resources, counseling for new parents)

Chapter 5. Childcare

In 2017, DACOWITS pursued a new line of study: childcare. The Committee was interested in better understanding Service members' experiences with childcare and the challenges they faced obtaining care for their children. The focus groups aimed to assess Service members' perceptions of the care they received and the techniques parents employed to ensure they had care for their children (see Appendix C.3 for the focus group protocol).

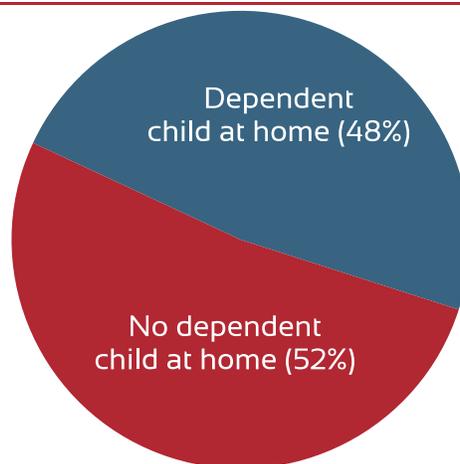
The Committee conducted 27 focus groups on childcare. This chapter discusses the focus group findings on childcare and is organized into the following sections:

- ▶ Many Participants Had Experienced Parenthood
- ▶ Certain Populations Had Particular Difficulty Obtaining Childcare
- ▶ Women Were More Likely Than Men to Feel That Childcare Has Put Strain on Career
- ▶ Some Believed Childcare Affected Unit Readiness
- ▶ Sources of Childcare Varied
- ▶ A Range of Factors Influenced Satisfaction With DoD Childcare
- ▶ Weighing All Factors, Many Felt DoD Childcare Was a Better Option Than Civilian Childcare
- ▶ Arranging Childcare Has Been an Ongoing Struggle for Families

A. Many Participants Had Experienced Parenthood

About half of participants had dependent children living at home (see Figure 5.1).

Figure 5.1. Percentage of Participants Who Had Dependent Children at Home



Source: DACOWITS mini-survey (data from groups participating in childcare discussion only)

B. Certain Populations Had Particular Difficulty Obtaining Childcare

Obtaining childcare was harder for certain populations than others. Groups that were perceived to have the most challenges with childcare were dual-military families, single parents, parents of children with

special needs, junior Service members, and parents who worked in jobs that did not offer flexible hours or locations.

1. Dual-Military

Participants perceived that dual-military parents faced challenges obtaining childcare because they needed to accommodate two military schedules and careers. This sentiment was more common among women and officers.

"It's not only single mothers, but it's dual-military, too. . . . [If one parent is deployed], it's sort of like having a single parent. . . . The problem is when you were given 24 hours or less notice. The leadership can be flexible. . . . It's all about communication, flexibility, and leaders being leaders."

–Male Officer

"I have seen the struggle of being a dual-military family, and I don't want that life. I know people do it, but I don't want to put my kids through that if we both get deployed and my parents have to raise them."

–Junior Enlisted Woman

"The goal is to have quality childcare and allow people to continue their careers. Many of us . . . are dual [military], and our spouse wants a career, and the key is quality childcare."

–Female Officer

"When [the kids] have a fever, you have to pick them up immediately. . . . I'm basically a single mom, my husband is [stationed at a different location]. I don't have the option of having family here. If he had a fever, I'd be out of work, and my command doesn't have an option."

–Junior Enlisted Woman

2. Single Parents

In the absence of a partner with whom to share childcare duties, single parents had difficulty finding quality care to meet their needs. Workplace flexibility, and trust and understanding from leaders, was particularly valuable for these parents. This perception was more common among officers.

"In general, the folks that have the most trouble are single mothers, and they don't have [a] good fallback plan. . . . You knew deep down they didn't have one, but didn't want to call someone out."

–Male Officer

"I am a single parent of an 8-year-old. I do super long nights and early mornings and [have] no flexibility. . . . Luckily, he's a really good boy and goes with the flow. He has a beanbag chair in my office, and sometimes, he just has to hang out with me. My boss will let me work from home sometimes. I literally just have to have a computer with me and have my phone with me, and he knows his mom is always working. The [Child Development Center] isn't open long enough for me. . . . Then you run the risk of when you get somewhere, you don't know anyone at all, and I've moved every year or two, and then you start all over again. As he's gotten older, it's gotten easier. I'm just really upfront with my bosses. Luckily, I put in the work, and they know I'm going to do it, but my baby comes first."

-Female Officer

"Since my son is with his mom [who has custody], I use a combination of family and childcare. [My son is] not eligible to go to the [Child Development Center] since I'm not married. It puts me in a box. We make it work."

-Male Officer

"I had a boss with no kids who didn't understand at all. He thought I could keep [my son] in the office until 10pm! . . . If I deploy, he has to go with my mom. There have been a couple of long [Temporary Duties], and that's been difficult to find a babysitter who will stay at my house, and pay them, and pay for after-school programs and before-school programs. My mom teaches, so she can't move. So then, [I have to decide], do I want to take him out of school and sports long enough to go be with my mom? It's hard being a single parent, but it's doable."

-Female Officer

3. Parents of Children With Special Needs

Care was sometimes hard to arrange for children with special needs. Participants described how childcare providers either were not capable of providing the level of care the child needed or did not want the inconvenience of caring for a child with special needs. These parents often had to work harder than other parents to find willing and accommodating providers.

"The [Child Development Center] won't take a child with special needs, so [my coworker] found an in-home provider to take [her son]. [The in-home provider] got to the point where it became too much to take the child. She dropped him off one night and said, 'This is the last time I'm taking him.' [My coworker] separated because she couldn't do it anymore. She said, 'I'm not going to pick the military over my kid.'"

-Female Officer

"We switched from the [Child Development Center] because my son has special needs, and they couldn't handle it at all."

-Senior Enlisted Man

"I have a [Service member whose] son is special needs, and there's only one place he could go to childcare. . . . She was placed on the waiting list. . . . She arrived here, and they're like, 'We never had you on the waiting list.' They just gave her the runaround. . . . It was more like the childcare center didn't want to accommodate her. . . . It was an inconvenience for them, and it was unfortunate because she was a single parent."

-Senior Enlisted Woman

4. Enlisted and Junior Service Members

Participants believed junior Service members and enlisted personnel had more difficulty with childcare because their schedules were less flexible than those for officers, and they had less control over their work.

"I think with all of us being officers, we have more of an advantage when it's time to get our kids than lower ranking [Service members]. Because at 5:30 [pm], my boss knows that's my cutoff time . . . to pick up my child. My priorities are being a [Service member] and a mother and a wife. Enlisted [Service members], they have bigger challenges, like in the aviation units or other combative units. . . . They can't just drop what they are doing [or take work home]."

–Female Officer

5. Certain Occupational Specialties With No Workplace Flexibility

Participants explained the benefits of having workplace flexibility and the challenges faced by parents with no or limited flexibility at work. This theme arose in three Services and was more common among women and senior enlisted participants.

"I'm lucky I have a regular 7:30–4:30 job, but if someone has mid shift or night shift, it makes it super difficult. If you are far away from your family, you have to trust someone in your [unit to care for your children]."

–Junior Enlisted Woman

Participant 1: "I get it, but in some cases, like security forces, you can't just walk away."

Participant 2: "I would be a deserter."

Participant 3: "You cannot leave . . . your post. That's unlawful. It would be desertion."

Participant 4: "That is where leadership should come in. Leadership should have someone come relieve them."

–Senior Enlisted Men

"The type of job you are at is a big factor. . . . We have remote capability, and I can work from home. I keep working all day when my kid is home sick. I use it a lot."

–Female Officer

"I work in a classified building, so you can't bring children in there, and they require you to stay past duty hours, and they don't understand why I have to leave to get my kids. A lot of time, I have to call someone to watch my kids for an hour."

–Senior Enlisted Woman

C. Women Were More Likely Than Men to Feel That Childcare Has Put Strain on Career

Women were more likely than men to feel that childcare needs were taxing on their careers. They often felt that tending to their children's needs gave the appearance that they were avoiding work. Participants also perceived military culture as rigid and not supportive of workplace flexibility to accommodate childcare needs. A few felt that the military did not support male caregivers. Many of the

challenges women faced with childcare mirror those they faced with taking maternity leave as outlined in Chapter 4.

1. Mothers Perceived as Avoiding Work, Particularly Physical Training

Female participants believed prioritizing childcare over work gave peers and leaders the impression that they were trying to avoid work. Childcare facilities often did not open early enough for parents to use their services during early morning physical training sessions.

"In my shop, we had [physical training] at 0530, and we don't get off until 1730. That would never work. Then I'd be known as that female who has to leave every day [to pick up my child]."

–Junior Enlisted Woman

"This week, I'm having a problem. [The childcare facility is] open from 0600 to 1800 and . . . you go over, they have to charge you extra. . . . We have [physical training] at the last minute at 0500 or 0600, and I can't drop my kid off, so I'm going to be late. They say that you can drop them off earlier with a 2-week notice [and] a description, but who gets that?"

–Junior Enlisted Woman

"There are parents that don't show up to [physical training] because they don't have the childcare. We don't have after-work [physical training]. It's always in the morning."

–Junior Enlisted Woman

"It makes you look bad, too. . . . Unless I come to [physical training] with my kid, then this isn't going to work."

–Junior Enlisted Woman

2. Military Culture Perceived as Prioritizing Work and Not Supporting Workplace Flexibility

Male participants were more likely than female participants to describe how military culture views work as the priority, including over family needs and illness.

"I think it's a military culture thing. We don't take sick days. Government employees and civilians, they have leave days and sick days. If you're sick here, you go to work. That's kind of the way we do it."

–Male Officer

"I've got three female [Service members] that have to excuse themselves and not show up when everyone else shows up because they have to get their child to daycare. I understand the importance, I really do, but I don't know how I would approach that because some females . . . really need PT [physical training], and they are skipping PT to take their kid to a daycare. . . . A [noncommissioned officer] in my unit . . . hasn't taken a PT test in nearly 4 years . . . that's her excuse, 'Oh, I'm taking the kid to daycare,' and it makes our unit look bad. It makes her look bad."

–Junior Enlisted Man

3. A Few Said the Military Did Not Support Men as Caregivers and Perceived Childcare as Woman's Role

A few officers from one Service felt the military did not support men sharing caregiving duties with women. They described a perception, particularly in certain male-dominated occupational specialties, that caring for children was a woman's role.

"The wife tends to be the one who has to stay home, so [the military needs to help] dads realize they can stay home, too, it's not always mom's responsibility. . . . There are two parents there."

–Female Officer

"My husband is [in the] infantry, and it depends. I know he's called his boss and said his child is sick and [he] needed to stay home, and his [commanding officer] will say, 'Really?' It's more accepted for women to stay home. Culture needs to change that. Males are half of a marriage, and they can take a turn. . . . In combat arms, there is the attitude [that men] have a spouse who is at home or can have a job where they can take off."

–Female Officer

D. Some Believed Childcare Affected Unit Readiness

Participants were asked to describe how recurrent childcare issues affected unit readiness. They described how units often had challenges accommodating absences and the difficulties caused by repeated absences. Some also believed childcare challenges negatively affected morale. Participants described how larger units found it easier to accommodate day-to-day challenges and how leaders could play a key role by offering flexibility and support for childcare needs.

1. Units Struggled to Accommodate Absences

Participants described the challenges units faced to cope with absences related to childcare. They cited particular difficulties accommodating frequent absenteeism.

"Sometimes, you have to look for someone to take your spot. It's really hard on short notice. I may have to jump in. It depends on how serious the situation is. If it's an emergency, we will find someone to cover it, but if the scenario is that it keeps going on and on, that's not good."

–Senior Enlisted Woman

"We all have a post to be at 24/7. If someone leaves early, we have to scramble and find someone to plug them into that spot. They could have just gotten off a 12-hour post and now they have to man this one. When I had to leave, they [wanted me to] finish [my] post first."

–Senior Enlisted Woman

"It's hard to say how it affects combat readiness. You always have two to three [Service members] who are like, 'I need to go get my kid.'"

–Senior Enlisted Man

“When members are late for work, it leads to disciplinary actions. If you need to leave early because daycare is closing early, that leads to less productivity.”

–Senior Enlisted Woman

“If you have to take a child to work one day, you’re not effective at all. I took her with me to [my job] and decided I’m never doing that again.”

–Junior Enlisted Woman

2. Absenteeism Related to Childcare Had Negative Effect on Morale

A few junior enlisted participants described how frequent absences by some unit members to address childcare needs lowered unit morale; this sentiment was more common among men. Participants described the perception that some parents abused their status as parents to avoid work, whereas others mentioned how constantly needing to choose between family and career damaged their morale.

“From what I see, [one Service member is] using her kids, I don’t want to say as an excuse [for absences], but it’s a constant. . . . My friend, who’s always working . . . , has to stay late [to accommodate other Service members’ absences]. I see how much it affects her, and she has a kid herself.”

–Junior Enlisted Woman

“Morale drops. I’ve had people that just straight up leave. If I was in that situation, and I had to get my kids, I would say . . . , ‘I’m going to get my child.’”

–Junior Enlisted Man

3. Unit Size Affected Ability to Accommodate Childcare-Related Absences

Participants described how smaller units had more trouble coping with unplanned absences related to childcare compared with larger units. The perception that larger units were better able to adapt to absences also arose during the discussion around parental leave (see Chapter 4).

“We have a lot of Service members in our unit, so if it’s one person, it doesn’t make a difference. It’s just the . . . accountability of the [Service members] leaving.”

–Junior Enlisted Woman

“If I do have to leave my unit, there are four of us, [but] we constantly push out products all the time. If we get behind, it’s going to affect operations. . . . It would be pretty bad if even one person wasn’t able to go [to work] for an unplanned 2 days. That [is something] you can’t work around.”

–Junior Enlisted Woman

4. Flexibility, Foresight, and Support From Leaders Could Help Units Manage Absences

Ultimately, participants believed that leaders could help their Service members by providing flexibility and support regarding childcare. Some participants described how workplace flexibility could benefit not just parents but all Service members. Others mentioned how leaders could ensure that multiple people in each unit were trained to perform the same tasks to better accommodate absences.

"At the [unit], they are really understandable [about] sick kids . . . and having to have the time off. When we have some [Service members] without kids, they try to work with them to give them days off for school, so nobody feels like they are [singled out]. It's leadership and time management."

–Senior Enlisted Woman

"We have 2–3 people qualified to do each job. That is a good way to do it. Sometimes leaders get complacent. If [only one person can do a job, and] that person gets sick, you now struggle."

–Junior Enlisted Woman

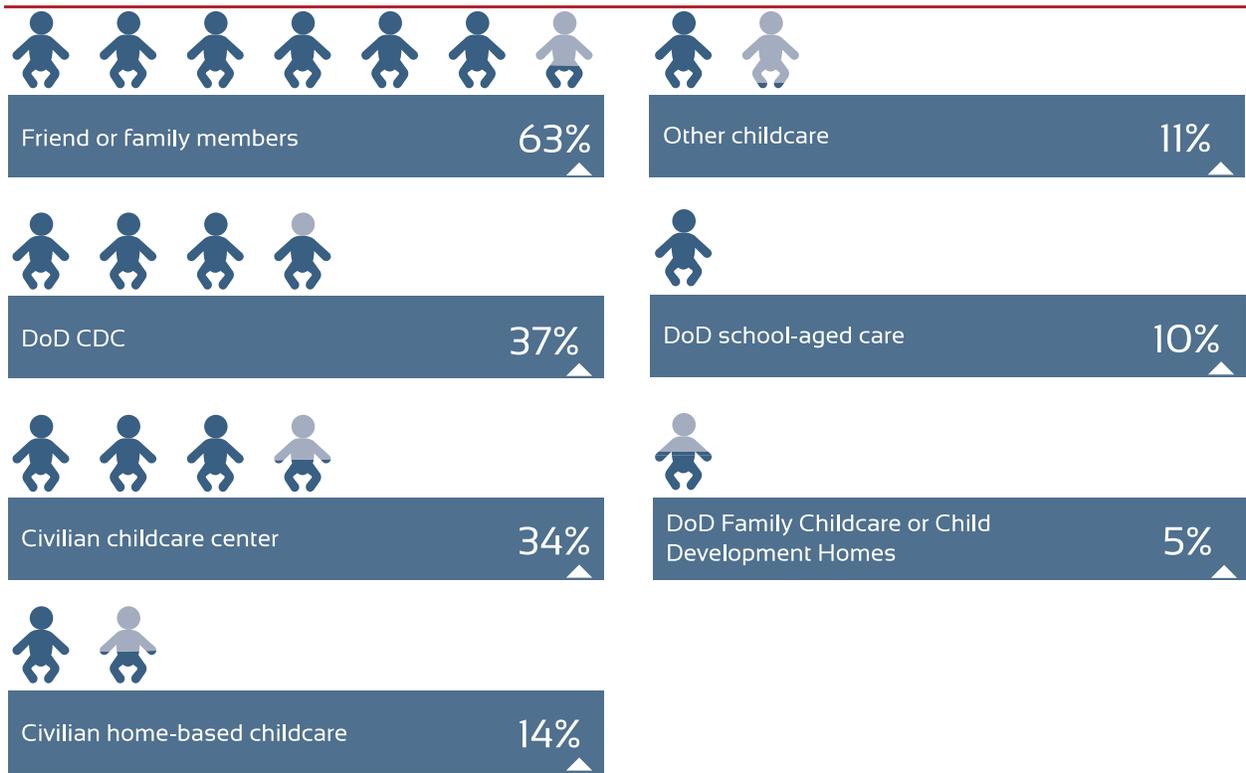
E. Sources of Childcare Varied

Participants described obtaining childcare from a wide variety of sources.

1. Service Members Obtained Care From a Range of Sources

In the mini-survey, parents were asked which services they regularly used for full- or part-time childcare. Friends or family were the most common source of childcare, followed by DoD and civilian childcare (see Figure 5.2).

Figure 5.2. Sources Regularly Used for Full- or Part-Time Childcare



Percentages do not sum to 100 because participants were given the opportunity to select all childcare options they regularly used.

Source: DACOWITS mini-survey (data from groups participating in childcare discussion only)

2. Many Obtained Childcare From Family Members

The most common source of childcare was from family members. This included stay-at-home spouses, family members moving in with Service members to provide care, and children moving in with and being cared for by family members other than their parents.

a. Stay-at-Home Spouses Provided Care

Some participants had stay-at-home spouses who cared for their children. Although both male and female Service members described having spouses who did not work, this was more common among men.

“Childcare is a big deterrent for me to stay in. Every day, I feel bad because my husband had to give up his job to stay home with [the kids], and that’s because of me. When he worked, he would have to leave work early to get the kids because I couldn’t. They are at home because I made this choice, and he can’t follow his dreams because I’m following mine.”

–Senior Enlisted Woman

“My wife chooses to stay home. We tried daycare, but my kid came home sick all the time.”

–Male Officer

“My wife . . . likes being a stay-at-home mom, so she pretty much has everything covered. . . . She holds it down.”

–Junior Enlisted Man

b. Family Members Moved in to Provide Care

Some participants had family members move in to help provide childcare; parents were acutely aware of the burden this imposed on these caregivers. Women were twice as likely as men to share experiences of family members moving in to assist with childcare.

“I’m pregnant now, and my husband’s deployed, so my mom is going to come here to help out. She’s leaving my dad, her husband, for at least a year. I am thankful for that, but your family definitely has to make sacrifices.”

–Junior Enlisted Woman

“My husband and I go to the field a lot. We have to send my daughter to her aunt’s and my mom. . . . We don’t want to take her out of daycare because we have to pay [even] when she’s not there. . . . We have to pay my mom as well. . . . We don’t want to burden her.”

–Senior Enlisted Woman

c. Children Moved in With Other Family Members Who Provided Care

When they were unable to provide childcare themselves, a few participants described sending their children to live with other family members who were better suited to provide care.

"We have a new [Service member], a single mom with a 1.5-year-old who can't get into the [Child Development Center]. Her baby has to live with her husband until she can find care. She has custody but can't live with her."

–Junior Enlisted Man

"My son lives with my mother right now. We work 12 hours on the ship. . . . When I get off leave, I go back to shift work, which will be the same hours. We have [a Child Development Center] with 24 hours for us, but it's hard to get into."

–Senior Enlisted Woman

3. A Few Officers Used Nannies and Au Pairs, Others Patched Together Care to Meet Their Needs

A few officers relied on nannies or au pairs, and other participants used a variety of sources for childcare, particularly during hours when traditional childcare facilities were not open.

"With the hours we have to support, daycares don't open that early, so you have to make accommodations through a home daycare provider, a friend, a friend of [a] friend. . . . You have to have people you can rely on as backup."

–Senior Enlisted Woman

4. Other Common Sources of Care Were DoD Child Development Centers and Civilian Childcare Providers

Many participants said they obtained childcare from DoD Child Development Centers (CDCs) or civilian childcare providers, although this varied slightly by Service. All participants in one Service said they used CDCs, whereas no participant in another Service said they used CDCs. Participants' perceptions of DoD childcare are outlined in Section F.

F. A Range of Factors Influenced Satisfaction With DoD Childcare

Participants were asked to describe the things they liked and disliked about DoD childcare. A range of factors influenced their satisfaction (see Figure 5.3). Availability and wait lists were mentioned most frequently, followed by operating hours, cost, structure and programming, convenience and location, and provider and facility quality.

"You worry about who will watch your baby [when you are] on the wait list . . . [There were] no spots until 2018, and I was stressing about it, so I found someone [else] to take care of him."

–Junior Enlisted Woman

"We looked into putting both kids in childcare and didn't because the wait list was crazy. Unbelievable how long it would take—you're talking a year. [My wife] stays at home now. . . . Everywhere is completely booked."

–Senior Enlisted Man

b. Certain Populations Received Priority on the Wait List

Participants described how some parents, such as dual-military families and single parents, were moved to the top of the wait list for DoD childcare. Parents who had benefited from the prioritization system were grateful, but some others felt the structure was unfair.

"Both my daughters go to a military CDC. . . . We are dual-military and were on the waiting list in [city] for 1.5 years before I got in. Here, I signed up as soon as I got pregnant, and there was a 2-week period where I had to use a home provider prior to the CDC. Once again, [it was] almost a year wait with maternity leave and all. I can't imagine how long non-dual-mil parents wait."

–Female Officer

"We get preference because we are dual. I applied because [my wife] was deployed and then came back because she got pregnant. We applied late, and within 1 or 2 months, we were contacted that they could take the kids. I think it's awesome."

–Senior Enlisted Man

"It could be worse. I have a significant other, but we're not married. Being a single parent puts me at the top of the list. If you're married, it's harder, because single parents get more preference."

–Junior Enlisted Woman

"If you and your spouse are dual-active duty, you are the top priority. If one spouse is active duty, you are a different priority, if one is active duty and one stays at home, you are at the bottom of the list. There is a whole structure. [It is] not really fair to single parents or everyone else who don't get priority and have to wait so long."

–Senior Enlisted Woman

c. Some Participants Found It Hard to Arrange Childcare With Little Notice Before Relocating

Participants struggled to find childcare when they and their families were required to move on short notice. One participant explained how childcare challenges related to a move caused his wife to leave the military. Others said they signed up for childcare as soon as they found out they had to move but faced long wait lists when they arrived.

"[Childcare was] why my wife got out [of the military]. We had our daughter and were getting ready to [do a permanent change of station], and our son was [very small]. . . . It was just too much. She tried to get into on-post daycare, and the waiting list was like 10 months, so she legitimately took the option to [do an employment-related separation] because of that."

–Junior Enlisted Man

"If you [do a permanent change of station], you have to wait maybe 6 months and get [to your new location] and don't have a [daycare] spot. When I was pregnant, I put my name on right away, and I had the baby, and they still didn't have a spot. That's the biggest problem."

–Senior Enlisted Woman

"Childcare is a big issue. [Overseas location] . . . had no slots when we got there . . . , and then there's the language barrier. . . . There were a lot of adjustment issues. Here, the school is overcrowded on base. . . . There are zero options for my kids right now."

–Senior Enlisted Man

d. Wait Lists Were Longer for Children of Certain Ages and in Certain Locations

A few participants described situations in which the wait list was longer for children in certain age groups or in highly populated areas of the country.

"My daughter is on age freeze, meaning the CDC is not accepting any kids of her age. They provide a list of other providers, but they're full on her age as well. How am I supposed to go to work and do my job? She's with her father right now, but he's going out of the country, so I have to figure out what I am going to do."

–Junior Enlisted Woman

"I was 2 months pregnant, and I put myself on the list. My kid's now 4 months, and they can't tell me if he'll have a spot. I'm going to [move to a different location, and] they flat out said the wait there will be 18 months."

–Female Officer

e. A Few Mentioned Wait Lists at Civilian Childcare Facilities

A few participants described a lack of availability at civilian childcare facilities in their areas, which suggests this is a widespread challenge affecting those who use DoD and civilian childcare.

"The wait list is a concern, too, but civilian providers have those, too. I don't think that's specific to CDCs."

–Male Officer

"We looked at civilian sector childcare also, but even their wait list was ridiculous. The wait list was worse on the installation than out in town. [Civilian childcare] is . . . more expensive, but I honestly trust them better."

–Senior Enlisted Man

2. Operating Hours

The second most common factor that affected satisfaction with childcare was the facilities' operating hours. Some participants liked the hours of operation of DoD childcare facilities, but others felt the hours were too limited and struggled to find care that aligned with their work schedules.

a. Many Liked the Operating Hours and Felt They Were Conducive to Military Life

Many participants felt DoD childcare facilities met their needs as military parents. They appreciated the operating hours that fit with their schedules, and some mentioned having access to 24-hour care options.

"With home daycare providers, you're on their schedule if they want to close. On base, they are always open, and you know they're never going to close, especially if you have crazy hours. As a single parent, I worry about [trying to figure out] last minute, 'Where am I going to put them?'"

–Senior Enlisted Woman

"When I was at [installation], that was the best childcare ever. . . . They have one daycare open from 0400 to 1900, and they have overnight care because they are [instructors who need to work long days and overnights]. It's the best. . . . You bring an extra change of clothes [for the kids], and they can stay overnight [at the childcare facility]. . . . All [installations] should have something like that. Sometimes, you need earlier or later [hours for childcare]."

–Female Officer

b. Some Felt the Hours Were Too Limited

Although many felt the CDC operating hours met their needs, others complained that the hours were not synchronized with their work schedules. Some leaders found it difficult to keep their units fully staffed because Service members had to leave to care for their children and accommodate the childcare facility schedule.

"The hours were a major problem. I'd have [Service members] calling saying, 'They won't let me drop my kid off.' You can't bring the kid to the ship. . . . The CDC up there didn't open until 0630. That is too late to open. Early hours are the norm [in the military]. There were a lot of complaints, but it didn't seem like anything was done. Instead, the burden was shifted to command and spouses."

–Male Officer

"My daughter is young, and . . . I'm going through that trouble with my command. The daycare doesn't open until 6, so I [have] to rush to drop off my baby and then get to work by 6:15. . . . She's been having health issues, too, so it takes me longer to drop her off, and my command doesn't care about that at all."

–Junior Enlisted Woman

"Sometimes, you have to stay late [when] people have to go [pick up their kids], and we are left with less people to get the job done. They need to be more flexible [at childcare], because we are flexible as [Service members]."

–Senior Enlisted Man

"We have mandatory [physical training] sessions in the morning, and the CDC opens during or after the session occurs, so that puts them in a bind. I've only heard two complaints, but they have to figure it out and get their spouse to go into work later."

–Male Officer

3. Cost

The price of childcare was another factor that directly affected Service members' satisfaction. Although most felt childcare was reasonably priced at CDCs, largely because of subsidies, others still found the price unaffordable.

a. Most Felt DoD Childcare Was Affordable, but Some Did Not Like Pricing Structure

Many participants appreciated the subsidized price of childcare services available through CDCs. However, some did not like the pricing structure, which uses a sliding-fee scale tied to the Service member's income.

"I like the structure of the military daycare for younger kids, and you can't beat the price as well."

–Female Officer

"The [Service] has a subsidy program. They can help subsidize childcare based on your income bracket. For me, I pay \$64 for one kid, \$127 for the second."

–Female Officer

Some participants did not like the fee structure and felt it was unfair that people of different ranks pay different amounts for the same childcare.

"As a first lieutenant, I am paying more, and the E4 [child of a junior enlisted, lower paid Service member] is in the room with my child [receiving the same care]. . . . I understand the pay grade, but this is the career path I chose. Why am I being penalized?"

–Female Officer

"Why does a captain have to pay beaucoup bucks for the same care? That's insane."

–Junior Enlisted Woman

b. Some Thought Civilian Childcare Was Unaffordable

Some participants who used civilian childcare found the prices too expensive.

"It was extremely expensive . . . It was almost \$30,000 at tax time for childcare when we had three kids in daycare. In [one location], newborn childcare is \$2,500 per month. I was an O4, but for someone who is an E5, she will likely leave [the military]."

–Female Officer

"When I looked at other places with the hours that I needed, there was only one place, and they are expensive. . . . We pay \$1,500 a month."

–Female Officer

“What we are going through now is debating whether we will come on [to the CDC] because [civilian childcare is] a little expensive, so we would rather [use the CDC], but we don't know how good [it is].”

–Junior Enlisted Man

4. Convenience and Location

A fourth factor that affected satisfaction with childcare was the convenience of the locations.

a. Many Liked the Convenient Nearby Locations

Parents appreciated the childcare facilities that were near work and/or home.

“They're generally close to your place of work, so it's easier. Like on this [installation, they have] done a good job of scattering the CDCs, but there's a good chance you can get a place close to your unit; it's an ease factor.”

–Male Officer

b. Some Felt CDCs Were Located Too Far Away

However, some felt it took too long to bring their children to and from the CDC.

“I used in-home care when I lived in San Diego, but it added 45 minutes to my day. You are selective about who you want watching your kid, so I spent 20 minutes to get there and 20 minutes to get back.”

–Senior Enlisted Woman

“When they were in [installation], if anything happened and I had to pick them up, it was 2 minutes. Here, it's hard because I am an hour away from them. If there's an emergency, it takes longer [to get them].”

–Senior Enlisted Woman

5. Quality of Providers, Facilities, and Programming

The final factor that affected satisfaction with childcare was the quality of the providers, facilities, and programs.

a. Many Liked DoD's Safe, Secure, and Certified Childcare Providers and Found CDCs Reliable

When asked about what they liked about DoD childcare, participants described the vetting process for staff as well as the high-quality programming available for their children.

“I like the vetting process for the providers. It's very similar to how we grant security clearance. I have much more confidence that person will be vetted than [those] off post.”

–Senior Enlisted Man

"I can't take credit with teaching my kid how to use a fork or spoon or tie her shoes. They basically potty-trained her."

–Female Officer

b. Many Others Had Health and Safety Concerns

However, many parents voiced concerns about DoD childcare facilities and mentioned overcrowding, health concerns, frequent illnesses, and worries about safety.

"I picked [my daughter] up at 0245, and she already had her snowsuit on. . . . She was naked under the snowsuit. All she had on was [her diaper]. I blamed myself. Maybe she had an accident and I didn't pack extra clothes. Then I saw in the bag and saw that I had three sets of clothes. I filed a report. . . . Even in regulated places with cameras and [Service] regulations, there are still slipups. My daughter was extremely sick after that."

–Junior Enlisted Woman

"During the winter, the kids go outside for an hour at a time, and sometimes they don't put on hats or jackets. I asked if she could go to another classroom or not go out for as long, but they wouldn't allow that."

–Senior Enlisted Woman

"[Children] bring home sicknesses [from the CDC]."

–Male Officer

"At [installation], it's saturated, so the facilities are overcrowded. They were flooded, and [there was] mold, and they [shuttled] kids around. Daycare is one of the biggest issues we face."

–Senior Enlisted Woman

"When I first went to the CDC at the base, I found it to be way below standard, so I didn't use it. I was lucky enough that my spouse could stay home with the kids. . . . One of my coworkers has her child in the CDC, and she has horror stories of her daughter getting bumps and bruises every week, and she doesn't trust them anymore."

–Female Officer

G. Weighing All Factors, Many Felt DoD Childcare Was a Better Option Than Civilian Childcare

Considering the range of factors that influenced satisfaction, participants generally tended to value DoD childcare over civilian options.

"We'd like to be on base. It's more convenient and safe, but there's no availability. We want him to be educated and interact with other kids."

–Junior Enlisted Man

“When we first got here with my daughter, we paid almost the same [for civilian childcare] as we paid [for DoD childcare], and the daycare [with DoD] is astronomically better. The service, the cleanliness, the toys, everything. . . . I think the sliding scale is appropriate. It sucks if you're higher ranking, but for the quality of care we get, [it is worth it].”

–Senior Enlisted Woman

“The first option [is to] look for a CDC. It's a more controlled environment that I know is being looked at regularly. I have a lot of faith in the CDC. If that's not an option, I'm left with the civilian option. When I first got here, nothing was available at the CDC . . . , so I had to go downtown for substandard care because that was my only option. I cringed every day that I dropped her off.”

–Female Officer

H. Arranging Childcare Has Been an Ongoing Struggle for Families

Families have faced many challenges obtaining safe, reliable, affordable childcare. Many mentioned the difficulties of finding care for children when they were sick. Participants described the sacrifices their families had made to address childcare needs. For example, some parents said they brought their children to work with them when care was unavailable. Although a few knew about the childcare resources their Services offered, most participants were unaware of these options.

1. Obtaining Childcare for Sick Children Was a Recurring Challenge

Many parents mentioned how difficult it was to find care for their children when they were sick. Many childcare facilities had policies that forced parents to keep sick children at home to prevent the spread of diseases, and parents often had to take leave or miss work to accommodate.

“I usually have my own office, so I had a little cot for those days he would be sick. . . . I will take him to work with me; I have him all set up with his technology. . . . I have that luxury.”

–Female Officer

“A [Service member] and her husband went to [State] for training, and she's been having trouble. When her son is sick, he can't go to childcare, and I have lost multiple days from her because she has no other options. If [only] there was any way they could [isolate sick children at daycare and still watch them].”

–Senior Enlisted Man

“It does affect [Service members] mentally, knowing a child is home sick—you know you should be there. That could be a motivation booster; if the command says go home early, they come back more motivated.”

–Male Officer

“Daycares are strict when a child is sick, so most of the time, you have to take the day off. It's short notice, but the parent has to go for a day or two until the child is better. It's smart on the CDC, but cruddy on [the] unit.”

–Junior Enlisted Man

2. Some Parents Brought Their Children to Work When Care Was Unavailable

When faced with no other options, some parents brought their children to work with them. This was particularly relevant for parents who worked shifts or long hours that did not align with childcare facility operating hours.

"My daughter lives at my job. She used to go to sleep in my office. I would work 16 hours a day for about 4 years as a single parent. She went to CDC, and then I'd go get her. Now, I have to leave at 5:45. . . , then I bring her back. She's a welcomed presence, though. I don't know what I'd do if she wasn't a welcomed presence. I'd be leaving the [Service] prematurely."

–Senior Enlisted Woman

"There is a couple in my [unit] who . . . literally bring their baby to work and hand it off to each other when they switch shifts because they can't afford childcare."

–Junior Enlisted Woman

"It's not unseen for me to bring my children to work because the CDC doesn't open until 6:30. They'd sleep in the car or lay on the couch."

–Senior Enlisted Man

3. Awareness of Childcare Resources Was Limited

Although a few participants were aware of the resources available to help them meet their childcare needs, most participants knew of no such options.

a. A Few Knew About Available Childcare Resources

When asked what resources were available to help them meet their childcare needs, a few participants listed support services. Participants from one Service were especially well informed about such resources. Some of the support services mentioned follow:

- ▶ Information hubs such as Military OneSource, ombudsmen, and chaplains
- ▶ Networking groups
- ▶ Extended hours at childcare facilities
- ▶ Service-based support programs (e.g., Family Readiness Group/Work–Life Program, Fleet and Family Support)
- ▶ Respite care

"I also have an ombudsman and a family readiness group. I make sure everyone knows who the ombudsman is. . . . She is a conduit for the resources. It's getting the word out constantly about the resources available, and if you run into problems, ask the questions. Make sure people know other resources are available for them to ask questions."

–Male Officer

"I've learned so much [from the Facebook group . . . thread [on what childcare options worked for other parents]]. I reached out to someone last night about not wanting [my husband] to be forced to retire because we are having a kid that wasn't planned for. She talked about how the au pair system worked for her."

–Female Officer

"My daycare does parents' night out 1–3 times per month. You sign up for the child to stay later. I think it's great. You can't use it when the child is sick, but it's good to get a night out or clean your house and do laundry."

–Junior Enlisted Woman

"There is also programs where if one Service member is deployed forward, the parent staying back gets some hours of uncharged childcare, and my wife has taken full advantage of that."

–Senior Enlisted Man

b. Many Suggested Better Promotion of Available Resources

Participants recommended the Services do more to educate their members on childcare resources for parents.

"It's not that we don't have resources, but we do a poor job in [publicizing] resources out to the junior enlisted. I'm amazed that they come to me, and as chaplain, I'm acting as a gatekeeper. They are struggling, but there's no reason for them to struggle, they're just not aware of it. [The Services have] gotten to a check-the-box mentality [regarding childcare] instead of being proactive, and we only deal with it when we have to. We do a poor job, in some units, of telling [Service members] what benefits there are, what's available."

–Male Officer

"I think knowledge is power. If I don't have kids or don't plan on it, I couldn't tell these guys [what to do about childcare situations]. They should have word of mouth or flyers like they do for [preventing alcohol abuse]. Now, you don't know where to turn. I've never even heard of the CDC in my life."

–Junior Enlisted Man

"I think there should be briefs in general . . . just like we have them for suicide and [sexual harassment and assault prevention]. There should be briefs even to single [Service members covering] what should happen if you have a kid and your rights. I don't know how they do with people who become pregnant, but if I suddenly became pregnant today, I wouldn't know what to do in general, especially because I have no family around me."

–Junior Enlisted Woman

4. Participants Provided Suggestions for Improving Childcare

When prompted for recommendations to improve childcare, participants offered several ideas; these included—

- ▶ Provide education about childcare resources (see Section 3.b)
- ▶ Expand childcare options
 - 24-hour care
 - Alternatives for sick children
- ▶ Increase CDC capacity

Chapter 6. Family Care Plans

To build upon its study of childcare (see Chapter 5), the Committee explored Service member experiences with Family Care Plans (FCPs). The Committee was interested in learning about the perceived utility of FCPs and challenges Service members faced regarding the plans. The Committee asked about FCPs during 27 focus groups (see Appendix C.3 for the focus group protocol). This chapter discusses the focus group findings on Family Care Plans and is organized into the following sections:

- ▶ Mixed Experiences With Implementation of Family Care Plans
- ▶ Perceived Value of Family Care Plans Varied
- ▶ Participants Faced Challenges Completing Family Care Plans
- ▶ Decision to Implement Family Care Plan Was at Leader’s Discretion
- ▶ Family Care Plans Affected Service Members’ Careers

This chapter details findings from focus group discussions on Family Care Plans.

A. Mixed Experiences With Implementation of Family Care Plans

When asked whether they had ever had an FCP, about 3 in 10 participants reported ever completing one (see Figure 6.1).

Figure 6.1. Experience With Family Care Plans



Source: DACOWITS mini-survey (data from groups participating in Family Care Plan discussion only)

Participants described how FCP implementation differed by Service. For example, in one Service, all Service members were required to complete an FCP, even if they had no dependents. Participants in another Service described how they did not use FCPs at all, even for single parents or dual-military families. Finally, participants from a third Service explained how they were required to include their bank account information to ensure financial care for their children in an emergency.

“Before I deploy with 1,000 [Service members] I sit down and go through 1,000 [FCPs] when I [should be able to focus only on] those 12 [FCPs] for my [Service members] that have children.”

– Male Officer

“My spouse and I are dual-active, and I’ve never been required to do [an FCP].”

–Female Officer

“There’s one form [in the Service’s FCP] where I need to give my bank account information [to ensure you will support whoever cares for your children while you’re gone], and I don’t like that.”

–Senior Enlisted Woman

B. Perceived Value of Family Care Plans Varied

DACOWITS asked participants to share their opinions on the value and utility of FCPs. Many believed the documents were not helpful and were solely a formality that did not reflect families’ real plans and intentions. Some, however, saw value in the plans in certain situations and for certain populations.

1. Many Felt Family Care Plans Were Not Helpful

Most participants believed FCPs were not valuable for Service members or the military. They felt the plans did not often reflect reality and did not always work as intended. These views were more common among women and officers.

a. Family Care Plans Did Not Reflect Real Contingency Plans, Purpose Was Only to “Check the Box”

The most common sentiment participants shared about FCPs was that the documents did not reflect reality and that the Services only used them as a formality. Participants described how they completed an FCP to “check the box” (i.e., meet the requirement) but had other options in place that reflected their real family needs.

“My husband and I are dual-military, and we just got here, and I don’t know who to trust. We have it on paper, but will we actually follow it? No. When we were deployed, we did something, but it wasn’t the FCP at all. That’s just the emergency plan if, God forbid, something were to happen.”

–Female Officer

“The reality is, if it had to be used, it’s going to be something different than what’s on that paper.”

–Female Officer

“We don’t do ours. They just say to fill it out, [but] it doesn’t matter, whatever.”

–Junior Enlisted Woman

b. Family Care Plans Did Not Work as Intended

Some participants felt that the procedures documented in an FCP were not always carried out as intended. A few participants, for example, said FCPs were not legally binding documents that could hold up in court outside of a military setting in the case of a family emergency.

“It is kind of a joke. It’s not legally held up in court. Just because I put my sister [on my FCP] doesn’t mean she will have any rights. They have the nice check sheet of what you are supposed to have, but [there are limitations].”

–Female Officer

"It's like a comfort blanket for leadership, but the reality on the ground is that if I have a lady from [one location], and we move her to [a different location], she doesn't really have a plan. She has what she hopes will happen, but it might not be that easy. Trusting your kid with strangers and having the money to fly people in [is difficult]."

–Senior Enlisted Man

A few participants also described how FCPs were not helpful for short-term, day-to-day childcare needs.

"For long term, OK, my parents will take my kids when I am deployed . . . , but if your kid gets sick, if you go to the field, if you're on duty . . . , it's not feasible for your [FCP] person to take care of your kid when he is throwing up or has chicken pox. So you rely on your commander's good graces."

–Senior Enlisted Woman

2. Some Felt Family Care Plans Could Be Helpful in Certain Situations

Although most participants did not see FCPs as useful, some did believe they could be helpful under certain circumstances.

a. During Deployments, Field Trainings, and in Emergencies

Participants felt FCPs could be useful for deployments, extended field trainings, or emergencies. This sentiment was somewhat more common among women.

"They can be helpful. If you're deploying, or if you have to be away a long time, designating someone to be in control of care is important."

–Junior Enlisted Woman

"I think the [FCP] is more for deployments or field operations, so the command knows who is watching your kid. Not just day-to-day, but [over] long periods of time, who will be there 24/7 for your kid."

–Junior Enlisted Woman

"[Without an FCP], you get into an accident, and there's no one there to take care of your kid until your next of kin shows up."

–Junior Enlisted Woman

b. For Single Parents, New Parents, and Dual-Military Families

Others called out particular audiences that could benefit from FCPs, including single parents, new parents, and dual-military families.

"I believe it's an important tool to have. I'm a single mother, so mine is detailed because it's just me and my son. The father's not involved, and we are away from friends and family. My world is small, and having that piece of paper that says what he's going to do if something happens to me [is important]."

–Female Officer

“For a new family, or [one that] just had their first child—it forces the thought process to get them thinking about a plan.”

–Senior Enlisted Man

“It’s important to [have an FCP] when you have dual-active [Service members]. . . . Our field schedules don’t overlap this year, so it is a good thing to understand. We would use the FCP as last resort if we are both deploying. That is important. It gives me the opportunity to find people who I trust.”

–Senior Enlisted Woman

c. For Leaders, if They Verify Plans

Some participants mentioned the utility of FCPs for leaders, and a few described how leaders could maximize the effectiveness of FCPs if they took extra time to verify the plans.

“I think there is value in [FCPs] in terms of making [Service members] think through what their plan is. I don’t like reading these things, but it forces [Service members] to think through what happens, what would be their plan.”

–Male Officer

“I had a friend who was [in a] dual [military couple], and they had a kid, and they both got put on field [operations] at the same time. Their care plan wasn’t set in stone, and our command sat down and helped them make one, so that way they could go on field ops and have . . . their child taken care of.”

–Junior Enlisted Woman

“I actually called every one of them! [Acting out the phone call:] ‘Hey, Ms. T., I wanted to touch base with you. [Name] is one of my outstanding [Service members], and he said you are [his] childcare [provider if he gets deployed]. Has he discussed this with you?’ . . . Then I call the short-term provider: ‘You are here in local area? Can you do it? Okay, everything good?’”

–Senior Enlisted Male

d. Family Care Plans Could Also Apply to Ailing Parents or Other Family Needs, Not Just Children

Finally, a few female officers from one Service explained how FCPs could ensure care not only for young children but also for other family members in need.

“This even translates to an ailing parent. My parents and in-laws are aging. . . . That’s not going to be an easy thing to handle. It’s not going to be a quick 30-day thing to place a parent somewhere.”

–Female Officer

“My grandmother collapsed; I was the only one there to take care of her. My command . . . gave me all the time I needed. I was the caregiver here. It doesn’t just have to be a child. It can be a parent or grandparent. Command should be flexible with that factor as well.”

–Female Officer

C. Participants Faced Challenges Completing Family Care Plans

Many participants shared frustrations about the difficulties of completing their FCPs. The requirements varied by Service; to complete an FCP, a Service member could be required to assign a guardian for dependents; sign up for life insurance; arrange for housing, food, and emergency needs; arrange for a guardian to have access to the funds necessary to care for dependents; arrange for transportation to transfer dependents to the guardian; or prepare a will. Participants found it hard to find trusted individuals to list and to keep the plans up to date, and described not having enough time to complete the documents.

1. Hard to Find People to Trust; Too Restrictive

A common challenge participants in one Service faced was finding people they trusted enough to list as caregivers on the FCP; this was particularly true for participants in one Service. A few cited restrictions preventing them from listing fellow Service members on their documentation.

"It's hard to trust people nowadays. . . . [For example], if your friends babysit, and they have shady friends who come [over]. . . . For me, I have my husband and the select people that I trust to watch my child that's not family. . . . I'm nervous about [people] who don't vaccinate [their kids], and I don't want my kid around that."

–Junior Enlisted Woman

"It's so restrictive. [You cannot list] a military person, and that's who we know and trust! We prayed we didn't have to use it!"

–Female Officer

2. Hard to Keep Updated

Some participants described the difficulty of keeping FCPs up to date.

"I've seen people where the FCP hasn't been updated, and they don't want their kids with those people [named as caregivers in the FCP] anymore."

–Junior Enlisted Woman

"You have to update it every time [you transfer]. [I had to update it for] every command I went to, although it was the same address, and it stated my son was staying with my parents. I had to update it and have my mom and dad sign it each and every time. It was a waste of time."

–Senior Enlisted Woman

3. Some Felt They Did Not Have Enough Time to Complete the Plan, Especially After Moving

When asked whether they had enough time to complete their FCPs, some cited difficulty completing the plan in the limited time allotted.

"The more time you have to execute the plan, it will be the largest factor in whether it is working. [One of my Service member's FCPs] worked flawlessly because she had several months to plan and have an A plan and B plan on standby . . . just in case, whereas my [Service member] who [became] single quickly . . . had no time to create it."

–Senior Enlisted Man

"I've got no family in [location]. The only people I would trust is one of my buddies, and it took 2 years for me to even let them have my daughter stay there. We're always transferring around. It's not enough time [to find people you trust to include on your FCP]."

–Junior Enlisted Man

"You get 30 days [to complete the plan] with the option to extend an additional 30 days, and I have never seen someone NOT do a 30-day extension."

–Senior Enlisted Man

"If they don't [complete their documentation] in 60 days they will be flagged, but if you just got to [the installation] and you don't know anyone . . . , [it's hard to put together an FCP]."

–Senior Enlisted Woman

4. Several Requested Training on Family Care Plans

Several senior enlisted and officer participants suggested the Services provide additional training on the proper use and purpose of FCPs.

"You need sit-down training. It's a collateral duty. . . . I haven't had any training on it. I did a . . . 'Pregnancy 101' class that touched on it. There needs to be training; leadership needs to be trained on actual situations and how to navigate that. . . . People aren't taking it seriously because it's just a paper to sign, and maybe you sit down with someone, and maybe you don't."

–Female Officer

"I think a lot of times they need that general training on the purpose of it and the effectiveness of it. It's not for [situations where] you can't do this last-minute thing because of your child and now I can separate you."

–Senior Enlisted Woman

D. Decision to Implement Family Care Plan Was at Leader's Discretion

Generally, there was a perception among participants that the decision whether to implement an FCP was the leader's choice.

"Based on what I've seen, it depends on the [commanding officer]. It's at their discretion. . . . It blew my mind that you could literally be separated if it falls through. I hadn't seen that perspective before. When [a peer] was crying about not leaving his son with some random person, I got it."

–Female Officer

"It depends by command. I'm dual-military, and my wife's command used to make her take leave. [When faced with a childcare situation], my old division would say to go home; my new one makes me take leave. It's by leadership and what they want to do."

–Junior Enlisted Man

1. Leaders Did Not Know the Rules

Although many believed leaders had the ultimate say about if and when to implement an FCP, some believed leaders were not well versed on the policies and procedures.

"It's not clear to many supervisors how it works."

–Junior Enlisted Woman

"It depends on where you go. Some will want you to use it when you have to work a day you don't normally do. That's not what it's for. I feel like chain of command doesn't understand."

–Senior Enlisted Woman

"The chain of command should know the actual instruction. I checked into this command and had to redo it. I didn't know if the instruction had changed or if this was command by command."

–Senior Enlisted Woman

"The [FCP] is an excuse for leadership to bring up when they don't know how to deal with your situation."

–Junior Enlisted Man

2. Many Reported Instances of Leaders Misinterpreting or Misusing Family Care Plans

Female participants described cases in which leaders misused the FCP or misinterpreted its purpose to reprimand subordinates unnecessarily. This perspective was expressed mainly by participants from one Service.

"My husband is [deployed], and obviously, I work full time. . . . I figured my husband would be home, but now he is not, and I don't have anybody to take care of my daughter, and I don't want to leave her with just everybody. I have friends, but they have a job and kids of their own, and it's a burden. . . . I have [an FCP], but they throw it in your face, like, 'Do you want to get chaptered out?' My husband is deployed; I am by myself. . . . I don't have a person to take care of my daughter for 24 hours' duty, but they throw it in your face—'You have [an FCP], so use it.'"

–Senior Enlisted Woman

"Sometimes, when leaders want you to work late, they say, 'Where is your [FCP]?!' and I say, 'That isn't what the [FCP] is for.' It's for exercises . . . , but sometimes leaders try to throw that in your face to get you to work longer."

–Female Officer

"I have seen commands push to separate [Service members] because the plan fell through. It's not always something you can plan."

–Female Officer

a. Leaders Implemented Family Care Plans Inappropriately When Children Were Sick

Despite being intended for long-term childcare needs, some women described instances of leaders implementing an FCP when parents were dealing with a sick child.

“When my son had a chronic ear infection and got the stomach flu—there were so many symptoms going on that I didn’t know how to handle it. I asked to take leave and they didn’t allow it. They said the [FCP] should kick in at that point. I had a doctor’s note providing that he couldn’t be at daycare. I had the full accountability for where I was and all, but I was not able to take leave.”

–Senior Enlisted Woman

“Leaders should be more understanding. I get, ‘What about your [FCP]?’ but a younger child gets sick a lot of time, that just happens. If you know your [Service member] and their situation, if you’re a single parent like me, and one comes home with a stomach virus, the whole house will get sick. So that impacts your mission, but what will you do? . . . I think at this point in my unit, they kind of got tired of me saying my child was sick [and said], ‘What about your FCP?’”

–Senior Enlisted Woman

b. Male Leaders More Likely to Implement Family Care Plans at Inappropriate Times

There was also a perception among a few participants that male leaders were more likely than female leaders to misuse the FCP.

“I think a lot of [leaders] are not understanding, especially males. . . . Male leadership, with a wife who stays at home, or the kids are way older . . . , forget what it was like to have young children who get sick a lot. That’s a really sore subject for me.”

–Senior Enlisted Woman

E. Family Care Plans Affected Service Members’ Careers

Participants frequently gave examples of how noncompliance with FCPs has affected Service members’ careers. In some cases, it caused people to switch career fields, and in others, it led people to separate. Participants from two Services, however, said FCPs did not have any effect on their careers.

“The FCP was the reason I cross-trained out of my favorite career field. I saw mother after mother—and dads—with it being thrown in their faces. They say, ‘If we wanted you to have children, we’d have issued them to you.’”

–Senior Enlisted Woman

1. Led to Separation, Either by Choice of Service Members or Their Leaders

Participants shared stories about Service members who left the military because of issues with their FCPs. Men were more likely to describe how Service members misused FCPs to leave the military; women were more likely to describe how leaders forced people out because of noncompliance.

"We ended up sidelining one of our most senior people—[he had] 15 years of duty—[but we] sent him back from deployment and detached him from the command because of [FCP] issues."

–Male Officer

"I see people using their kid as an excuse when the kid is not really sick, and it's like, '[Now,] they will not believe you when your kid is actually sick.' I don't think it's right [to use that as an excuse] if your kid isn't sick."

–Junior Enlisted Woman

The sentiment that Service members could abuse their status as parents to leave the military was more common among men.

"I know people who use the [FCP] to actually get out. Those threats are made almost every day."

–Junior Enlisted Man

Women, conversely, were more likely to describe instances when leaders forced people out of the military.

"If you don't complete your [FCP], they can flag you for involuntary separation."

–Junior Enlisted Woman

2. Disproportionately Affected Dual-Military Families, Younger or Enlisted Service Members, and Women

Participants believed that career implications from noncompliance with FCPs more frequently affected certain populations.

"If you are dual [military], you [both] have to do [an FCP] separation packet. . . . If yours failed, his failed as well, so you both get separated."

–Junior Enlisted Woman

"It disproportionately affects female [Service members] and dual-military couples. Men with wives at home don't understand. The male [Service member] won't get chaptered out. It will be a female [Service member] who is probably dual-military [who will get chaptered out because of her FCP]."

–Senior Enlisted Woman

"I can leave and pick up my kids [as an officer], but as a [junior enlisted Service member], I can't do that and am faced with [Uniform Code of Military Justice] action. I see that all the time, people being chaptered out. People have [an FCP], but the provider can't take care of their child [on short notice], and the leadership wants to chapter them out."

–Female Officer

Chapter 7. General Comments

When time permitted after the topical focus group questions were completed, the Committee asked participants if there were issues that might affect women in the Military Services that had not been covered in the discussion so far (see Appendices C.1 through C.4).

This chapter summarizes the most common themes from these discussions and is organized into the following sections:

- ▶ Overall Opinions of Gender Integration
- ▶ Challenges for Women in the Military
- ▶ Proper Use of Social Media
- ▶ Recommendations for the Secretary of Defense

For these questions, this report provides historical context to compare current responses with those from previous years if the question was asked in the past. Several of the themes covered in this chapter were also addressed by participants as they discussed the primary topics for each focus group; Chapters 2 through 6 present these responses and provide additional information on each topic.

A. Overall Opinions of Gender Integration

When asked how well they thought the gender integration process was going, in general, participants saw gender integration as a positive development, and their comments tended to mirror those from previous years.

1. Most Saw Gender Integration as a Positive Step for the Military

In general, participants saw gender integration as a positive step, and several participants indicated the process seemed to be going well thus far. This came both from participants directly involved in the gender integration process and from participants that were not personally involved in any gender integration efforts.

"I was one of first females go down to the line. [It was] myself and another female lieutenant. . . . [The unit] prepped itself before we got there. . . . We integrated like any other lieutenant[s] would. I [went] to be in a position with the same platoon . . . and take over as platoon leader, but I never saw any issues."

–Female Officer

"Yeah, I think it's going well, but that's probably because I am on a good [team]. . . . I have had times when I had trouble physically, and they showed me techniques to be able to do [the activity] instead of jumping in [to do it for me], and I appreciated it."

–Junior Enlisted Woman

"It's been quicker, and the integration has been happening. The leadership doesn't want it to fail. The mindset now is that it will be successful. We've had trainings about it. . . . We moved females into the battalions. They want the leadership to have females so the enlisted females can see them. The battalion commander here now embraces it and moves the females to those units. My female [Service members] are so good that my male [Service members] are stepping it up. The males become more professional as well. It's a good thing overall. We just recently had an ugly social media post about a female officer here. The battalion commander did a public [nonjudicial punishment]. We don't have problems here; if you treat them like [Service members], there aren't any problems. . . . The leadership perspective matters. We used to try to fight [integration] and [come up with a reason] why they can't do it, but now we're like, 'Oh, we have to [do this], so we're not going to fail.'"

–Male Officer

Maintaining Equal Standards Was Important

Several participants emphasized the importance of maintaining equal standards for men and women and supported the opening of all positions to women as long as the women placed in those roles met the established standards. This sentiment was shared by participants of all rank levels and from all Services but was much more common among men.

"We all are different, that's the point. Like you said, if there are some people who can meet the requirement, then ok, but I think the important factor is that we don't change the requirement to meet some kind of political thing, because now, you're endangering the mission."

–Male Officer

"Are we going to [lower] the PT [physical training] standards so we can say we have the first female [special operations unit] team, or do we want to make everyone be able to pass the same standards so they can do the job correctly? There are plenty of males who can't pass those standards."

–Senior Enlisted Man

"There are females doing the job, there are females living in the field, and as long as they can do the job to the same standards and all that, there is no reason not to have them out there. Just keep the standard the same."

–Senior Enlisted Man

"If a girl, female, Airman, Soldier—if she's equally qualified—my point is if they meet that standard, they should still be qualified."

–Junior Enlisted Man

2. Gender Integration Will Take Time but Ultimately Will Succeed

Echoing comments made in previous years, some participants envisioned a successful end to the gender integration effort, although they acknowledged the process might take some time.

"This is not something new. When there was the first [female pilot], there was some transition, some friction points. . . . There's that transition that needs to happen, and we can't just accelerate that transition. We have done it before [for] African Americans, when they came into the [Service]. . . . We have our military evolution, which has showed transitions will and can happen and will be successful but take time."

–Female Officer

"We got female [Service members] starting in February, with pushback: 'Why are females here?' . . . Male [Service members] struggle, and here comes . . . a little 110-pound female . . . willing to get in there. It's going to take time; [it] can't happen overnight. [There are] a lot of reluctant people . . . , but [women] gotta keep proving themselves."

–Senior Enlisted Man

A few male participants suggested the military should not push too hard to achieve those first few successes in the gender integration effort but rather should let the process play out naturally, even if that means a very gradual integration.

"I've seen and heard [people say] as long as they can do the job, they can do the job. [The] big concern is rushing it. Either by quota or . . . lowering of the standards of the job is a fear of the male [Service members]. No one has seen that, but there's a credible fear that could happen."

–Male Officer

3. Gender Integration Was of Minimal Concern for Most Service Members

Some participants, particularly men, indicated that gender integration was not as significant an issue for members of the military as it was often made to seem. A few of these participants drew a comparison between the fears raised about gender integration and those initially raised about the former “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” policy.³²

"I don't think it's a big deal. I think other people outside the Service make more of it than it is. In my opinion, if someone can meet the requirements, then it doesn't matter."

–Male Officer

"Back when [Operation Iraqi Freedom] kicked off, back then, we had women in convoys in my job. We had women on gun trucks firing behind enemy lines. . . . I don't understand the big deal with women in combat. We've been doing it now for 10–15 years."

–Senior Enlisted Man

"I think people think it's going to be more life changing than it actually will be. . . . It shouldn't be a big deal."

–Junior Enlisted Woman

³² DoD, Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness. (2011). *Repeal of Don't Ask, Don't Tell: Quick reference guide*. Retrieved from http://archive.defense.gov/home/features/2010/0610_dadt/Quick_Reference_Guide_Repeal_of_DADT_APPROVE_D.pdfhttp://archive.defense.gov/home/features/2010/0610_dadt/Quick_Reference_Guide_Repeal_of_DADT_APPROVED.pdf

"It will be all right. It reminds me of when they were going to repeal 'Don't Ask, Don't Tell,'³³ and everyone thought the world was going to end—'Oh my God, how will people stay in?'—and then the world didn't end. Everyone will be fine."

—Senior Enlisted Man

a. Concerns About Gender Integration Varied by Generation

In contrast to the majority opinion that gender integration was of minimal concern, a few participants felt that although the younger generation was not bothered by the thought of gender integration, it might be an issue for some older Service members.

"[You've got] issues coming down from older generations where everything has to be a big deal . . . : 'Can we LET . . . women in here?' The younger generation [thinks that] if you can do your job, come on over, but it doesn't need to make it a big deal that it's a woman."

—Female Officer

"The biggest integration problem is that old-school [Service] leaders now understand that this is the new [Service], new regulations, new rules; whether you like it or not, you're going to have to adjust. . . . It's a senior leadership thing. It is not my problem; they can figure it out. They don't want to change their old-school way of thinking to accommodate females. They have to be trained to accept the change. This is the biggest problem."

—Senior Enlisted Woman

"I think it's [an issue for] the old guys, like me. . . . To the young guys, this will just be accepted. While this used to be a male-dominant field, now you have to realize that women can do your job. Just watch. That first female Ranger—that was a big deal. Each time a woman makes it into a new position, it's a phenomenal step, not just for women, but for that person. We have to accept it, and move on, and just grow."

—Senior Enlisted Man

4. Perceived Challenges to Successful Gender Integration

As they had done in past years, participants shared what they saw as potential barriers to successful gender integration.

b. Women's Struggle to Gain the Respect of Male Peers and Leaders

Several female participants of all ranks cited challenges in earning the respect of their male peers and male leaders. Many of these participants indicated they were overlooked for tasks because they were perceived as less capable of performing the tasks than their male counterparts, or they had to work harder and demonstrate greater expertise to obtain the same level of respect their male counterparts often received automatically. Though this concern was raised exclusively by women this year, men have also mentioned this in past years.

³³ DoD, Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness. (2011). *Repeal of Don't Ask, Don't Tell: Quick reference guide*. Retrieved from http://archive.defense.gov/home/features/2010/0610_dadt/Quick_Reference_Guide_Repeal_of_DADT_APPROVE_D.pdf

"We are not considered knowledgeable enough in that type of work because it's male [dominated]. . . . I walk into meetings, and I'm just not acknowledged half the time. . . . I see it with my female [Service members]. . . . I noticed how male squad leaders talk and interact with female junior enlisted who are very capable, but they don't think they can do the job of the male [Service members]. They supersede some male [Service members], and still they're 'not good enough' as the males. In my opinion, they push us a little bit more to see if we crack."

–Senior Enlisted Woman

"Once you prove you can do it physically . . . , well, you have to earn that [respect], and it is so much harder to earn it because you have to show them that you can do it, that you're tough enough, so the men can't mistake it."

–Female Officer

"I'm in a male-dominated [occupational specialty], and they will . . . want me to do something, [but] as soon as one of the boys comes along, they will ask him to do it. . . . They will still pick the guy over the female. They feel like they can do it faster or better than I can. Sometimes, I feel like I do need more experience, but not choosing me isn't going to help me."

–Junior Enlisted Woman

c. Concerns About Sexual Harassment and Sexual Assault Led to Women Being Excluded

Concerns about sexual harassment and sexual assault included not only a fear that such events could occur but also men's concerns about false accusations, which caused them to avoid interactions with female Service members.

"[For women] being integrated in those units, [sexual harassment and sexual assault] is the first [concern] going through my mind. I know what it is to deal with males. . . . Even though the campaign is making a bigger push to try to combat those types of behaviors and eliminate those threats. I still think it's a problem."

–Senior Enlisted Woman

Fear of false accusations and a lack of understanding among men in how to interact with female Service members led to women being excluded from basic leadership training opportunities and not being corrected when needed. These concerns were voiced primarily by senior enlisted women, and some described the fears they observed among their male colleagues.

"Sometimes it is a leadership failure, and sometimes they won't lead. There is the fear of, 'How am I as a male supposed to lead a female?' We hear horror stories of false accusation cases, and men are afraid of being accused. They would rather just not do it. They would rather nothing be said. If we provide guidance to them, [they will provide] mentorship, but we need to open the path and change the culture."

–Senior Enlisted Woman

"In terms of correcting the person, the males would not want to correct a female person for fear of repercussion or [sexual harassment complaints]. . . . Even if what [the male leader] did wasn't wrong, having a complaint on record can ruin your career, so the result is [the men deciding], 'I'm not risking my career correcting you on this.'"

–Senior Enlisted Woman

d. Male Instinct to Protect Women

A few senior enlisted women were opposed to gender integration because they felt men would naturally try to protect or care for women, which would cause problems on the battlefield. This perspective was not common among participants.

"It has a lot to do with how males are raised. You take care of your sister, [and] don't let anyone touch her. If you [are] on a battlefield, you're going to run back to the female. . . . Everyone is raised differently, but most males are raised to take care of females."

–Senior Enlisted Woman

"Females can hold their own with men, but if we go to war, in the battlefield, it's in a man's nature to protect women. Women could be taken as [prisoners of war] and be used to hurt the men, so it might cause problems in the future on the battlefield."

–Senior Enlisted Woman

e. Women's Hygiene Needs

Though raised by only a few participants in this year's focus groups, concerns related to women having more extensive hygiene needs than men mirrors concerns raised by participants in past years. These concerns surrounded women's menstrual cycles as well as general hygiene requirements.

"When we go in the field for combat arms, we are there for a while. One of the biggest issues I have with this is . . . ladies can't go as long as [men] can go without washing certain parts because of a hygiene issue. Washing, avoiding infections, [and] so on . . . , and not only that, but most ladies I know have this monthly thing. If we're out in the middle of nowhere and that happens, that would also create a sanitary problem."

–Junior Enlisted Man

"There is a way to keep clean when you're in the field, but it's not as clean. . . . When you're in a place, they understand females have to [have an area to maintain hygiene]."

–Senior Enlisted Woman

f. Potential Negative Effects on Cohesion in Formerly Male-Only Units

A few participants in one focus group of junior enlisted men felt introducing women into previously male-only special operations and combat-related units could negatively affect the cohesion of those units. This concern was raised with greater frequency in past years' focus groups, though, suggesting that it may be lessening over time.

"Those guys [have fed] on brotherhood and morale ever since we started doing the [special operations] program, and now, this new change is shaking everything down to its core. . . . A lot of the people who have been in [those previously male-only units] aren't very happy about it."

–Junior Enlisted Man

“Being able to have a successful career and a family is harder for women. Even [for] women willing to make sacrifices, it is even difficult to find a spouse.”

–Female Officer

“It does affect the career development of the female, so they have to choose now to have a child or not. Obviously, physically, they carry the child, and culturally, the norm is that they are going to care for the child, but there is less pressure on men to stay back and make career choices [based] on if I am going to be a father or not, and so women have to choose to be a good mother or not, or a good [Service member] or not.”

–Male Officer

a. Dual-Military Families

A few participants particularly noted the difficulty of balancing work and family responsibilities while being married to another Service member.

“[Regarding the issue of] life-work balance . . . , [it's] the same for my husband. We're in a dual-career marriage, but it's not 50/50. That calculation is 100 percent/100 percent. Every day, we're just trying to find that balance.”

–Female Officer

“There's only so much [you're willing to accept] before you realize your priorities in life. For me personally, my husband is former active duty, and after my son was born, there was no reason for us to both stay active duty, so he got out. . . . He was in a career field with more frequent deployments. It was too complicated. We didn't want to have to deal with the joint assignments business.”

–Female Officer

b. Breastfeeding Support

Participants in one group mentioned challenges related to breastfeeding, particularly those related to taking breaks from work to pump breastmilk. In previous years, participants were more likely to discuss problems related to gaining access to a lactation room or being offered enough time to pump.

“I'm still breastfeeding, and they've gotten better with the breastfeeding policy, but I'm busy at this [ship]. Every minute is precious, and I need to take 30-minute breaks to go pump. . . . Breast pumping at night and storing milk is hard. I've had to throw out milk in the middle of the night. I also have to bug my roommate, waking her up in the middle of the night, [when I] pump.”

–Junior Enlisted Woman

“I have a 6-month-old, and I'm still breastfeeding as well, but I've slowly started integrating formula. I've been under so much pressure maintaining my milk supply and workload. . . . I work with all women, but it is really challenging when you have a task in front of you. Do you make your [leadership] happy and reach the end-of-the-day goal, or do you dedicate 2 hours of your workday to [pumping]? I started to integrate formula because of that. It was taking too much out of me emotionally. [It's hard] balancing family needs and your own personal needs to feel accomplished.”

–Junior Enlisted Woman

2. Male-Dominated Military Culture

Challenges related to military culture was the next most commonly mentioned area of difficulty for servicewomen. Participants described military culture as often being unaccepting of women in general or of women who serve in nontraditional roles in the military. Several of these participants indicated this mindset was particularly strong among older male Service members. This concern was raised primarily by female participants, although a few male participants mentioned it as well.

"I got a chance to train the [Service members]. . . . We'd be deploying little grenades, simulations, we have M-240s we'd carry. I did it all, and the cadre didn't expect me to be out there in it with everyone else, and they said, 'We give her props for being out here.' I was like 'Thanks, I guess,' but I don't think I did anything special."

–Junior Enlisted Woman

"I think it's that subconsciously . . . , females tend to get put in admin[istrative] roles, [such as] project management, not the mission-type roles, and I think it's just something that's subconscious in the male mind. [They think,] 'They're female, they're more organized, they have better handwriting,' so that's kind of a barrier. The guys end up doing the mission, and we end up doing the admin[istrative] work."

–Female Officer

"I think it's breaking the culture. I'm older; I grew up in the South. I grew up with the mentality that the man goes out and works and takes care of the wife and kids. It's breaking that in the military to have a role reversal that's going to be the hardest thing for women in the military."

–Senior Enlisted Man

a. Gaining Respect as Female Service Members

Another aspect of military culture that posed a challenge to women was the difficulty women face in earning respect as Service members. Several participants mentioned this challenge. Female participants often expressed frustration that men did not give them the respect they deserved, and male participants felt women had to work harder than men to prove themselves.

"If they are going to call us females, then treat us like females. If I'm a [Service member], then treat me like a [Service member]. . . . If we are not as good, we are female. If a male falls out during a run, it's like, 'Someone fell out,' but if it was [a] female, 'It was a female.'"

–Junior Enlisted Woman

"I think there are still challenges with female leadership. . . . We still get that side eye . . . , like [they're thinking], 'I need to see what she is going to do before I even follow her.'"

–Female Officer

"I think the hardest issue [for women] is living up to men's expectations."

–Junior Enlisted Man

“My [instructor] in boot camp explained to us that as a woman, we will have to work 10 times harder no matter what. If we do the same [as men], we will never get picked. He really drove us to work harder. He said there aren't a lot of women because they feel that they won't live up to what men can do, so he pushed us to work harder.”

–Junior Enlisted Woman

b. Culture in Male-Dominated Environments

A few female participants also mentioned the pervasive masculine culture in male-dominated environments as a challenge for women. For the most part, these participants described hearing male Service members complain about not being able to say the same things around women in the unit as they would if the unit contained only men.

“It hurts your morale when you hear these jokes, and people are always like, ‘I don't want to offend you.’ . . . It makes the environment hostile. You shouldn't have to feel like [it's] a hostile environment at work when you're here most of the day and getting paid just like the next person.”

–Junior Enlisted Woman

“They say, ‘Oh, I came from combat arms.’ . . . You have a mother; you have a sister; you know how to talk to them. You use that as an excuse.”

–Senior Enlisted Woman

3. Difficulty Obtaining Key Developmental Positions

Several female participants said it was difficult to obtain key positions on ships or in other jobs that were required for them to be eligible for promotion. This theme was raised primarily for one Service, though two participants from another Service indicated similar challenges.

“You need a year of sea time to make [the next rank]. Some platforms are not created equal. Women don't have availability to serve on all of those platforms. [One specific type of boat is] men only.”

–Senior Enlisted Woman

“I would be one of the only females in [my occupational specialty], and they'd send me to work in [operations]. They'd say, ‘We don't need you on line, we have males on line.’ That's happened three times in 7 years. I haven't done my ‘job’ in 2 or 2.5 years. . . . It kept me from going to promotion board. Well, whose fault is that? I have been wanting to go back to my job so I can have experience as E6 [in my occupational specialty], but I'm being held back because . . . I was held back, and put in . . . admin[istrative] positions, and held from the line.”

–Senior Enlisted Woman

4. Perceived Inability to Meet Physical Standards

Participants from two male groups suggested the biggest challenge for women in the Service was to meet the physical standards. This theme was mentioned more frequently in past years' focus groups.

"I think [the biggest challenge is for women to meet] the standards. Whether it's equal across the board or gender specific, it's the standards in my opinion."

–Male Officer

Female participants indicated they were aware of this perception as well.

"They don't think we carry our weight even though we don't get a chance to."

–Junior Enlisted Woman

C. Proper Use of Social Media

In light of the Marines United photo-sharing scandal and other news from prior years related to the improper use of social media among members of the military, DACOWITS asked participants if they had received guidance about the appropriate use of social media and if they had suggestions for ensuring the appropriate use of social media among Service members. The press first reported on the issue in March 2017—only a month before the focus groups that were held in April and May 2017—so although some participants were familiar with the scandal, some were not yet aware of it.

1. Most Participants Received Social Media Training and/or Guidance

Although most of the participants indicated they had received training on the appropriate use of social media, the topics of the training varied somewhat. In some Services, the training focused on what types of content were not appropriate to post on social media, whereas in other cases, the training focused more broadly on how to ensure social media posts portrayed the Service in a positive light.

"We have a lot of training on [social media]. We had to go to a course . . . , and they made sure that they are honest about that stuff."

–Junior Enlisted Man

"We had online media training, which was thrown in with cyberawareness training. There used to be separate social media training. It's nothing that you don't already know, but it boggles my mind that people don't use common sense."

–Female Officer

"We had training from day one: don't do anything that would portray the [Service] in a negative way."

–Senior Enlisted Woman

"We've had that training; they tell us don't post drunk pictures of yourself."

–Senior Enlisted Woman

"I think we all have received guidance. I have. It was just about learning the basics. People always post too much information on there. I don't believe it unless I hear it out of someone's mouth."

–Junior Enlisted Man

a. Some Training Was Focused Solely on Operational Security

For a few participants, the only social media training they received was related solely to operational security.

"We've only had [operational security] training."

–Senior Enlisted Woman

"In basic [training] . . . , [they said] don't put anything to do with your work on Facebook because you never know who will hack it, and they could message your wife or find out about the mission."

–Junior Enlisted Man

2. Perception That Service Members Are Not Cautious Enough on Social Media

Several participants reported a concern that Service members should be more careful about what information they post on social media. Many of these participants believed younger Service members were more likely to post inappropriate information on social media. A few of these participants also noted that Service members have less freedom than civilians in terms of what they can and cannot post to social media.

"It's crazy. . . . You get [online and see inappropriate posts], and what can you do about it because every day it's something new, and people feel like they have to express it. I just was raised [with the guidance that] if you don't have anything nice to say, don't say anything, but now people feel the need to express everything before they think about it and don't realize how many people [see what they post]."

–Junior Enlisted Woman

"I've been seeing the stories about unmonitored Facebook groups, and it happened in another Service, but it's not just a problem in their Service. . . . [Social media is] not really private."

–Junior Enlisted Woman

"Not everyone [posts inappropriate information on social media]. We know that. Once you reenlist once, you're a lifer. You have more time invested, and you know that's a dumb way to go out and get kicked out. It's those guys [the ones that don't reenlist] that do the stupid [things]. They're lower ranking. They want to feel tough when they're in their rooms because they've been told to shut up all day. They're the ones messing it up. . . . You can't stop teenagers from doing teenager stuff."

–Junior Enlisted Man

"People don't understand [that when you join the military], some of your rights aren't what they used to be in the civilian world, and I have seen people talk bad about the President, and you see them on Facebook posting about that, and you [tell them to watch what they post], and they say, 'I'm an American, it's my right,' but you signed that away [when you joined the military]. You should be briefed that you don't have the same rights you used to have as a civilian."

–Junior Enlisted Woman

Despite these concerns, several participants, particularly from one Service, expressed the opinion that nothing can be done to stop the improper use of social media by Service members.

"You can't just limit everyone's use [of social media]. You can't regulate it. It comes down to stupid people putting up stupid things. You can't control everyone's thoughts."

–Junior Enlisted Man

"21-year-old guys aren't going to get it. They are brought up in the [Service] to hate females. [They] all have [negative] thoughts in their heads because of their peers on social media."

–Senior Enlisted Woman

"The people who shared the pictures online, they're dirtbags, they're [expletive], or they just made a bad decision, maybe. They did something stupid. . . . People were surprised, but it's been happening for a long time. I don't think there's a fix. [The Services] can make a policy [against posting such content], but [people will] find a different way to do it."

–Senior Enlisted Man

"It will never be eradicated. Like drunk driving, no matter how many trainings you do, there will always be that one stupid guy."

–Male Officer

3. Need for Stronger Repercussions and Consistent Enforcement

The need for stronger penalties and more consistent enforcement and punishment for improper use of social media was the most commonly mentioned suggestion for ensuring the appropriate use of social media.

"I think they should make punishments stricter. . . . People act like it's a big deal now, but this has been going on for a while. If they made the punishments stricter, it would help. . . . It should be more than just signing the roster because you took the class; we should actually do something about it."

–Senior Enlisted Woman

"I don't think anyone involved had any kind of thought that it was ok. They knew it was wrong. . . . The message comes from above. . . . If [the punishment they get is] nothing, I see that. That's a message. If they get jail, or kicked out of [the] Service, that's a strong message . . . : Because you did this thing, you will answer for it."

–Male Officer

"I feel like accountability for what people put online is key. . . . This should be a [Uniform Code of Military Justice] issue. People are disparaging the President, people are disparaging command, and that's open, it's all open, and you never hear about anyone being held accountable."

–Female Officer

"They should be punished as much as possible because their conduct is unbecoming of a [Service member]. They're lowering themselves. . . . It's belittling. You're doing this against your Service members. These are your teammates, and it's affecting unit cohesion."

–Senior Enlisted Woman

"It has to be swift, public action. You need to make it known. Certain people will be made examples of, but it needs to be publicly known that it won't be tolerated."

–Female Officer

4. More Training Is Needed

Several participants suggested additional training and guidance as a method for ensuring the appropriate use of social media, although some participants feared that frequent social media training could cause people to become immune to the messages. Participants from one Service in particular wanted additional training beyond signing a statement acknowledging the social media policy, which is how they perceived training was being handled at the time of the focus groups.

"I've been surprised and disappointed that there hasn't been more training on social media."

–Junior Enlisted Woman

"[Encouraging] appropriate use of social media [by offering] training on how to make good decisions . . . , that's something we could do by investing in our [Service members] and helping them think through and use leadership at the lower levels to talk about ramifications of doing this."

–Female Officer

"Talk to people about it. [Signing a statement] that says you won't do something is ridiculous. We should be able to talk to people about adult behavior."

–Male Officer

D. Recommendations for the Secretary of Defense

When asked what recommendations they would make to the Secretary of Defense, participants offered suggestions on a variety of topics; several suggestions mirrored those from previous years. Some of the recommendations stemmed from discussions held earlier in the focus groups related to the primary topics of interest as reported in Chapters 2 through 6; in this section, it is noted when the findings echo those presented in earlier chapters.

1. Increase the Length of Paternity Leave

The most common suggestion was to increase the length of paternity leave. Although this finding echoes those reported in Chapter 4 on parental leave, this recommendation was also provided by participants outside of the parental leave focus groups. Many male and female participants felt very strongly that the allotted paternity leave was too short. Participants emphasized the benefits longer paternity leave would have for the mother, child, and father.

"[Regarding] paternity leave—the stark difference between 12 weeks and 10 days is crazy. . . . You can take 21 days if you adopt, but only 10 days as a father. That is shocking. That will become more and more of an issue with not just same-sex [couples], but a generation that [is] used to more diverse [family structures]. Dads want to be dads too; two moms both want to be moms. I don't think it's unrealistic, and I think it might alleviate some of the issues we're talking about."

–Female Officer

“We need paternity leave that is equal to maternity leave if only for the fact that it will provide more flexibility for the mothers in caring for the children and getting back to work, especially for those who . . . [also have a] medical challenge. The millennials, we want things to be more equal, so fathers should have the time to be equal parents.”

–Female Officer

“Women would be able to come back faster if they had the help.”

–Junior Enlisted Man

“My wife couldn’t even get out of bed after 10 days. Work didn’t care. . . . I had to come back.”

–Senior Enlisted Man

2. Support Extra Staffing to Help Units Accommodate Pregnancies

Some participants made recommendations to improve the staffing issues units often face when a female member becomes pregnant; similar findings are reported in Chapter 4 on parental leave. Although only officers made this suggestion for the Secretary, the idea was also brought up in the focus groups that discussed parental leave as well as the groups that discussed other topics.

“It’s a readiness issue for the ship as a whole . . . , losing one person for that period of time. . . . I have to go to [operations] and ask for another body, and then I’m going to have to go talk to one of my peers and inconvenience them to get someone on board so I can operate my ship . . . if you want to have a child. It’s 42 weeks to get [trained for that specialty]; I can’t lose you for 12 weeks. I can’t keep the ship at dock for 12 weeks. No one is saying you can’t do this as a female, [but] you will also have to have a male as a backup [for that position].”

–Male Officer

“It’s taking care of the mom, but . . . from the management perspective . . . , we are still undermanned, and everybody’s got longer hours.”

–Female Officer

3. Normalize Interactions Between Men and Women

Offering comments similar to those from past years, several participants from one focus group suggested a need to normalize interactions between men and women.

“You have to normalize the relationship between men and women [Service members]. There’s been separation like in the schools. I was an instructor at one course, and the males and females were separated in the barracks. The females didn’t have access to certain amenities in the building like the pool table and socializing room. That just set the bar that it wasn’t normal to cohabitate. We’re not normalizing the relationships as leaders. There is still a clear difference between women and men. The door has to stay open when a male and female [Service member] talk, and that makes it special. I don’t know how to fix it, but it makes it obvious that we’re different. There are homosexual males in the male barracks, but no one cares. It’s gender that’s not normalized; sex has been normalized. . . . We’re supposed to fight together, but we have to open a door when we’re at work, so are we fighting together, or are we not?”

–Female Officer

"I was the first female pilot in my unit, and it was like the boys' club was over. They needed another female pilot there so it wouldn't be strange, but I don't need a female to be my co-pilot. Sleeping in the same area isn't weird, but they make it weird."

–Female Officer

4. End the Frequent Changes to Uniforms

A few participants from one Service complained about the numerous uniform changes that had taken place in recent years. Participants cited the cost of purchasing each new uniform as well as the fact that the changes being made were not the changes Service members had requested.

"Male officers will never have to change their uniform. Female officers are the only ones who will have to spend extra money. We don't get an extra allotment after our first uniform allotment."

–Female Officer

"Stop changing the uniforms. Just keep one. We are a big . . . fashion show. Every 4 to 5 years, we are displaying something new."

–Senior Enlisted Man

"Leave our uniforms alone. None of what they are trying to change [in terms of uniforms] is what we have been asking for them to change. They've gone too far now because people get issued different things. . . . It's not the money issue; it's that we're asking for things to change, and they are not focused on that."

–Female Officer

5. Improve the Performance Review System

Men from two Services recommended improving the performance review system. Though the two Services have different approaches to performance evaluations, members of each Service said they would prefer a system that is more inherently performance based.

"I want to go back to the [enlisted performance review] system. I think we should have a board system like how the [Service A] does it. In the [Service A], you can get to each rank faster, but it can also get taken away. I have a friend in the [Service B] who was a [noncommissioned officer] in 2 years. I think this would help with all the favoritism that is in [my Service]. There are a lot of people who just know how to sweet talk their way up."

–Junior Enlisted Man

"[Don't have] advancement exams. . . . Make it performance based."

–Junior Enlisted Man

6. Increase the Amount and Availability of Job-Specific Training and the Number of Jobs Within Each Career Field

Participants from all but one of the Services recommended increasing the amount and availability of job-specific training within each occupational specialty. This finding is consistent with those reported in Chapter 3 on mid-career retention.

"[Regarding] training . . . , we get tasked out, and we don't get [job-specific] training like we should. I feel like we have to fight for it in our unit. I feel like we should definitely get more training. . . . That's a big problem."

–Junior Enlisted Woman

"There should be more training. Not annual training, but actual training. People are winging it right now. People just figure it out as they go. The culture is to figure it out because it makes us able to adapt, but I'd like to be really good at what I do. [Another Service] would have one unit do one thing. They do one thing, and they're good at it. We do 18 things in 1 unit, but we don't know what we're doing."

–Male Officer

7. Height-Weight Standards, Particularly for Women of Color

A few women from one Service recommended the Service reevaluate its current height-weight standards and the associated measuring procedures used to ensure Service members meet the physical standards (i.e., the "tape test" to measure body fat).

"[For] the height-weight regulations, [regarding] certain ethnic groups' . . . body composition, they have a lot of struggles."

–Senior Enlisted Woman

"I would say fix the taping process. . . . When you tape a female around her hips, some females are very small, and some are blessed with a bit more, and it's hereditary. They need to relook at the system, I think."

–Female Officer

8. Implement Better Screening During Recruitment

A few participants from one Service recommended improving the recruitment screening process to eliminate those who would likely be low performers and to match recruits with occupational specialties that align better with their skill sets.

"When you're signing up to join, I wish they could [screen] you [to] see who you are and your past. I've met so many people in the [Service] that [I did not like]. . . . I wish they would have looked into them more before they joined, and it would take time, but I think it's worth the effort."

–Junior Enlisted Woman

"You have to have the right [Service member] for the job. . . . If we're going to be professional and have billions of dollars of equipment, we need the right [people] in the right jobs. . . . I had a female [Service member] at logistics school that had a journalism and public affairs degree and had worked on Wall Street. She wanted to be in public affairs, and they wouldn't let her. We need to put the highly qualified people in the right field."

–Male Officer

9. Extend Childcare Hours

A few female participants recommended extending the hours at DoD CDCs, particularly for Service members who work irregular hours or long shifts and for those who are single parents or part of dual-military couples in which one parent is deployed. This finding echoes those reported in Chapter 5 on childcare.

"[The Services should provide] help for parents. . . . My job is mission essential, so if I have to work outside of my normal hours, I don't have the resources to meet [childcare] needs. It is so hard to find childcare. I don't understand why there isn't a 24-[hour] CDC on base for working parents. I'm mission essential, but I can't get the childcare I need."

–Junior Enlisted Woman

"As a single mom . . . , having a better support network in terms of additional childcare and on-base options would make it easier for women to stay in. They made a recent change at [a local CDC] where they are open from 0500–0700. That opens flexibility. . . . The hours are a big deal. The difficulty to get in is a big deal. That [change] would expand women's options and the ability to take care of their child."

–Female Officer

Chapter 8. Gender Integration at Fort Hood: A Case Study

DACOWITS was asked by the Army to conduct a small number of focus groups at one Army installation while the installation was undergoing gender integration; the results served as a case study on how the gender integration process was proceeding. To meet this request, the Committee conducted four focus groups at Fort Hood with participants from units that were integrating the first women into the newly opened combat arms specialties of infantry and armor. The focus groups were composed of male and female officers and noncommissioned officers (NCOs) who were part of the gender integration efforts at that installation (see Table 8.1). The discussions focused on participants' perceptions of the integration process, their first communications regarding gender integration, preparations made for gender integration, challenges faced in gender integration, and suggestions for ensuring the success of gender integration (see Appendix C.4 for the focus group protocol). Most of the questions asked during these groups were derived from DACOWITS focus groups held to discuss the topic of gender integration in previous years.

This chapter summarizes the most common themes from these discussions and is organized into the following sections:

- ▶ Most Participants Felt the Integration Process Has Gone Smoothly Overall
- ▶ Challenges With the Gender Integration Process
- ▶ Most Observed Little Preparation for Units Prior to Gender Integration
- ▶ Initial Communications About Gender Integration Were Minimal
- ▶ Suggestions for Future Process Improvements

This section compares the results of the Fort Hood case study to relevant findings from focus groups held in previous years. For additional information, please see DACOWITS reports from prior years.³⁴

Table 8.1. Fort Hood Case Study Participant Demographics

Participant Characteristic	Women		Total (Men and Women)	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Gender				
Male	N/A	N/A	24	57%
Female	N/A	N/A	18	43%
Total	N/A	N/A	42	100%
Age				
18–20	0	0%	0	0%
21–24	1	6%	1	2%
25–29	8	44%	15	36%
30–34	0	0%	2	5%
35–39	6	33%	16	38%
40 or older	3	17%	8	19%
Total	18	100%	42	100%

³⁴ Previous DACOWITS reports are available online at <http://dacowits.defense.gov>

Participant Characteristic	Women		Total (Men and Women)	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Pay Grade				
E1–E3	0	0%	0	0%
E4–E6	7	39%	12	29%
E7–E9	0	0%	7	17%
WO1–WO5	0	0%	0	0%
O1–O3	9	50%	17	40%
O4 or higher	2	11%	6	14%
Total	18	100%	42	100%
Length of Military Service				
Less than 3 years	0	0%	0	0%
3–5 years	6	38%	8	21%
6–9 years	3	19%	10	26%
10–14 years	4	25%	8	21%
15–19 years	3	19%	10	26%
20 years or more	0	0%	3	8%
Total	16	100%	39	100%

Source: DACOWITS mini-survey (data from Fort Hood gender integration groups only)

A. Most Participants Felt the Integration Process Has Gone Smoothly Overall

Participants felt that in general, the process of gender integration in these units has gone well. A few believed the women in these units were being treated the same as the men, and a couple of participants provided specific success stories of women excelling.

“We have great leaders. We integrate [women] in, and everything from our end has been running smoothly. Honestly, though, some people make a big deal above us or in other civilian sectors. Give us someone smart and ready to learn, it’s really not an issue.”

–Male Officer

“Regardless of gender, if you can do your job, if your work ethic is strong, our male counterparts have no issue with us—or, if they do, [it is] not to our face. From the battalion commander on down, male leadership is mostly respectful and mindful and don’t grant special favors. . . . In the field last month, our sleep time was gender integrated. We put sheets up. If we had to go change, we’d go elsewhere.”

–Female Officer

B. Challenges With the Gender Integration Process

Despite the general positive feedback both from leaders in the integrating units and from women who had integrated within the past couple of years, participants expressed some challenges related primarily to the processes surrounding gender integration. Some believed these challenges created second-order effects for leaders to address.

1. Challenges With the “Leaders First” Approach

The Army’s “leaders first” approach calls for integrating female leaders prior to assigning junior enlisted women to those units. This process has been used successfully in the past and is being employed by other Services as well. However, some participants felt qualified men were being passed over for leadership roles in these units so women could fill those positions. Nevertheless, participants generally favored the “leaders first” approach and recognized that women were being placed in the leadership positions to fulfill the requirements of the approach. Participants believed leaders were doing their best to reassign those qualified men to other leadership positions on the installation.

“When female officers do arrive, there’s a possibility that infantry officers are waiting for platoon leader positions that have been there 3–4 months [and] that the females get jumped ahead solely based on gender. It raises a red flag, but . . . the conditions have to be met. Leaders are mitigating the risk of having male lieutenants jumped by females with the same resume, but the only differentiator is gender.”

–Male Officer

“[The women being integrated are] strong females, they’re all awesome; the way they are being integrated is the only concern. They are being integrated in cohorts of two, and you must also have a female officer. . . . This pushed experienced [male Service members out] . . . , and that created animosity between Soldiers pushed out and females coming in. We were having issue with guys leaving [and] females coming in [and] pushing out experienced men.”

–Senior Enlisted Man

“The concern is with the influx [of] infantry officers; it seems like they are slotted straight into platoon leadership positions, and the males will have to wait, causing concerns from male perspectives.”

–Female Officer

2. Challenges With the Requirement for Minimum Number of Women in a Unit

The Army’s approach to gender integration also includes the requirement to have a minimum number of women in each unit, and participants indicated this requirement has also created some challenges. Participants described how this approach has led to women being grouped into a small number of units, sometimes creating units with few experienced members. However, the participants also recognized the importance of having women placed in groups in these newly opened units.

“I have two [fire support officers] already . . . , and they are limited in where they can go. . . . I’m now creating companies that are very much female-centric; [I am] not able to spread them out across the formation.”

–Male Officer

“You have to move in cohorts of four. Four from the same graduating [advanced individual training] class, two male and two female Soldiers in the same platoon. . . . My job is manning . . . , [and] I have to figure out a way to seat all four people. A lot of times, I don’t have four openings [for that position]. [It] forces experience and cohesion out of the platoon in order to keep the four together.”

–Senior Enlisted Man

3. Lingering Misperception of Lowered Standards

A few participants mentioned that there was an enduring misperception that the physical standards for the positions recently opened to women had been lowered to ensure that women passed the training courses for these positions and schools. Participants believed that those outside of the integrating units were more likely to believe this misperception.

"This past year, we had the first women graduate from Ranger School. There's been a lot of hate, lots of comments saying they weren't graded fairly, took it easy, whatever. I think that sentiment is stronger, but people don't outright say so. A lot of classmates, when it was coming out . . . , said they didn't want to be in the first class of women . . . because if they succeeded, they knew people would say it was only because the standards would have changed, that they made it easier, and maybe it wasn't easier, but that's what people would think."

–Female Officer

C. Most Observed Little Preparation for Units Prior to Gender Integration

As it has done in past years, DACOWITS asked participants what actions DoD or the Service took to prepare the receiving units and/or the women going into these newly opened units. Echoing comments made in past years, a few participants reported the perception that very little was done to prepare either the units integrating women or the women themselves. However, many of these participants saw no issue with the lack of preparation and believed no special steps were needed to prepare the units for gender integration.

"Females . . . integrated perfectly fine. There was no plan; they just integrated like any other Soldier."

–Senior Enlisted Man

1. A Few Participated in Research Before Integration to Explore Potential Challenges

A few participants reported taking part in activities such as focus groups and surveys to discuss potential challenges to gender integration prior to the process beginning.

"It initially started as focus groups, sensing sessions, [and] surveys. They were trying to get a feel for what the Soldiers thought of integration [and learn] what . . . risk factors we may be facing."

–Male Officer

"My unit had sensing sessions where they had gathered everyone, and they simply discussed what would be happening, concerns, [and asked,] what do you think? [They] aired out everything, you know. Any questions [or] concerns were addressed from there. They didn't discuss living conditions, [it was] just pretty basic."

–Senior Enlisted Woman

2. A Few Took Part in Physical Testing With Men and Women to Validate Physical Standards

A couple of participants described being among the men and women whom the Army tested as part of its effort to validate the physical standards for the newly opened positions and to revise the standards if needed.

"That was part of the 20-20 thing, where I was one of the Soldiers chosen to see how women reacted in combat arms. . . . It was 3–4 days, and they took females and males. We wore heart monitors, and they had us do different exercises to see how we react. You had to [carry] . . . 100 pounds plus half your weight. . . . I automatically put on 100 pounds plus 10. I think, 'I am going to die.' They were . . . dropping weights in our pockets, taping weights to you, saying 'Go.' There were males that couldn't do it; it was hard."

–Senior Enlisted Woman

D. Initial Communications About Gender Integration Were Minimal

When asked about the initial communications they received regarding gender integration, participants' responses mirrored those from past years: much of the initial reaction from Soldiers was negative, and participants tended to hear about the decision to integrate women from civilian sources first. A couple of participants indicated they did not hear about it from their Service at all.

"All I heard was negative comments. Integrating women into combat arms, that's [terrible], on and on. You name it, I heard it."

–Senior Enlisted Woman

"I received the plan when they arrived on unit, and I heard on Facebook and whatnot."

–Male Officer

E. Suggestions for Future Process Improvements

Some participants offered suggestions to ensure the success of gender integration both for the women going into these newly opened career fields and the units being integrated.

a. Focus Less Attention on the First Women to Complete Gender Integration

A few participants suggested putting less of a spotlight and pressure on the first women going through each newly opened training course or school and joining the newly integrated units.

"The more low-key, the better. For example, two women graduated Ranger School, but that victory lap was too long. . . . It was good that they highlighted that, but the tour of Army posts was too much. If we expect equality, it shouldn't be a big deal in infantry, in field artillery, or Ranger School. It was good that two others graduated a week ago, and that was less of a big deal. The more emphasis on not making a big deal . . . , the better."

–Female Officer

“A while back, we had our first enlisted woman come through their schooling. We had a whole story done. The cameras were there. I’m all about the team concept, but you’re also putting a whole lot of pressure on the women. There’s been a couple that have come through and told me they feel the added pressure.”

–Senior Enlisted Man

b. Start With Female NCOs Rather Than Female Officers

A couple of participants suggested it would be better to install female NCOs than female officers in leadership positions as part of the “leaders first” approach because junior enlisted women may feel more comfortable with senior enlisted women than officers.

“What we need are the NCOs that Soldiers look up to, who interact on a daily basis with a private or specialist. It creates awkward relationships with female leaders directly interacting and working with privates or specialists. If we were able to have more E5s [and] E6s, [it would be] a more natural fit in small teams.”

–Male Officer

“I understand the intent; it just seems a bit unrealistic. A new lieutenant is still learning the process of how to be a leader. . . . I mean, you learn most from fellow NCOs. They will teach future leaders.”

–Male Officer

Appendix A. Installations Visited

Site	Members	Dates
Naval Base San Diego	Ms. Kyleanne Hunter and SGM (Ret.) Norma Helsham	April 3–4, 2017
Naval Base San Diego	Ms. Sharlene Hawkes and CSM (Ret.) Michelle Jones	April 6–7, 2017
Camp Pendleton	VADM (Ret.) Carol Pottenger and Ms. Therese Hughes	April 10–11, 2017
Camp Pendleton	Gen (Ret.) Janet Wolfenbarger and Ms. Pat Locke	April 13–14, 2017
Fort Hood	MG (Ret.) John Macdonald and Lt Gen (Ret.) Judy Fedder	April 18–19, 2017
Fort Hood	SMA (Ret.) Kenneth Preston and FLTCM (Ret.) JoAnn Ortloff	April 20–21, 2017
Lackland Air Force Base at Joint Base San Antonio	Maj Gen (Ret.) Sharon Dunbar and Mr. Brian Morrison	April 24–25, 2017
Lackland Air Force Base at Joint Base San Antonio	Col (Ret.) John Boggs, Dr. Jackie Young, and Dr. Kristy Anderson	April 27–28, 2017
Sector Hampton Roads	Ms. Janie Mines and Ms. Pat Locke	May 3–4, 2017

Appendix B. Mini-Survey

1. **What is your branch of Service?**

- Army
- Navy
- Marine Corps
- Air Force
- Coast Guard

2. **Are you a member of a Reserve or a National Guard unit?**

- Yes
- No

3. **How long, in total, have you served in the military? Please round to the nearest year.**

_____ Year(s)

4. **What is your age?**

- 18–20
- 21–24
- 25–29
- 30–34
- 35–39
- 40 or older

5. **What is your gender?**

- Female
- Male

6. **What is your pay grade?**

- E1–E3
- E4–E6
- E7–E9
- W01–W05
- O1–O3
- O4 or higher

7. **Are you Spanish/Hispanic/Latino?**

- No, not Spanish/Hispanic/Latino
- Yes, Spanish/Hispanic/Latino

8. **What is your race? Please mark all that apply.**

- White
- Black or African American
- American Indian or Alaska Native
- Asian (for example, Asian Indian, Chinese, Filipino, Japanese, Korean, Vietnamese)
- Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander (for example, Chamorro, Guamanian, Samoan)
- Other race

9. **What is your relationship status?**

- Married
- In a registered domestic partnership/civil union
- Divorced or legally separated
- Widowed
- Single, but with a partner/significant other (not including a registered domestic partnership/civil union)
- Single, with no significant other

10. **With the birth/adoption of your youngest child, did you take parental leave (maternity/paternity/adoption) offered by the military?**

- Not applicable:
 - I am not a parent
 - Parental leave was not available
 - My youngest child was born/adopted before I joined the military
- Yes:
 - I took the maximum leave available:
___ weeks OR ___ days
 - I took some of the leave available:
___ weeks OR ___ days
- No, I did not take any of the leave available

11. Do you have dependent children living in your home?

- Yes 
- No

12. IF YES: Which services have you regularly used for full-time or part-time child care? *Please mark all that apply.*

- DoD Child Development Center
- DoD School Age Care
- DoD Family Child Care or Child Development Homes
- Civilian child care center
- Civilian home-based child care
- Friend or family
- Other child care _____
- None

13. Assuming you could stay in the military, which of the following best describes your intentions regarding your military career?

- Staying until I am eligible for retirement or longer
- Staying beyond my present obligation, but not necessarily until retirement
- Probably leaving after my current obligation
- Definitely leaving after my current obligation
- Leaving the Active Component to join the Guard or Reserve (any Service)
- Undecided/Not sure
- For those with 20 or more years of service: 
 - Staying indefinitely, or as long as possible
 - Retiring as soon as possible
 - Undecided/Not sure

14. When you were thinking about joining the military, how important were the following things:

	1 Not at all important	2	3	4	5 Extremely Important
Educational opportunities	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Bonus	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Benefits (for example, health care)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Pay	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Desire to get away/travel the world	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
No jobs at home	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Patriotism/serve my country	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Change my life	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Learn new job skills	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Training opportunities	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Develop self-discipline	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Equal employment opportunity	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other _____	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Appendix C. Focus Group Protocols

C.1. Focus Group Protocol: Propensity to Serve

Session Information

Location:

Date:

Time:

Facilitator:

Recorder:

Number of participants present:

Focus Group Kickoff: Key Points to Cover

1. Welcome attendees

- ▶ Thank you for taking the time to join our discussion today. Please take a minute to write your name on the tent card in front of you. Write in whatever name you would like everyone to use to refer to you during today's activities.
- ▶ I am **[INSERT NAME]**, and I am a member of the Defense Advisory Committee on Women in the Services, known as DACOWITS, and this is **[INTRODUCE PARTNER]**, also a member of DACOWITS.
- ▶ We have **[INSERT NAME]** here with us from the DACOWITS staff.
- ▶ Our note taker, **[INSERT NAME]**, is with **[CONTRACTOR]**, a research firm hired to record these sessions, and s/he is part of the DACOWITS research team.

2. Introduce DACOWITS and its purpose

- ▶ DACOWITS stands for the Defense Advisory Committee on Women in the Services. The Committee has been around a long time—over 65 years.
- ▶ DACOWITS has put forth hundreds of recommendations to the Secretary of Defense over the years; many of these recommendations have resulted in policy changes that affect the lives of Service members.
- ▶ DACOWITS' charter is broad—to advise the Secretary of Defense on matters and policies relating to women serving in the Armed Forces.
- ▶ We are a civilian Committee, although some of us have prior military service. **(MODERATOR: Do not share whether you were prior enlisted/an officer or your former rank/title with the group; simply state you are a veteran.)**
- ▶ We are appointed by the Secretary of Defense. We are all volunteers and we serve without pay.

- ▶ Every year, DACOWITS selects specific topics on which to prepare a report for the Secretary of Defense.
 - ▶ This year, the Committee is interested in hearing from Service members on several topics, including the propensity to serve. **[FOR MALE GROUPS: We are also meeting with groups of women.]** We would like to spend some time discussing these specific topics, but we will also try to set aside some time at the end to discuss any other topics that you'd like to talk about relating to women serving in the military.
3. Describe how focus group session will work
- ▶ A focus group is basically just a guided discussion. As the facilitator, I have a set of scripted questions that I'd like to cover today, but we would like to encourage open conversation. Our note taker serves as a recorder. S/he will generate a transcript of our discussion but will not take down anyone's name.
 - ▶ The session will last approximately 60 minutes, and we will not take a formal break. Restrooms are located **[INSERT RESTROOM LOCATION]**. Please don't hesitate to step out at any time for whatever reason.
 - ▶ We consider you the experts on this topic; your opinions and attitudes are important to us. Although we would like to hear from everyone, feel free to answer as many or as few questions as you prefer.
4. Explain ground rules
- ▶ Please speak clearly and one at a time to make sure our note taker can capture everything that you say.
 - ▶ There are no right or wrong answers.
 - ▶ We want to hear the good and the bad.
 - ▶ We respect and value differences of opinion.
 - ▶ Please avoid sidebar conversations.
 - ▶ I want to make sure we cover all our questions today. If I feel we've covered a topic, I'll move us along.
 - ▶ Our note taker, **[INSERT NAME]**, will make sure we're sticking to the schedule and will alert me if we need to move on to the next question.
5. Emphasize that participation is voluntary and that privacy and confidentiality will be maintained
- ▶ Your participation in this session is completely voluntary.
 - ▶ If you would prefer to excuse yourself from the focus group at any time, you are free to do so.
 - ▶ If there are any questions you don't want to answer for whatever reason, please feel free to pass.
 - ▶ We treat the information you share as confidential. That means we will protect your confidentiality to the extent allowable by law. We will not reveal the names of study participants, and no information will be reported that can identify you or your family. In fact, all members of the DACOWITS research team (members and staff) have signed agreements pledging to safeguard the confidentiality of the information we gather during these sessions.

- ▶ Your name will not be linked to your answers or to any comments you make during the discussion.
- ▶ There are some behaviors that we are required to report. If we learn that you are being hurt or plan on hurting yourself or others, or others are being hurt or plan on hurting themselves or others, the law requires that we share this information with someone who can help and the appropriate authority.
- ▶ Because this is a group meeting, it is important that each of you agree to respect and protect each other's privacy. We expect you to keep any information you hear today in the strictest of confidence and not discuss it with anyone outside of this group. We also expect you not to share the identity of other participants with anyone outside of this group.
- ▶ We will begin by passing out a couple of short forms.
 - The first is a participant rights form for you to read. You do not need to sign this form. If you do not agree to the terms in the form, we will not be able to include you in the group today. If you stay for the group discussion, this will indicate your consent.
 - The second is a short mini-survey for you to complete anonymously. Please do not write your name on the form. This mini-survey allows us to compile data on the number and kinds of participants we spoke with during our site visits. Because the mini-survey is anonymous, we will not be able to link any responses you make during the discussion today with your responses to the mini-survey. Please be sure to fill out the front and the back of the form.
- ▶ After all the focus groups at this and other sites we're visiting this year have been completed, our staff will compile the results into a focus group report that we will use in writing our annual report to the Secretary of Defense **[SHOW COPY OF 2016 REPORT]**. Copies of our annual reports are available online at dacowits.defense.gov. The focus group report compiles responses by broad categories only, such as female junior officers or male senior enlisted.

Warmup/Introductions

6. Before we get started with our discussion about the propensity to serve, let's do some introductions. **Short introduction by each DACOWITS member:** My name is **[NAME]** and I'm from **[LOCATION]**. I am a **[VETERAN/CURRENT OCCUPATION]**.

(MODERATOR: Do not share whether you were prior enlisted/an officer or your former rank/title with the group; simply state you are a veteran to prevent participants from feeling intimidated.)

Now, let's go around the room and have each of you tell us: **(MODERATOR: Ask each person all three questions before moving on to next person.)**

- ▶ How many years you've served in the military
- ▶ Your job in the military
- ▶ How long you've been with your current unit

Propensity to Serve

Let's begin by talking about the propensity to serve—what makes people decide to join the military—since this is a topic we've heard a lot about in recent years.

7. Thinking back to your past, when did you first start to consider joining the military?
 - a. How old were you?
 - b. What put the military on your radar as a possible career option?
8. What motivated you to take the next step and *join* the military?
 - a. **[PROBE FOR EXAMPLES:]** Did you want to learn a job skill? Seek to further your education? Serve your country? Achieve a higher standard of living? Travel the world? Something else?
 - b. What set you apart from peers who did not join the military?
 - c. How did you decide which Service to join?
9. Now, I'd like to hear about some of the other career or educational paths that you considered. What options other than the military did you consider, and why did you move forward with the military?
10. What were some of your concerns when you were thinking about joining the military?
11. Thinking about the people who are joining the military today, what do you think motivates them to join? How do you think their reasons compare with the reasons you joined?
12. If a young person in your life asked whether they should join the military, what would you tell them?
13. Now, put yourself in the shoes of a recruiter or senior leader in your Service. What could your Service do to interest more people in joining?
 - a. Have the Services made any changes recently that you think will encourage more people to join the military?
 - b. What about recent changes that may push people away from the military?
14. What will factor into your decision to stay or leave the military?
 - a. Thinking about other people you know, what are the reasons they stay in or leave the military? Do have the same reasons or different ones?

General Questions

We're also interested in hearing about other issues we haven't yet discussed that may affect women in the military. Is there anything else you'd like to talk about with us? We may use your ideas as future topics of DACOWITS research.

15. One issue DACOWITS has been studying for years is the efforts DoD and the Services are taking to integrate women into previously closed positions/ billets and units. We would like to hear your thoughts about how these efforts are progressing to date. How well do you think the integration process is going?

16. What do you feel is the biggest challenge to women serving in the military today?
17. If you could send one recommendation back to the Secretary of Defense, what would it be?
18. **[IF NOT ALREADY ADDRESSED:]** As you know, the inappropriate use of social media among Service members has been widely reported in the news lately. How many of you have received guidance about the appropriate use of social media? **[NOTE TAKERS: COUNT THE NUMBER OF HANDS]**
 - a. What suggestions do you have for ensuring the appropriate use of social media?

(MODERATOR: Reinforce confidentiality) We will keep your information confidential—please do so as well by not sharing what you heard with anyone else.

This concludes our discussion. Thank you for taking the time to share your knowledge with us. Your thoughts are valuable to our efforts to inform the Secretary of Defense on these matters.

Once again, thank you very much.

C.2. Focus Group Protocol: Propensity to Serve and Mid-Career Retention

Session Information

Location:

Date:

Time:

Facilitator:

Recorder:

Number of participants present:

Focus Group Kickoff: Key Points to Cover

1. Welcome attendees
 - ▶ Thank you for taking the time to join our discussion today. Please take a minute to write your name on the tent card in front of you. Write in whatever name you would like everyone to use to refer to you during today's activities.
 - ▶ I am **[INSERT NAME]**, and I am a member of the Defense Advisory Committee on Women in the Services, known as DACOWITS, and this is **[INTRODUCE PARTNER]**, also a member of DACOWITS.
 - ▶ We have **[INSERT NAME]** here with us from the DACOWITS staff.
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- ▶ We are a civilian Committee, although some of us have prior military service. **(MODERATOR: Do not share whether you were prior enlisted/an officer or your former rank/title with the group; simply state you are a veteran.)**
- ▶ We are appointed by the Secretary of Defense. We are all volunteers and we serve without pay.
- ▶ Every year, DACOWITS selects specific topics on which to prepare a report for the Secretary of Defense.
- ▶ This year, the Committee is interested in hearing from Service members on several topics, including parental leave and childcare. **[FOR MALE GROUPS: We are also meeting with groups of women.]** We would like to spend some time discussing these specific topics, but we will also try to set aside some time at the end to discuss any other topics that you'd like to talk about relating to women serving in the military.

3. Describe how focus group session will work

- ▶ A focus group is basically just a guided discussion. As the facilitator, I have a set of scripted questions that I'd like to cover today, but we would like to encourage open conversation. Our note taker serves as a recorder. S/he will generate a transcript of our discussion but will not take down anyone's name.
- ▶ The session will last approximately 90 minutes, and we will not take a formal break. Restrooms are located **[INSERT RESTROOM LOCATION]**. Please don't hesitate to step out at any time for whatever reason.
- ▶ We consider you the experts on this topic; your opinions and attitudes are important to us. Although we would like to hear from everyone, feel free to answer as many or as few questions as you prefer.

4. Explain ground rules

- ▶ Please speak clearly and one at a time to make sure our note taker can capture everything that you say.
- ▶ There are no right or wrong answers.
- ▶ We want to hear the good and the bad.
- ▶ We respect and value differences of opinion.
- ▶ Please avoid sidebar conversations.
- ▶ I want to make sure we cover all our questions today. If I feel we've covered a topic, I'll move us along.

- ▶ Our note taker, **[INSERT NAME]**, will make sure we're sticking to the schedule and will alert me if we need to move on to the next question.
5. Emphasize that participation is voluntary and that privacy and confidentiality will be maintained
- ▶ Your participation in this session is completely voluntary.
 - ▶ If you would prefer to excuse yourself from the focus group at any time, you are free to do so.
 - ▶ If there are any questions you don't want to answer for whatever reason, please feel free to pass.
 - ▶ We treat the information you share as confidential. That means we will protect your confidentiality to the extent allowable by law. We will not reveal the names of study participants, and no information will be reported that can identify you or your family. In fact, all members of the DACOWITS research team (members and staff) have signed agreements pledging to safeguard the confidentiality of the information we gather during these sessions.
 - ▶ Your name will not be linked to your answers or to any comments you make during the discussion.
 - ▶ There are some behaviors that we are required to report. If we learn that you are being hurt or plan on hurting yourself or others, or others are being hurt or plan on hurting themselves or others, the law requires that we share this information with someone who can help and the appropriate authority.
 - ▶ Because this is a group meeting, it is important that each of you agree to respect and protect each other's privacy. We expect you to keep any information you hear today in the strictest of confidence and not discuss it with anyone outside of this group. We also expect you not to share the identity of other participants with anyone outside of this group.
 - ▶ We will begin by passing out a couple of short forms.
 - The first is a participant rights form for you to read. You do not need to sign this form. If you do not agree to the terms in the form, we will not be able to include you in the group today. If you stay for the group discussion, this will indicate your consent.
 - The second is a short mini-survey for you to complete anonymously. Please do not write your name on the form. This mini-survey allows us to compile data on the number and kinds of participants we spoke with during our site visits. Because the mini-survey is anonymous, we will not be able to link any responses you make during the discussion today with your responses to the mini-survey. Please be sure to fill out the front and the back of the form.
 - ▶ After all of focus groups at this and other sites we're visiting this year have been completed, our staff will compile the results into a focus group report that we will use in writing our annual report to the Secretary of Defense **[SHOW COPY OF 2016 REPORT]**. Copies of our annual reports are available online at dacowits.defense.gov. The focus group report compiles responses by broad categories only, such as female junior officers or male senior enlisted.

Warm-Up/Introductions

6. Before we get started with our discussion about maternity leave, let's do some introductions.
- Short introduction by each DACOWITS member:** My name is **[NAME]** and I'm from **[LOCATION]**. I am a **[VETERAN/CURRENT OCCUPATION]**.

(MODERATOR: Do not share whether you were prior enlisted/an officer or your former rank/title with the group; simply state you are a veteran to prevent participants from feeling intimidated.)

Now, let's go around the room and have each of you tell us: **(MODERATOR: Ask each person all three questions before moving on to next person.)**

- How many years you've served in the military
- Your job in the military
- How long you've been with your current unit

Propensity to Serve

Let's begin by talking about the propensity to serve—what makes people decide to join the military—since this is a topic we've heard a lot about in recent years.

7. Thinking back to your past, when did you first start to *consider* joining the military?
 - a. How old were you?
 - b. What put the military on your radar as a possible career option?
8. What motivated you to take the next step and *join* the military?
 - a. **[PROBE FOR EXAMPLES:]** Did you want to learn a job skill? Seek to further your education? Serve your country? Achieve a higher standard of living? Travel the world? Something else?
 - b. What set you apart from peers who did not join the military?
 - c. How did you decide which Service to join?
9. Now, I'd like to hear about some of the other career or educational paths that you considered. What options other than the military did you consider, and why did you move forward with the military?
10. What were some of your concerns when you were thinking about joining the military?
11. Thinking about the people who are joining the military today, what do you think motivates them to join? How do you think their reasons compare with the reasons you joined?
12. If a young person in your life asked whether they should join the military, what would you tell them?
13. Now, put yourself in the shoes of a recruiter or senior leader in your Service. What could your Service do to interest more people in joining?
 - a. Have the Services made any changes recently that you think will encourage more people to join the military?
 - b. What about recent changes that may push people away from the military?

Mid-Career Retention

Next, I want to talk about why people do or do not stay in the military after they join. The Committee is interested in learning about what issues influence people to stay in the military and what issues influence them to leave.

14. Tell me about the reasons that you've chosen to stay in the military as long as you have. To date, what has factored into your decision to stay?
 - a. What are the pros and cons of staying versus leaving?
 - b. Thinking about other people you know, what are the reasons they stay in or leave the military? Do you have the same reasons, or different ones?
 - c. **[PROBE IF RELEVANT:]** Deployment schedule? Command climate? Military culture? Lack of educational opportunities? Deciding to start a family? Not enough opportunities to do your job in realistic conditions? Something else?
15. **[IF NOT ALREADY ADDRESSED:]** We just talked about the factors that motivated you to join the military. How do those compare with the reasons you have decided to stay in?
 - a. **[PROBE IF RELEVANT:]** What's similar, and what has changed? Have circumstances in your life changed and caused you to change your perspective on what you think is important?
16. You've mentioned a few different issues that people think about when deciding whether to stay in the military. As I mentioned before, the Committee is especially interested in hearing more about training opportunities. Outside of required professional military education, what role does training play in your decision to stay?
17. Career progression includes timely selection for military schooling, including joint professional military education, choice career assignments, and timely promotions. What role does career progression play, if any, in your decision to stay?
 - a. To what extent do you feel you know what you need to do to advance in your field? **[PROBE:]** Do you know the general timeline of requirements needed to progress in your career?
 - b. To what extent do you feel in control of your career outcomes?
18. What has been your experience with military-sponsored networking opportunities (for example, the Joint Women's Leadership Symposium)?
 - a. How, if at all, do events like these effect your decision to stay in the military?
19. What else could the military do, if anything, to help convince members to stay in the Services?

General Questions

We're also interested in hearing about other issues we haven't yet discussed that may affect women in the military. Is there anything else you'd like to talk about with us? We may use your ideas as future topics of DACOWITS research.

20. One issue DACOWITS has been studying for years is the efforts DoD and the Services are taking to integrate women into previously closed positions/ billets and units. We would like to hear your thoughts about how these efforts are progressing to date. How well do you think the integration process is going?
21. What do you feel is the biggest challenge to women serving in the military today?
22. If you could send one recommendation back to the Secretary of Defense, what would it be?

23. **[IF NOT ALREADY ADDRESSED:]** As you know, the inappropriate use of social media among Service members has been widely reported in the news lately. How many of you have received guidance about the appropriate use of social media? **[NOTE TAKERS: COUNT THE NUMBER OF HANDS]**

24. What suggestions do you have for ensuring the appropriate use of social media?

(MODERATOR: Reinforce confidentiality) We will keep your information confidential—please do so as well by not sharing what you heard with anyone else.

This concludes our discussion. Thank you for taking the time to share your knowledge with us. Your thoughts are valuable to our efforts to inform the Secretary of Defense on these matters.

Once again, thank you very much.

C.3. Focus Group Protocol: Parental Leave and Childcare

Session Information

Location:

Date:

Time:

Facilitator:

Recorder:

Number of participants present:

Focus Group Kickoff: Key Points to Cover

1. Welcome attendees

- ▶ Thank you for taking the time to join our discussion today. Please take a minute to write your name on the tent card in front of you. Write in whatever name you would like everyone to use to refer to you during today's activities.
- ▶ I am **[INSERT NAME]**, and I am a member of the Defense Advisory Committee on Women in the Services, known as DACOWITS, and this is **[INTRODUCE PARTNER]**, also a member of DACOWITS.
- ▶ We have **[INSERT NAME]** here with us from the DACOWITS staff.
- ▶ Our note taker, **[INSERT NAME]**, is with **[CONTRACTOR]**, a research firm hired to record these sessions, and s/he is part of the DACOWITS research team.

2. Introduce DACOWITS and its purpose

- ▶ DACOWITS stands for the Defense Advisory Committee on Women in the Services. The Committee has been around a long time—over 65 years.

- ▶ DACOWITS has put forth hundreds of recommendations to the Secretary of Defense over the years; many of these recommendations have resulted in policy changes that affect the lives of Service members.
- ▶ DACOWITS' charter is broad—to advise the Secretary of Defense on matters and policies relating to women serving in the Armed Forces.
- ▶ We are a civilian Committee, although some of us have prior military service. **(MODERATOR: Do not share whether you were prior enlisted/an officer or your former rank/title with the group; simply state you are a veteran.)**
- ▶ We are appointed by the Secretary of Defense. We are all volunteers and we serve without pay.
- ▶ Every year, DACOWITS selects specific topics on which to prepare a report for the Secretary of Defense.
- ▶ This year, the Committee is interested in hearing from Service members on several topics, including parental leave and childcare. **[FOR MALE GROUPS: We are also meeting with groups of women.]** We would like to spend some time discussing these specific topics, but we will also try to set aside some time at the end to discuss any other topics that you'd like to talk about relating to women serving in the military.

3. Describe how focus group session will work

- ▶ A focus group is basically just a guided discussion. As the facilitator, I have a set of scripted questions that I'd like to cover today, but we would like to encourage open conversation. Our note taker serves as a recorder. S/he will generate a transcript of our discussion but will not take down anyone's name.
- ▶ The session will last approximately 90 minutes, and we will not take a formal break. Restrooms are located **[INSERT RESTROOM LOCATION]**. Please don't hesitate to step out at any time for whatever reason.
- ▶ We consider you the experts on this topic; your opinions and attitudes are important to us. Although we would like to hear from everyone, feel free to answer as many or as few questions as you prefer.

4. Explain ground rules

- ▶ Please speak clearly and one at a time to make sure our note taker can capture everything that you say.
- ▶ There are no right or wrong answers.
- ▶ We want to hear the good and the bad.
- ▶ We respect and value differences of opinion.
- ▶ Please avoid sidebar conversations.
- ▶ I want to make sure we cover all our questions today. If I feel we've covered a topic, I'll move us along.
- ▶ Our note taker, **[INSERT NAME]**, will make sure we're sticking to the schedule and will alert me if we need to move on to the next question.

5. Emphasize that participation is voluntary and that privacy and confidentiality will be maintained
 - ▶ Your participation in this session is completely voluntary.
 - ▶ If you would prefer to excuse yourself from the focus group at any time, you are free to do so.
 - ▶ If there are any questions you don't want to answer for whatever reason, please feel free to pass.
 - ▶ We treat the information you share as confidential. That means we will protect your confidentiality to the extent allowable by law. We will not reveal the names of study participants, and no information will be reported that can identify you or your family. In fact, all members of the DACOWITS research team (members and staff) have signed agreements pledging to safeguard the confidentiality of the information we gather during these sessions.
 - ▶ Your name will not be linked to your answers or to any comments you make during the discussion.
 - ▶ There are some behaviors that we are required to report. If we learn that you are being hurt or plan on hurting yourself or others, or others are being hurt or plan on hurting themselves or others, the law requires that we share this information with someone who can help and the appropriate authority.
 - ▶ Because this is a group meeting, it is important that each of you agree to respect and protect each other's privacy. We expect you to keep any information you hear today in the strictest of confidence and not discuss it with anyone outside of this group. We also expect you not to share the identity of other participants with anyone outside of this group.
 - ▶ We will begin by passing out a couple of short forms.
 - The first is a participant rights form for you to read. You do not need to sign this form. If you do not agree to the terms in the form, we will not be able to include you in the group today. If you stay for the group discussion, this will indicate your consent.
 - The second is a short mini-survey for you to complete anonymously. Please do not write your name on the form. This mini-survey allows us to compile data on the number and kinds of participants we spoke with during our site visits. Because the mini-survey is anonymous, we will not be able to link any responses you make during the discussion today with your responses to the mini-survey. Please be sure to fill out the front and the back of the form.
 - ▶ After all of focus groups at this and other sites we're visiting this year have been completed, our staff will compile the results into a focus group report that we will use in writing our annual report to the Secretary of Defense **[SHOW COPY OF 2016 REPORT]**. Copies of our annual reports are available online at dacowits.defense.gov. The focus group report compiles responses by broad categories only, such as female junior officers or male senior enlisted.

Warm-Up/Introductions

6. Before we get started with our discussion about maternity leave, let's do some introductions.
Short introduction by each DACOWITS member: My name is **[NAME]** and I'm from **[LOCATION]**. I am a **[VETERAN/CURRENT OCCUPATION]**.

(MODERATOR: Do not share whether you were prior enlisted/an officer or your former rank/title with the group; simply state you are a veteran to prevent participants from feeling intimidated.)

Now, let's go around the room and have each of you tell us: **(MODERATOR: Ask each person all three questions before moving on to next person.)**

- How many years you've served in the military
- Your job in the military
- How long you've been with your current unit

Parental Leave

Let's begin by talking about parental leave policies, which include both maternity and paternity leave and leave for adoptive parents. Before we start, I want to reiterate that even if you are not a parent or never plan to become a parent, we still want to hear your opinions because this issue affects both parents and non-parents in the unit. As you know, most parents take time off work for reasons related to their children. This is something the Committee has heard a lot about in past years. Parental leave policies vary somewhat across the Services. I'm curious to learn about how parental leave works in your Service and at this location/installation.

7. Let's talk first about how parental leave works in your Service.
 - a. Who is eligible to take it?
 - i. Mothers? Fathers? Adoptive parents? Others?
8. For maternity leave, how much time can mothers take?
 - a. For paternity leave, how much time can fathers take?
 - b. How much time can adoptive parents take?
9. Let's talk about taking maternity and paternity leave. Raise your hand if you have ever worked with someone in your unit who has taken maternity or paternity leave. **[NOTE TAKERS: COUNT THE NUMBER OF HANDS]**
 - a. [FOR FEMALE GROUPS ONLY: Raise your hand if you have ever taken maternity leave.]
[NOTE TAKERS: COUNT THE NUMBER OF HANDS]
 - b. [FOR MALE GROUPS ONLY: Raise your hand if you have ever taken paternity leave.]
[NOTE TAKERS: COUNT THE NUMBER OF HANDS]
 - c. [PROBE FOR MALES WHO HAVE TAKEN PATERNITY LEAVE: How much time did you take for paternity leave? Did it seem like the right amount of time? What were the benefits and challenges to taking paternity leave?]
10. Have there been any updates to these policies? **[IF YES:]** What kinds of changes were made?

We have discussed parental leave policies for your respective Services, and now we want to focus specifically on DoD-wide changes to the maternity leave policy for the next few minutes. In January 2016, Secretary of Defense Ash Carter authorized 12 weeks of maternity leave across all the Military Services. DoD's new policy requires the Services to offer at least 12 weeks of paid maternity leave.

11. By a quick show of hands, how many of you have heard about this change? [NOTE TAKERS: COUNT **THE NUMBER OF HANDS**]
 - a. What do you think of this change?
 - i. **[PROBE:]** Positive? Negative?
12. How many of you have either taken or worked with someone who has taken maternity leave *since the policy was changed in 2016*? [NOTE TAKERS: COUNT **THE NUMBER OF HANDS**]
13. Thinking back to a time when someone in your unit took maternity leave, how did that affect your unit?
 - a. What went well?
 - b. What was challenging?
 - c. How, if at all, did it affect morale?
 - d. **[IF GROUP HAS NO PERSONAL EXPERIENCE WITH MATERNITY LEAVE:** What effect do you think someone taking maternity leave could have on your unit?]**]**What has changed since the new policy went into effect in 2016?
14. What are some benefits to taking maternity leave?
15. What are the benefits for the parent? For the unit?
 - a. **[PROBE:]** Childcare, health, breastfeeding, bonding, other reasons?
16. What pressures are women facing to either take or not take the full 12 weeks of maternity leave available?
 - a. What are some benefits of taking the full 12 weeks?
17. What are some drawbacks of taking the full 12 weeks?
 - a. Are any groups more or less likely to have concerns about taking the full 12 weeks? (Officers? Enlisted? Junior? Senior? Certain career specialties?)
18. How are performance evaluations/performance reports handled for women who are out on maternity leave?
19. If a peer came to you who was deciding whether to take the full 12 weeks of available maternity leave or to take less leave, what advice would you give her?
20. If you had to give a recommendation to the leadership in your Service about how they should improve maternity leave, what would you say?
 - a. **[PROBE IF NEEDED:]** This can be a recommendation about the leave itself or ways to assist units when one or more women are out on maternity leave.

Childcare

Now, I want to talk about a different but related topic: childcare. For working parents inside and outside the military, finding childcare is a challenge.

21. Thinking about yourself or other Service members you know who have children, where and from whom are people obtaining childcare?
 - a. **[PROBE:]** Family member? Friend? Spouse? On-base care? Offsite/civilian/community-based care?
22. How do parents address day-to-day childcare issues (e.g., sick children, holidays, sick caregiver)?
 - a. What effects do these day-to-day challenges have on mission readiness?
23. By a quick show of hands, how many of you use or know someone who has used a DoD Child Development Center? **[NOTE TAKERS: COUNT THE NUMBER OF HANDS]**
 - a. How many of you use or know someone who has used in-home childcare through DoD (for example, Family Child Care)? Please raise your hands. **[NOTE TAKERS: COUNT THE NUMBER OF HANDS]**
24. What are some things people like about DoD childcare services?
 - a. **[PROBE:]** Convenience? Cost? Hours of operation? Quality?
25. What are some things people do not like about DoD childcare services?
 - a. **[PROBE:]** Cost? Quality? Hours of operation? Waiting lists? Location?
 - b. How, if at all, does the wait list for childcare services affect peoples' decisions whether to use DoD childcare services?
26. [IF NOT ALREADY ADDRESSED:] I want to hear some examples—think of a time when you or someone you know had a challenge with childcare, and tell me about that experience.
 - a. How did it affect that parent in other parts of their life —work, personal, financial, etc.?
27. Now, I have a few questions about family care plans. These are the written documents outlining how children are cared for while single parents or dual military parents are away for work. How many of you have ever had a family care plan? **[NOTE TAKERS: COUNT THE NUMBER OF HANDS]**
IF NEEDED: As outlined in DoDI 1342.19, all Service members are responsible for the care of dependent family members during deployments and temporary duty, as at all other times. All members shall develop and forward a family care plan through the appropriate chain of command that arranges for the logistical, financial, medical, educational, and legal documentation necessary to ensure continuity of care and support for dependent family members.
28. How helpful are these documents when it comes to childcare?
29. How much time do people have to complete their family care plan? Is it enough time? What do you think would be the appropriate amount of time?
30. Under what circumstances **should** a family care plan be implemented?
 - a. Under what circumstances have you seen a family care plan implemented?
31. How do family care plans affect Service members' careers and their ability to stay in or leave the military?

32. What are some of the programs and resources your Service offers to help parents address their childcare needs?
 - a. Which of these programs and resources are most helpful?
 - b. In what ways can your Service improve these programs and resources?

General Questions

We're also interested in hearing about other issues we haven't yet discussed that may affect women in the military. Is there anything else you'd like to talk about with us? We may use your ideas as future topics of DACOWITS research.

33. One issue DACOWITS has been studying for years is the efforts DoD and the Services are taking to integrate women into previously closed positions/ billets and units. We would like to hear your thoughts about how these efforts are progressing to date. How well do you think the integration process is going?
34. What do you feel is the biggest challenge to women serving in the military today?
35. If you could send one recommendation back to the Secretary of Defense, what would it be?
36. **[IF NOT ALREADY ADDRESSED:]** As you know, the inappropriate use of social media among Service members has been widely reported in the news lately. How many of you have received guidance about the appropriate use of social media? **[NOTE TAKERS: COUNT THE NUMBER OF HANDS]**
 - a. What suggestions do you have for ensuring the appropriate use of social media?

(MODERATOR: Reinforce confidentiality) We will keep your information confidential—please do so as well by not sharing what you heard with anyone else.

This concludes our discussion. Thank you for taking the time to share your knowledge with us. Your thoughts are valuable to our efforts to inform the Secretary of Defense on these matters.

Once again, thank you very much.

C.4. Focus Group Protocol: Gender Integration

Session Information

Location:

Date:

Time:

Facilitator:

Recorder:

Number of participants present:

Focus Group Kickoff: Key Points to Cover

1. Welcome attendees

- ▶ Thank you for taking the time to join our discussion today. Please take a minute to write your name on the tent card in front of you. Write in whatever name you would like everyone to use to refer to you during today's activities.
- ▶ I am **[INSERT NAME]**, and I am a member of the Defense Advisory Committee on Women in the Services, known as DACOWITS, and this is **[INTRODUCE PARTNER]**, also a member of DACOWITS.
- ▶ We have **[INSERT NAME]** here with us from the DACOWITS staff.
- ▶ Our note taker, **[INSERT NAME]**, is with **[CONTRACTOR]**, a research firm hired to record these sessions, and s/he is part of the DACOWITS research team.

2. Introduce DACOWITS and its purpose

- ▶ DACOWITS stands for the Defense Advisory Committee on Women in the Services. The Committee has been around a long time—over 65 years.
- ▶ DACOWITS has put forth hundreds of recommendations to the Secretary of Defense over the years; many of these recommendations have resulted in policy changes that affect the lives of Service members.
- ▶ DACOWITS' charter is broad—to advise the Secretary of Defense on matters and policies relating to women serving in the Armed Forces.
- ▶ We are a civilian Committee, although some of us have prior military service. **(MODERATOR: Do not share whether you were prior enlisted/an officer or your former rank/title with the group; simply state you are a veteran.)**
- ▶ We are appointed by the Secretary of Defense. We are all volunteers and we serve without pay.
- ▶ Every year, DACOWITS selects specific topics on which to prepare a report for the Secretary of Defense.
- ▶ This year, the Committee is interested in hearing from Service members on several topics, including gender integration and how the process of integration has been working in your unit or installation. **[FOR MALE GROUPS: We are also meeting with groups of women].** We would like to spend some time discussing these specific topics, but we will also try to set aside some time at the end to discuss any other topics that you'd like to talk about relating to women serving in the military.

3. Describe how focus group session will work

- ▶ A focus group is basically just a guided discussion. As the facilitator, I have a set of scripted questions that I'd like to cover today, but we would like to encourage open conversation. Our note taker serves as a recorder. S/he will generate a transcript of our discussion but will not take down anyone's name.
- ▶ The session will last approximately 45 minutes, and we will not take a formal break. Restrooms are located **[INSERT RESTROOM LOCATION]**. Please don't hesitate to step out at any time for whatever reason.

- ▶ We consider you the experts on this topic; your opinions and attitudes are important to us. Although we would like to hear from everyone, feel free to answer as many or as few questions as you prefer.

4. Explain ground rules

- ▶ Please speak clearly and one at a time to make sure our note taker can capture everything that you say.
- ▶ There are no right or wrong answers.
- ▶ We want to hear the good and the bad.
- ▶ We respect and value differences of opinion.
- ▶ Please avoid sidebar conversations.
- ▶ I want to make sure we cover all our questions today. If I feel we've covered a topic, I'll move us along.
- ▶ Our note taker, **[INSERT NAME]**, will make sure we're sticking to the schedule and will alert me if we need to move on to the next question.

5. Emphasize that participation is voluntary and that privacy and confidentiality will be maintained

- ▶ Your participation in this session is completely voluntary.
- ▶ If you would prefer to excuse yourself from the focus group at any time, you are free to do so.
- ▶ If there are any questions you don't want to answer for whatever reason, please feel free to pass.
- ▶ We treat the information you share as confidential. That means we will protect your confidentiality to the extent allowable by law. We will not reveal the names of study participants, and no information will be reported that can identify you or your family. In fact, all members of the DACOWITS research team (members and staff) have signed agreements pledging to safeguard the confidentiality of the information we gather during these sessions.
- ▶ Your name will not be linked to your answers or to any comments you make during the discussion.
- ▶ There are some behaviors that we are required to report. If we learn that you are being hurt or plan on hurting yourself or others, or others are being hurt or plan on hurting themselves or others, the law requires that we share this information with someone who can help and the appropriate authority.
- ▶ Because this is a group meeting, it is important that each of you agree to respect and protect each other's privacy. We expect you to keep any information you hear today in the strictest of confidence and not discuss it with anyone outside of this group. We also expect you not to share the identity of other participants with anyone outside of this group.
- ▶ We will begin by passing out a couple of short forms.
 - The first is a participant rights form for you to read. You do not need to sign this form. If you do not agree to the terms in the form, we will not be able to include you in the group today. If you stay for the group discussion, this will indicate your consent.

- The second is a short mini-survey for you to complete anonymously. Please do not write your name on the form. This mini-survey allows us to compile data on the number and kinds of participants we spoke with during our site visits. Because the mini-survey is anonymous, we will not be able to link any responses you make during the discussion today with your responses to the mini-survey. Please be sure to fill out the front and the back of the form.
- ▶ DACOWITS is conducting four focus groups on gender integration with individuals at Fort Hood. Your responses will be combined and reported in aggregate, using no names or identifying information. The resulting case study on Fort Hood's gender integration efforts will be included as part of DACOWITS 2017 focus group report and shared with command leadership. Copies of our annual reports are available online at dacowits.defense.gov.

Warmup/Introductions

As everyone here knows, Secretary of Defense Ash Carter announced his decision to open all previously closed U.S. military units and positions to women on December 3, 2015. DACOWITS has been following this issue closely for several years. We've received briefings and written responses on this topic from each of the Services, and we've conducted focus groups with military men and women from all ranks and branches regarding gender integration. Now that full gender integration is moving forward, we'd like to hear from the people at installations where the first units are undergoing gender integration. We chose to visit this specific installation because of its role in integrating women into **[INSERT NAME OF NEWLY OPENED POSITION/UNIT]** for the first time. Thank you for taking time out of your busy day to share your perspectives with us.

6. Before we get started with our discussion about gender integration, let's do some introductions. **Short introduction by each DACOWITS member:** My name is **[NAME]** and I'm from **[LOCATION]**. I am a **[VETERAN/CURRENT OCCUPATION]**.

(MODERATOR: Do not share whether you were prior enlisted/an officer or your former rank/title with the group; simply state you are a veteran to prevent participants from feeling intimidated.)

Now, let's go around the room and have each of you tell us: **(MODERATOR: Ask each person all three questions before moving on to next person.)**

- How many years you've served in the military
- Your job in the military
- How long you've been with your current unit

Successful Gender Integration

To get started, we would like to talk about gender integration and hear your thoughts about how the efforts to integrate women into previously closed positions/billetts and units are progressing to date.

7. By a quick show of hands, who here is working in a unit where women are being integrated into certain positions/billetts for the first time? **[NOTE TAKERS: COUNT THE NUMBER OF HANDS]**
 - a. For those who have experience with units integrating women, can you tell us more about that experience (e.g., when it began, what type of unit)?
8. How well do you think the integration process is going overall?

Now, I'd like you to think back to when you first found out that your unit or installation was going to be among the first to receive women in these newly opened positions.

9. As best you can recall, what was the first communication you received from your command related to your installation being among the first to receive women in **[INSERT NAME OF NEWLY OPENED POSITION]** units?
 - a. Who did you hear from? How and when did you hear from them?
 - b. What was the message in this initial communication?
10. How did members of your unit seem to respond to this news?
11. Following that initial communication, what changes, if any, did you see in the ways your unit prepares or operates?
 - a. **[PROBE IF NEEDED:]** Changes in leadership? Training?
12. What was done, if anything, to prepare units for gender integration?
 - a. **[PROBE:]** Changes in leadership? Training?
 - b. How satisfied were you with these efforts to prepare units for gender integration?
13. How did your leadership handle the transition process, if any?
14. Are any changes still being made to adjust to having women in the unit?
 - a. For those who might have any concerns about how the integration process is going, do you feel that there is a protocol in place for sharing those concerns?
 - b. Do you think those concerns would be taken seriously?
15. What barriers or challenges did your unit face in integrating women?
 - a. Have you seen any pushback? From whom/what? What kind? This might include pushback from individual people or groups, or at the Service level.
 - b. Does military culture pose a barrier in any way? This could include structural barriers such as berthing space, or stereotypical gender expectations such as men feeling they need to protect women.
16. What could your command do to better support the integrating units?
17. What could the military do to better ensure women are successfully integrated into these newly opened units and positions?
 - a. **[PROBE:]** What improvements could be made at the unit level? By unit leadership? What about at the Service level or DoD level?

General Questions

We're also interested in hearing about other issues we haven't yet discussed that may affect women in the military. Is there anything else you'd like to talk about with us? We may use your ideas as future topics of DACOWITS research.

18. What do you feel is the biggest challenge to women serving in the military today?
19. If you could send one recommendation back to the Secretary of Defense, what would it be?
20. **[IF NOT ALREADY ADDRESSED:]** As you know, the inappropriate use of social media among Service members has been widely reported in the news lately. How many of you have received guidance about the appropriate use of social media? **[NOTE TAKERS: COUNT THE NUMBER OF HANDS]**
 - a. What suggestions do you have for ensuring the appropriate use of social media?

(MODERATOR: Reinforce confidentiality) We will keep your information confidential—please do so as well by not sharing what you heard with anyone else.

This concludes our discussion. Thank you for taking the time to share your knowledge with us. Your thoughts are valuable to our efforts to inform the Secretary of Defense on these matters.

Once again, thank you very much.