

DACOWITS

Defense Advisory Committee on Women in the Services



2019 Focus Group Report



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Defense Advisory Committee on Women in the Services (DACOWITS)



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Authors

Rachel Gaddes, Zoe Jacobson, Sidra Montgomery, Courtney Moore, Jordan Stangle, Ayanna Williams

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Defense Advisory Committee on Women
in the Services (DACOWITS)
4800 Mark Center Drive, Suite 04J25-01
Alexandria, VA 22350-9000

Project Officer

DACOWITS Executive Staff

Submitted by

Insight Policy Research, Inc.
1901 North Moore Street
Suite 1100
Arlington, VA 22209

Project Director

Rachel Gaddes

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Executive Summary

This summary outlines findings from the 2019 Defense Advisory Committee on Women in the Services (DACOWITS) focus groups. DACOWITS collected qualitative and quantitative data during visits in April and May 2019 to eight military installations representing all four DoD (U.S. Department of Defense) Service branches (Army, Navy, Marine Corps, Air Force). During these focus groups, which were held at Naval Submarine Base Kitsap, Naval Base Everett, Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson – Army, Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson – Air Force, Marine Corps Air Station Miramar, Marine Corps Air Station Yuma, Davis-Monthan Air Force Base, and Fort Huachuca, the Committee addressed three topics:

1. Conscious and unconscious gender bias
2. Pregnancy and parenthood
3. Physical fitness assessments

Chapters 2–4 discuss the findings from each topic, and chapter 5 provides the general focus group comments.

Conscious and Unconscious Gender Bias

What factors encouraged participants to join the military?

Participants were encouraged to join the military by a variety of factors. Most commonly, participants reported interactions with family members who had previously served in the military as their source of encouragement for joining. Other factors included their interactions with recruiters, perceptions of career stability, financial compensation and college tuition benefits, national pride, and the opportunity to leave their hometowns.

What factors discouraged participants from joining the military?

Participants were discouraged from joining the military by a variety of factors. Most commonly, participants cited their families as the primary source of discouragement from joining the military, with participants in some groups being discouraged by family members with military experience and from joining specific branches of the military. Participants in some groups reported that physical fitness requirements, and the fear of failure and the unknown, discouraged them from joining.

Participants also reported mixed opinions on whether men and women experienced similar forms of discouragement from joining. Participants in most groups reported that men and women experienced different forms of discouragement, with participants in nearly half of the groups reporting that women were more likely than men to be discouraged from joining by their families and that women faced greater societal discouragement than men from joining. However, participants in nearly half of the groups reported that men and women experienced similar forms of discouragement from joining for a variety of reasons.

What factors influenced a participant's choice of occupational specialty?

Participants in most groups reported being encouraged to pursue certain occupational specialties by a variety of factors. Most commonly, participants cited interactions with recruiters as a factor that encouraged them to pursue a specific occupational specialty, but participants in some groups also cited their perceptions of the working conditions associated with certain positions, interactions with family members, and the opportunity to learn job skills that were transferable to the civilian world.

Participants in most groups also reported being discouraged from pursuing their desired occupational specialties. Most commonly, participants in half of the groups reported being discouraged by recruiters from the pursuit of their desired occupational specialties, and participants in some groups reported being discouraged if the desired occupational specialty did not align with the needs of the Service. Participants in most of the female groups also reported being discouraged from pursuing their desired occupational specialties because of their gender.

Did participants believe male and female Service members were attracted to the same occupational specialties?

Participants in most groups reported that male and female Service members could be attracted to the same occupational specialty, but participants in some groups suggested that some occupational specialties might be more attractive to certain genders and that Service members were more likely to be attracted to an occupational specialty because of personality rather than gender.

Did participants believe gender bias existed in the recruitment process?

Participants reported mixed perceptions on whether gender bias existed in the recruiting process. Participants from most groups reported that gender bias did exist in the recruiting process in a variety of ways, such as a lack of female recruiters or female-focused recruitment activities, and recruiters who encouraged male and female Service members to pursue different occupational specialties. Participants also provided mixed opinions on the presence of gender bias in Service recruitment materials and advertisements.

Did participants believe gender bias existed in the military as a whole?

Participants in nearly all groups reported that gender bias existed in the military in a variety of ways, including the perception that women received special treatment and the perception that women could not meet the physical

requirements associated with some occupational specialties. Participants in all groups similarly reported that gender bias was more prominent in certain occupational specialties, including those that recently became available for women to pursue.

Participants also reported mixed feelings about whether gender bias in the military affected mission readiness. Participants in some groups reported perceptions that women who become pregnant could be detrimental to mission readiness, and participants in half of the male groups reported that a peer's lack of trust in the ability of female Service members to perform their jobs could negatively impact mission readiness. However, participants in some groups reported that gender bias had no effect on mission readiness.

What were participants' opinions on changes to make language in Service manuals and documents gender neutral?

Participants reported mixed feelings about changes to make language in Service manuals and documents gender neutral, with participants in most groups reporting negative reactions to these changes for a variety of reasons. Participants described gender-neutral language changes as a superficial solution to the issue of gender bias and stated the changes would draw more attention to the differences between men and women. In contrast, participants in most groups also reported positive reactions to these changes, and participants in some groups reported feeling indifferent about the changes.

What were participants' opinions on the impact of making job titles gender neutral with regard to recruitment and attracting women to positions historically perceived as male oriented?

Participants reported mixed opinions on whether changes to make Service position titles gender neutral would affect recruitment. Participants in most groups reported that these changes would have an adverse effect on recruitment for a variety of reasons, including

by negatively affecting the tradition associated with each Service. Participants in half of the groups reported that these changes would positively affect recruitment or that they would have no effect on recruitment.

Participants also reported mixed perceptions on whether changes to make Service position titles gender neutral would attract women to occupational specialties historically viewed as male oriented. Participants in most groups reported that gender-neutral position titles would have no impact on attracting women to these positions, and participants in some groups reported that these changes would have a positive impact.

What were participants' opinions on the response of Service leadership to the issue of gender bias?

Participants reported mixed feelings on whether Service leadership was doing enough to address gender bias. Most commonly, participants reported that Service leadership was working to address gender bias, with participants in some groups reporting that gender bias was an issue localized to units rather than the entire Service, and that unit leadership had made an effort to address gender bias. However, participants in some groups reported that Service leadership was not doing enough to address gender bias.

Participants also reported mixed opinions on the trainings and initiatives implemented by their Services to address gender bias. Most commonly, participants in most groups reported that the Equal Opportunity program was the primary source of training for addressing issues related to gender bias, but participants from some groups noted that gender bias was not addressed through any Service trainings or initiatives.

What were participants' recommendations on how Service or unit leadership could address gender bias?

Participants in some groups recommended implementing a gender-neutral physical fitness

standard, whereas participants in some groups recommended fostering a unit environment where Service members felt comfortable addressing gender related issues. A variety of other recommendations were mentioned by participants in a few groups, including increasing the number of female drill instructors, reducing the number of trainings required of Service members, and focusing efforts on addressing gender bias in occupational specialties recently opened to women.

Pregnancy and Parenthood

What challenges did participants face with career and family planning?

Female participants were more likely than male participants to find it somewhat or very difficult for members of their Services to have a family and continue to advance their careers in the military. Although many participants from all demographic groups felt that having a family and progressing in one's military career was somewhat or very difficult, women were more likely than men, and enlisted personnel and junior officers were more likely than senior officers, to feel this way.

What experiences do servicewomen have surrounding pregnancy?

Male and female participants described a range of challenges that servicewomen could face both during and after pregnancy. Participants in most groups felt that pregnant servicewomen were stigmatized and that pregnancy had a negative effect on the unit. However, some groups reported pregnancy did not have a substantial impact on their units because of the less demanding physical requirements of their day-to-day occupational specialty work. Participants also described difficulties associated with Service member confusion about pregnancy-related policies and medical challenges women could experience while working in military environments. Another challenge participants raised was the negative impact of pregnancy on a woman's career

progression in the military. Participants identified a range of military policies and support resources available to pregnant servicewomen.

How available, affordable, and functional were maternity uniforms?

Participants had mixed feelings on the availability of maternity uniforms in their Services. In most groups, participants reported that maternity uniforms were readily available for pregnant and postpartum servicewomen. However, some groups identified challenges with the availability of maternity uniforms, particularly in overseas locations or with finding the correct size. Participants reported a range of sources from which servicewomen obtain or borrow maternity uniforms. The expense of maternity uniforms was the greatest challenge identified by participants. Half the participants felt that maternity uniforms were not flattering to servicewomen, and participants recommended improving the comfort and utility of these uniforms by adding pockets, making the waistband more comfortable, and increasing their adjustability.

What were participants' perceptions of breastfeeding and lactation support in their respective Services?

DACOWITS found that the majority of participants had known someone who had breastfed or expressed milk while at work. When asked about policies and resources for breastfeeding servicewomen, participants in all groups confirmed there were policies that required a designated lactation room. However, participants' experiences with the existence and quality of designated lactation spaces varied. Reported challenges for breastfeeding servicewomen included a lack of designated lactation rooms, stigma for needing time to express milk while at work, and issues being able to find time to express milk at work. Participants recommended more lactation rooms, increased policy education, and efforts to reduce the stigma associated with breastfeeding.

How, if at all, did postdeployment family reintegration experiences differ by gender?

Although the majority of participants reported knowing someone who had deployed as a parent, male participants were more likely than female participants to have had the experience of deploying as a parent. Participants identified two common challenges for parents returning from deployment: the emotional challenges of reintegration, and the difficult reconnection process with their children. Participants identified a number of current military and civilian resources that supported Service members during the postdeployment reintegration process. Participants shared mixed opinions on whether military mothers and military fathers faced different experiences in the postdeployment reintegration period and also held mixed opinions on whether there should be separate family reintegration resources for male and female military parents. Finally, participants provided recommendations on how the Services could better support military parents during the postdeployment reintegration period.

How aware were participants about military child care options?

When asked about child care options for Service members, participants reported a range of military and civilian child care arrangements. Participant perceptions of different child care options varied. When asked about their recognition of militarychildcare.com, the gateway website for DoD child care options, only 2 out of 10 participants affirmed they had heard of this website. Of those who had visited militarychildcare.com, perceptions on the ease and functionality of the website were mixed. Participants suggested several ways the military could better support Service members in need of child care, primarily with offering more flexible child care options within the military child care system and reducing the long waitlists on installations.

Physical Fitness Assessments

What were participants' understanding and experience with the physical fitness assessment (PFA)?

Participants reported a range of frequency in how often they took the PFA. Participants in some groups indicated they took the test twice a year, once a year, or that the frequency depended on one's medical exemptions. Participants said that medical exemptions could result from injury, pregnancy, or being a postpartum mother. Participants in most groups described similar components for the PFAs for their respective Services but noted there were test-scoring differences for men and women. Participants in most groups reported that the PFA included cardiovascular (e.g., running); strength (e.g., pushups or pullups); and core (e.g., situps) components. Participants in at least half of the groups noted there was an alternative cardiovascular activity (e.g., swimming, bicycling, or walking) for Service members who were medically exempt. Participants in the majority of groups reported that the scoring parameters for the PFA varied by gender.

What were participants' perceptions of the impact of the PFA?

Participants indicated that scoring poorly on the PFA could have a negative impact on one's career such as enrollment in a fitness improvement program, administrative action, impact on promotion potential, and being discharged from the Service. When asked whether their Services' PFAs affected men and women differently, participants in the majority of groups reported no difference in the impact of the PFA by gender.

How did participants interpret the purposes of the PFA and the Occupational Standards Assessment (OSA)?

When asked about the purpose of the PFA, most participants indicated that it was to ensure mission readiness. Participants in some

groups perceived the purpose of the PFA was to ensure Service members were living a healthy lifestyle. When asked about the difference between the PFA and the OSA, participants most commonly noted that the PFA was a general assessment and that the OSA was occupation specific.

What were participants' perceptions of the effectiveness of the PFA?

When asked whether the PFA effectively measured Service members' health and whether this effectiveness varied for men and women, participants reported mixed opinions. For example, participants noted that the PFA did not effectively measure or adjust scores for the varying body types of Service members and did not identify or measure a wide spectrum of health and wellness outcomes. In contrast, participants in some groups reported that the PFA properly measured health. Despite varying opinions on whether the PFA was an accurate measure of health, participants in most groups agreed that the physical fitness test was equally ineffective for men and women.

What were participants' experiences training and preparing for the PFA?

The majority of participants noted they trained for the PFA three to five times per month or that group physical fitness training was optional. In approximately half of the groups, participants noted they trained for the PFA through unit-led workouts and individual training sessions. Of note, participants in some groups reported that command-led physical training had a positive impact on unit morale.

Participants had mixed opinions on whether men and women should train in the same manner for the PFA. Participants in approximately half of the groups suggested that men and women should not train differently. Participants in many groups suggested that test takers should train based on their individual needs.

What were participants' experiences with resources to improve their wellness and fitness?

When asked how Service members trained for the PFA and what resources were available to support them in these efforts, participants listed fitness facilities, fitness trainers, nutritionists, and nutritional classes.

Participants revealed that the availability and effectiveness of fitness trainers and nutrition classes varied from installation to installation. Participants in some groups reported that physical fitness leaders were not available for consultation or were not properly trained to serve as effective resources for those who needed to improve their PFA scores. Similarly, although participants in some groups reported that nutritionists were available, there was a wide spectrum of opinions surrounding nutritionists' helpfulness.

What were participants' suggestions for improving overall wellness and fitness?

When asked which additional or improved resources Service members desired to have to prepare for the PFA or improve their general health and nutrition, participants in many groups suggested providing additional nutrition-related resources, increasing access to fitness facilities, providing healthier food options on installations, and increasing promotion of currently available health and wellness resources. To better support Service members' wellness and fitness, participants suggested the Services improve the design of their respective PFAs, incorporate broader measures of health and wellness into the PFA, implement an objective standard for the PFA, adjust scoring of the PFA for different body types, increase accessibility of physical fitness leaders, provide more funding for conditioning programs, provide physical therapists to prevent PFA-related injuries, and design the PFA to better assess one's ability to perform a job.

General Comments

What were participants' perspectives on gender integration?

When asked how well they thought the gender integration process was going, in general, participants supported integration but cited a perception about the lowering of standards in newly integrated units or positions and emphasized the importance of ensuring women were able to meet the job requirements. Some participants saw the status of the initiative as positive, and their comments tended to mirror those from previous DACOWITS studies. Although some thought the process was going well, participants in some groups also mentioned obstacles to gender integration and cited challenges with gender-based discrimination. Finally, participants from some groups described challenges with a lack of female role models.

What challenges for women in the military did participants report?

The most commonly cited challenge for women in the military was gender-based discrimination. Participants in most groups reported experiencing prejudice or stereotyping based on their gender, including a perception that women were unequal to men, resulting in servicewomen working harder than men to prove themselves, and a male-centric culture that placed a higher value on male voices. Participants in most groups also shared challenges related to pregnancy and childrearing, including stigma surrounding pregnancy and childrearing and additional difficulty women faced navigating their careers when planning to start a family or after becoming a caregiver. Participants in approximately half of the groups cited challenges striking a healthy professional and personal life balance.

What were participants' suggestions for the Secretary of Defense?

When asked what suggestions they would make to the Secretary of Defense, participants offered recommendations on a variety of topics. The most common suggestions were related to family support: increase the capacity of DoD child care centers, improve expectations for family care plans, increase the access to and knowledge of sabbaticals and other alternative career paths, and lengthen caregiver leave.

Participants from some groups made recommendations for improving the current physical fitness assessments in general and about one Service's plan for a gender- and age-neutral physical fitness assessment more specifically.

Suggested modifications to the PFA included implementing universal physical fitness standards and occupational standards, and changing the current female height-weight standards and the associated procedures used to ensure Service members meet the physical standards (i.e., the "tape test" to measure body fat). Participants also discussed their concerns about the implementation of and strategies to improve a gender- and age-neutral physical fitness assessment. Participants emphasized the need to explore the impacts of such an assessment before implementation, especially for injured Service members or those who had previously had a caesarean section. Participants also cited concerns that morale could decrease if those who historically had performed well on physical fitness tests struggled with the new fitness standards.

Chapter 1. Introduction and Methods

This report outlines the findings from the 2019 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 5 present the findings on conscious and unconscious gender bias, pregnancy and parenthood, physical fitness tests, and general focus group comments, respectively.

A. Focus Group Overview

DACOWITS collected qualitative and quantitative data during site visits in April and May 2019 to eight military installations¹ representing all four U.S. Department of Defense (DoD) Service branches (Army, Navy, Marine Corps, Air Force; see Appendix A). During the focus groups at these sites, the Committee addressed three topics:

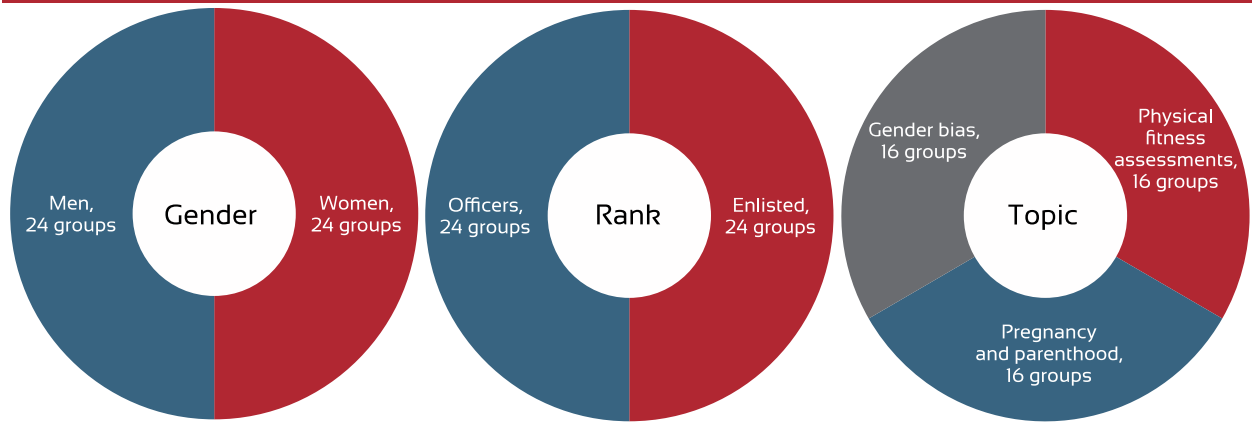
1. Conscious and unconscious gender bias
2. Pregnancy and parenthood
3. Physical fitness assessments

In partnership with researchers from Insight Policy Research, the Committee developed a series of focus group protocols (see Appendix C); each protocol consisted of one topic module to ensure each study topic was addressed by each Service, gender, and pay grade group. Each focus group lasted 90 minutes and addressed one topic module. Committee members facilitated focus group discussions to elicit and assess the views, attitudes, and experiences of Service members regarding the selected study topics. The Committee also distributed mini-surveys to the participants to determine the demographic composition of the groups (see Appendix B). Mini-survey findings are presented throughout the report including results for several supplemental questions in Appendix B-1. All the data collection instruments were reviewed and considered exempt by the institutional review board for Insight's subcontractor, ICF, with concurrence from DoD's Office of the Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness, to ensure the protection of human subjects.

DACOWITS conducted 48 focus groups in 2019. Of the 48 groups, 24 were held with men, and 24 were held with women. Twenty-four of the groups were conducted with enlisted personnel (pay grades E4–E8), and 24 were held with officers (pay grades O3–O5 and W1–W5). There were 475 distinct participants with an average of 10 participants per session. DACOWITS addressed the topic of conscious and unconscious gender bias in 16 groups, pregnancy and parenthood in 16 groups, and physical fitness tests in 16 groups. Each installation was responsible for recruiting focus group participants from the demographic categories specified by DACOWITS (see Figure 1.1).

¹ The eight installations were Naval Submarine Base Kitsap, Naval Base Everett, Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson – Army, Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson – Air Force, Marine Corps Air Station Miramar, Marine Corps Air Station Yuma, Davis-Monthan Air Force Base, and Fort Huachuca. The focus group protocols were not pretested.

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 (51 percent), and half were women (49 percent). Four Services—the Army (28 percent), Navy (22 percent), Marine Corps (22 percent), and Air Force (27 percent)—were nearly equally represented. The majority of participants (98 percent) were active duty. Participants ranged widely in age, from 18 to 40 and older. Participants in the youngest age category (aged 18–20) composed smaller percentages of the group.

Enlisted personnel represented more than half of focus group participants (52 percent): Service members with pay grades E4–E6 made up the largest proportion of enlisted personnel (38 percent), followed by those with pay grades E7–E9 (13 percent) and E1–E3 (1 percent). The largest subset of officers was composed of those with pay grades O1–O3 (27 percent), followed by those with pay grades of O4 or higher (14 percent) and WO1–WO5 (6 percent).

Focus group participants represented varying levels of tenure in the Military Services and were relatively equally distributed across all categories. Those with fewer than 3 years of service (6 percent) and 20 or more years of service (12 percent) were least represented, whereas the remaining tenures were nearly equally represented (19 to 22 percent). A majority of participants identified as White (72 percent); smaller proportions identified as Black (15 percent), Asian (6 percent), American Indian or Alaska Native (1 percent), or multiple races (5 percent). About one in six participants identified as Hispanic (15 percent). Subsequent chapters in this report provide the results for the topic-specific mini-survey questions.

Table 1.1. Focus Group Participant Demographics

Participant Characteristic	Percentage of Women (n = 232)	Percentage of Men (n = 242)	Percentage of All Participants (n = 475)
Gender			
Missing	0	0	0
Total	49	51	100
Service Branch			
Army	29	28	28
Navy	20	24	22
Marine Corps	23	21	22
Air Force	28	26	27
Missing	0	0	0
Total	100	100	100
National Guard or Reserves			
Yes	3	1	2
No	97	99	98
Missing	0	0	0
Total	100	100	100
Age			
18–20	2	2	2
21–24	19	10	15
25–29	24	21	22
30–34	23	26	25
35–39	19	21	20
40 or older	13	20	16
Missing	0	0	0
Total	100	100	100
Pay Grade			
E1–E3	1	1	1
E4–E6	44	33	38
E7–E9	13	13	13
WO1–WO5	3	8	6
O1–O3	25	30	27
O4 or higher	14	14	14
Missing	0	0	0
Total	100	100	100
Length of Military Service			
Less than 3 years	9	4	6
3–5 years	27	16	21
6–9 years	20	19	19
10–14 years	19	20	20
15–19 years	20	23	21
20 years or more	6	17	12
Missing	0	1	0
Total	100	100	100

Participant Characteristic	Percentage of Women (n = 232)	Percentage of Men (n = 242)	Percentage of All Participants (n = 475)
Race²			
Asian	6	5	6
Black	17	12	15
American Indian or Alaska Native	2	0	1
Pacific Islander	0	1	1
White	64	74	69
Multiple races	6	5	5
Missing	5	3	4
Total	100	100	100
Hispanic			
Yes	18	12	15
No	80	87	84
Missing	3	0	1
Total	100	100	100
Relationship Status			
Divorced	9	8	9
Married to a civilian or veteran	24	66	45
Married to a current Service member	32	5	18
Never married	33	20	26
Separated	2	1	1
Widowed	0	0	0
Missing	0	0	0
Total	100	100	100

Some percentages do not sum to 100 because of rounding.

One participant did not select a gender. This participant is included in the “all participants” column.

Source: DACOWITS mini-survey (data from all the 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 to remove identifiers from participants’ quotes. 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 12), 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, 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.

² This question asked participants to select all that applied. Participants who selected more than one race are included in the “multiple” row.

1. 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. The recruitment of participants for a focus group cannot be replicated, it is difficult to ensure identical questions are asked in each group, and the results for one group cannot be compared precisely with those for 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.

As a result of the small sample size, 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 the groups, and not all participants are able to answer each question (see Figure 1.2).

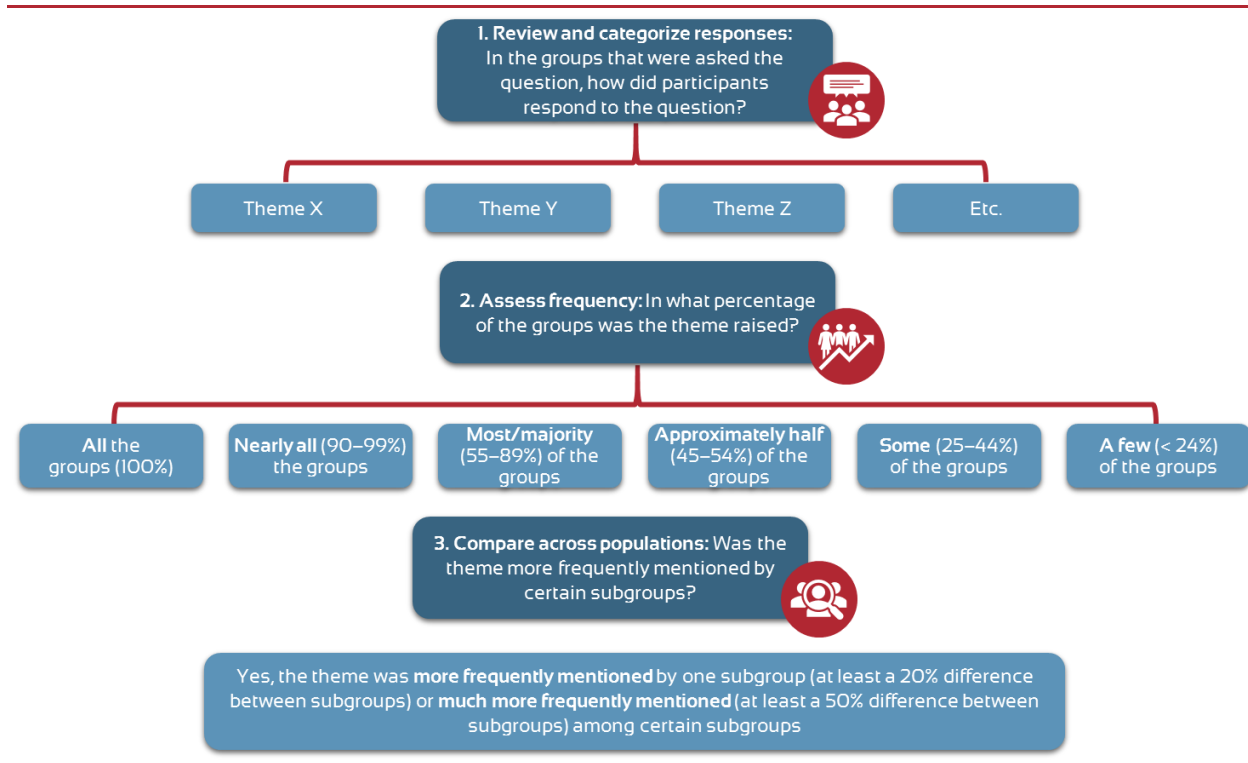
Figure 1.2. Collecting Data Through Structured Focus Group Conversations



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 a specific topic and in response to a particular question that was asked, the report uses “all” for themes that emerged in all the groups in which the question was asked; “nearly all” for themes in 90–99 percent of the groups; “most” or “majority” for themes in 55–89 percent of the groups; “approximately half” for themes in 45–54 percent of the groups; and “some” for themes in 25–44 percent of the groups. To ensure the report focuses on the most commonly reported themes rather than those that emerged in only a few groups, aside from lists of participant suggestions, this report typically does not include themes that emerged in fewer than 25 percent of the groups in which a particular question was asked. However in a handful of instances, the report uses the term “a few” for themes that emerged in fewer than 24 percent of groups in which the question was asked.

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 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. When comparing whether the theme was more frequently mentioned by certain subgroups (e.g., men, women, officers, enlisted personnel, members of one Service), the report uses the term “more frequently mentioned” to identify a theme that was mentioned at least 20 percent more often by one subgroup than others and “much more frequently mentioned” to identify a theme that was mentioned at least 50 percent more often by one subgroup than others. 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. An overview of the analysis structure is outlined in figure 1.3.

Figure 1.3. Overview of Analysis Process



Chapter 2. Conscious and Unconscious Gender Bias

DACOWITS investigated the perceptions of Service members about the presence of conscious and unconscious gender bias and how it affected their decisions to join the military during the recruitment process and pursue certain occupational specialties. The Committee was interested in learning about factors that encouraged and discouraged Service members from joining the military and pursuing particular occupational specialties. The Committee was also interested in learning about how the Services were addressing gender bias in the military. This investigation continued DACOWITS' previous research on gender discrimination, sexual harassment, and sexual assault.

The Committee conducted 16 focus groups with enlisted personnel (E4–E8) and officers (O3–O5/W1–W5) on the topic of conscious and unconscious gender bias (see Appendix C.1 for the focus group protocol). This chapter discusses the focus group findings on conscious and unconscious gender bias and is organized into the following sections:

- ▶ Factors that encouraged joining the military
- ▶ Factors that discouraged joining the military
- ▶ Factors influencing choice of occupational specialty
- ▶ Occupational specialty preference by gender
- ▶ Gender bias during the recruitment process
- ▶ Presence and impact of gender bias in the military
- ▶ Perceptions on gender-neutral language and title changes
- ▶ Impact of changes to make language gender neutral
- ▶ Leadership response to gender bias
- ▶ Recommendations to address gender bias

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. Factors That Encouraged Joining the Military

DACOWITS asked focus group participants about factors that encouraged them or could encourage others to join the military. Participants mentioned a variety of factors that encouraged them to join; these included benefits, career stability, and national pride. Participants from all focus groups also highlighted the influence of family members with military experience as a motivator that encouraged them to join.

1. Participants in all the groups were encouraged to join by family members who previously served in the military

The influence of family members who had served in the military consistently emerged as a factor that encouraged participants to join. Participants in all the groups reported their decisions to join were

influenced by learning about their families' history of military service or by receiving firsthand guidance from family members who had served. Women were more likely than men to provide this response.

"My family is military. My dad is retired, and my sister [was in the Reserve Officer Training Corps] for college and was in the [Service]. We were stationed in [State] when my dad retired, and I grew up with military around all the time. It was all I knew. . . . That's why I decided to [join]."

—Female officer

"My grandfather was a [Service member]. He passed away before I was born, so it was my desire to try to connect with him [by joining the military], and I just stuck around."

—Male officer

"I'm from Puerto Rico, so [joining the military] was a good way to leave the island. My mom and stepdad were in the military. . . . They left the island and told me [joining the military] was a good way to leave."

—Enlisted man

"My grandfather used to tell stories [about his service] all the time. That was my biggest influence."

—Enlisted woman

2. Participants in most of the groups were encouraged to join because of benefits offered by the military

Benefits offered by the military arose as a major factor that encouraged participants to join. Participants in most of the groups reported that their decisions to join were positively influenced by the variety of benefits offered by the military, including financial compensation and college tuition assistance. Officers were more likely than enlisted personnel to provide this response.

a. Participants in most of the groups were encouraged to join because of financial compensation

Financial compensation offered by the military, including bonuses for joining and salaries, encouraged participants to join. Participants from one Service were most likely to provide this response.

"I was a [civilian] pilot. . . . [The Service] said they would pay me money to do what I was [being paid to do on the outside]."

—Male officer

"[The recruiter] got my attention with retiring at 38 years old and immediate payment from my first day in the military. I came from a modest background [and] couldn't pay for school and didn't do great in school, so military was right."

—Male officer

"[I was the first person in my family] to go to college, so I had no idea what to study. I got an education degree. My recruiter said, 'Want to fly?' I said, 'I need a job.' [The military offers] pay and benefits . . . [and] stability . . . that civilian life doesn't."

—Female officer

"[The financial benefits help support] your family, depending on the situation that you are in. Everyone has their own personal reason—inspirational or something cut and dry like they don't have the money and they need to take care of their parents, children, etc. The majority of people I come in contact with, that's why they join."

—Enlisted woman

b. Participants in most of the groups were encouraged to join because of college tuition assistance

Assistance with college tuition was cited as an encouraging factor to join by participants in most of the groups. This theme was reported more frequently by participants from one Service. Women were more likely than men, and officers were much more likely than enlisted personnel, to cite this factor.

"I applied for a [Reserve Officer Training Corps] scholarship and got it. Basically, I had the choice of schools I wanted to go to. . . . My mom [said], 'We'll pay for your college.' I said I have a full ride, [so you don't need to pay for my college]."

—Female officer

"For me, I was in [Service] [Reserve Officer Training Corps] in high school, so military has always been one of those things that was an option. When I first joined, my intent was not to stay. My intent was to use the GI bill to pay for school."

—Male officer

"My parents said, 'You're going to college, but we can't give you a dime.' I had a [Reserve Officer Training Corps] full ride scholarship."

—Female officer

"Benefits. Education. That's huge. Everyone I went to high school with is struggling with student loans, and I have none."

—Enlisted woman

3. Participants in most of the groups were encouraged to join by interactions with recruiters

Participants in most of the groups said their conversations with recruiters encouraged them to join. Women were more likely than men, and enlisted personnel were much more likely than officers, to provide this response.

"When I was a senior in high school, a friend tricked me into going into the recruiting station. . . . The recruiter was very honest with me . . . [and said], 'I'm not going to [lie to] you; I'm going to tell you how it really is. I don't want you going in blind.' I appreciated it; honesty is a big deal for me."

—Enlisted woman

"[I went to] the recruitment events at my high school. . . . I went to the career office, and they had other [Service] branches there. I shopped around."

—Enlisted man

“My cousin had an appointment with a [Service] recruiter, and I gave him a ride, and they started showing us all the benefits [offered by the military]. Before [that interaction], I had no intention [of joining the military].”

—Male officer

“For me, it was the easiest way to leave where I was from. . . . It was different than what everyone else did. I wanted to travel, and they had a career fair at school, and a [Service] recruiter there talked to me [about joining].”

—Enlisted woman

4. Participants in most of the groups were encouraged to join because of perceived career stability

Participants cited perceptions of the career stability offered by the military as a factor that encouraged them to join. Enlisted personnel were much more likely than officers to provide this response.

“For some people, it’s opportunities for a consistent career you can depend on and job skills. I’ve heard that most.”

—Male officer

“[The military offers] job security. . . . Coming from an oil field community, the boom came and went. Well, that’s what my family does—so what am I going to do now? I have nothing. The . . . military in general is there and will always be there. It’s reassuring.”

—Enlisted woman

“My dad was a [Service member] and sent me to a recruiter. The things that caught me were the money—I got a big bonus to join—and job stability.”

—Enlisted woman

“It was a secure job [that did not require] formal education.”

—Enlisted man

5. Participants in most of the groups were encouraged to join because of national pride

National pride was reported as a factor that encouraged participants and others to join the military. Participants highlighted the events of September 11, 2001; patriotism; and the desire to give back to their country.

“[Serving gives] a sense of giving back to the country. You grow up here and look around and feel thankful for the freedoms you enjoy. Even when you don’t grow up here or you aren’t a citizen, you look around and want to give back.”

—Male officer

“9/11 happened, [and] the country was more patriotic. I had a buddy who was a senior when I was a sophomore in high school. He died in Iraq [during] my senior year. I saw the funeral and the noble cause [and] the ‘Pat Tillman’ type of respect that was given to him, and I wanted to do something like that.”

—Male officer

"I entered [the] delayed entry [program] 11 days after 9/11. I was married [into the] military, and I also wanted to join [because of] patriotism."

—Enlisted woman

"9/11—I was in high school when it happened. After that . . . , [the news] broke that America was going to war. My best friend and I decided we wanted to serve. We went down and signed up."

—Enlisted man

6. Participants in most of the groups were encouraged to join by opportunities to leave their hometowns

Participants in most of the groups were encouraged to join the military as a way to move away from their hometowns. In some cases, Service members joined to escape limited career opportunities or negative home situations. Men were more likely than women to provide this response.

"We have some young [Service members] in our office. A lot of them come from bad situations where they may lack opportunities. A lot of them are trying to get out of their hometowns and [away from] the people they were associated with prior to service."

—Female officer

"I've had a lot of [Service members] who have said [joining the military] is about escaping a small town and home life."

—Enlisted woman

"I grew up in Detroit, and the area was rough. I wanted to see what was bigger than the Detroit parameters. I wanted to get out of the inner city and see what life was about."

—Enlisted man

"I was 24 [years old] . . . before I considered realistically joining. Where I am from, after [age] 25, people . . . just don't leave. . . . I wanted to get away before I decided to stay there for good."

—Male officer

7. Participants in some of the groups were encouraged to join because of displeasure with their premilitary careers or postsecondary fields of study

Displeasure with one's career or academic field of study was another factor that encouraged participants in some of the groups to join the military. Enlisted personnel were more likely than officers, and women were much more likely than men, to cite this reason, as were members from one Service versus the others.

"When I joined college and started as pre-law, I decided I didn't want to be a lawyer."

—Female officer

"I had a [desk job] before, and I wanted something that was different."

—Female officer

"I got tired of college. I saw the posters around campus and thought I would give [joining the military] a shot."

—Enlisted woman

"I was 25 and wanted a change. I wanted to do something different. I worked for a glass company [before joining]."

—Enlisted man

8. Participants in some of the groups were encouraged to join because of a lack of career and academic opportunities

Participants in some of the groups reported being motivated to join because there were few career and academic prospects available to them outside of the military. Women were more likely than men, and enlisted personnel were much more likely than officers, to provide this response.

"I enlisted at 17 in the [Service] to leave [my home State]. . . . I did not get a scholarship, nor did I prioritize college. I jacked up [my grades] in high school, so [I] thought I would start over in the [Service]. I did that. I went to a recruiter."

—Female officer

"I come from a small town, so the same recruiter that put me in the [the military] put my brother in 2 years prior. I also had no other option. I figured I could retire and [receive a] paycheck at 20."

—Enlisted woman

"I have some friends who came in because [they had a] lack of direction, and so it was something to do."

—Enlisted woman

"I didn't have money to go to college, and everyone was going where I grew up. I knew that I needed to do something. I went down to join [Service A], but a [Service B] friend hit me up first."

—Enlisted man

9. Participants in some of the groups were encouraged to join because of perceived opportunities to travel

The possibility of travel motivated participants from some of the groups to join. Enlisted personnel were more likely than officers, and men were much more likely than women, to provide this response.

"[I was encouraged to join because of] an opportunity to travel."

—Enlisted man

"I'm a military brat . . . , so I knew the [military] way of life. I enjoyed moving and traveling."

—Female officer

"Travel benefits [were enticing to me]."

—Enlisted man

B. Factors That Discouraged Joining the Military

DACOWITS also asked focus group participants about factors that deterred them or could deter others from joining the military. Participants mentioned a variety of discouraging factors, including concerns about the ability to meet physical requirements and the fear of not knowing what to expect from military life. Participants also reported facing discouragement from a variety of sources such as family, friends, and military recruiters.

DACOWITS asked participants to think about the time when they were deciding whether to join the military and to indicate whether they ever felt or were discouraged from joining. Hand-count data revealed that slightly fewer than half of participants felt discouraged prior to joining; about 6 in 10 women and 3 in 10 men reported this experience (see Figure 2.1).

Figure 2.1. Proportion of Participants by Gender Who Felt Discouraged From Joining the Military



Source: Focus group transcripts

1. Participants in most of the groups were discouraged from joining by family members

Participants in most of the groups reported being discouraged from joining the military by family members in a variety of ways—for example, by disapproval from family members who had previously served in the military as well as those who had not, and discouragement from joining particular Services. Enlisted personnel were more likely than officers to report discouragement by family members.

“My father threatened me if I wanted to go enlisted. I said if I don't get into [officer training school], I would enlist. I would have been kicked out of the family. He said, ‘Absolutely not. . . . You will just get that degree.’”

—Female officer

“Sometimes parents talk kids out of it. [Joining the military is] dangerous, and they don't want [their kids] to risk their life.”

—Male officer

“We had workouts and everything. My parents were leaving me in the gym for 8 hours a day, and I was improving, but they couldn’t see it, and they were like, ‘You can’t do this.’ I was leaving for boot camp, and they said, ‘You’ll be back in a week.’”

—Enlisted woman

“My husband received a letter from his mom the day he went to [the Service] telling him that she was disappointed that he was abandoning the family. His brother said the same thing—that he was separating from the family and abandoning the family, and he would never see him again.”

—Enlisted woman

“When I was getting ready to leave for [the Service], we were having a family get-together. One of my own family members confronted me and said, ‘I don’t get why you couldn’t go get a real job.’ Well, he’s still sitting at home with no job, and here I am.”

—Enlisted man

a. Participants in some of the groups were discouraged from joining by family members with military experience

Although participants in most of the groups reported being encouraged to join after hearing about their family’s history related to military service or receiving firsthand guidance from family members who had served, participants in some of the groups reported they were discouraged from joining by family members who had served or had seen the experiences of other family members who had served.

“My parents both actively discouraged me because both their dads were in the [Service]. My parents didn’t experience the [Service] life, but they experienced the [post-traumatic stress disorder] after World War II. They experienced the negatives of when someone experiences the military for a long time.”

—Enlisted man

“My dad fought in the [Service] during Vietnam, and it was a different mindset. He said, ‘I don’t want you to see the things I saw.’ He was also not an officer, so [for him, it was] just a different time and different opinion of things.”

—Female officer

“My dad was in the [Service] in the late 80s and early 90s. For him, he was not on board [with me joining] because he said, ‘I see how females get treated [in the military], and I don’t want that for you.’ I had to choose between enlisting or living under his roof, and here I am.”

—Enlisted woman

“[My grandfather] was an [occupational specialist], and he was always [fighting overseas]. . . . His big thing was that he didn’t want me to have to go through anything similar [to what he did] with the horrors that happened to him in [foreign country]. He wanted to make sure that I was mentally prepared.”

—Enlisted man

b. Participants in some of the groups were discouraged from joining specific Services by their families

Participants in some of the groups reported being advised against joining certain branches of the military by family members. Officers were more likely than enlisted personnel to provide this response.

"My dad was [Service] and served enlisted, and he had seen the [way] women were treated [in the military] and said, 'No way you're joining. . . . [He said], 'If there's one Service that maybe you could think about, it's [Service].' [He] had seen that typically, they treated the family better than other branches. . . . Now he's proud of me."

—Female officer

"I talked to my mom, and she was like, 'No, you're not joining the [Service].' So it wasn't until . . . after I graduated high school, when life got harder, that I realized that if I wanted to be able to go to college, I needed to join the [Service]. She didn't want me to join the [Service] specifically."

—Male officer

"My dad was enlisted [Service], and while he didn't have a problem with me wanting to join, he said, 'Definitely don't go [Service]. . . . ' The rest of my family saw the toll that serving took on my dad and didn't want me to have the same problems, with the war and mocking at home. They were not supportive."

—Male officer

"My parents [discouraged me]. We are all going to have those parents that try to talk you out of joining the military, [especially] the [Service]."

—Enlisted man

2. Participants in some of the groups were discouraged from joining because of the physical requirements associated with the military

Participants in some of the groups reported concern about their ability to meet the physical requirements associated with the military as a discouraging factor. This theme was mentioned more frequently by one Service, much more frequently by women than men, and only by enlisted personnel.

"Physical feats [are a discouraging factor]. . . . Especially in high school, I was very unfit, and people didn't think I could . . . go into the military being so physically unfit."

—Enlisted woman

"When you first join, the . . . run [is a concern]. I've always been a sports player, but I [had] never had to run [that much]."

—Enlisted woman

"The physical strength [requirement] scares you a little bit, but once you get in [the military], it doesn't mean anything."

—Enlisted man

3. Participants in some of the groups were discouraged from joining by a fear of the unknown and failure

A fear of failing as well as not knowing what to expect from life in the military discouraged participants in some of the groups. This response was provided more frequently by members of one Service versus the others.

"Fear of the unknown [is discouraging]. I was the first person in my family to join the military. I was ignorant [about] what it involved. My family was the same way."

—Male officer

"Fear of the unknown [can be a discouraging factor]."

—Male officer

"For me, it wasn't outside forces but more so doubt in myself. I probably wanted to live up to my father's expectations . . . , so [I had] a fear of failure. My brother joined the [Service] and got hurt during boot camp and got sent home, so I thought, 'What If I get hurt?'"

—Enlisted woman

"The most discouraging part was the fear of the unknown; not knowing what to expect."

—Enlisted woman

4. Participants' opinions were mixed on whether men and women experienced similar forms of discouragement from joining the military

DACOWITS also asked participants whether men and women underwent the same types of discouragement from joining the military. Although participants in most of the groups reported that men and women were discouraged in different ways, participants in nearly half of the groups reported the opposite perception.

a. Participants in most of the groups reported that men and women experienced dissimilar forms of discouragement from joining

The perception that men and women experienced different forms of discouragement from joining the military was reported by participants in most of the groups. For example, participants said women were more likely to be discouraged from joining by their families, women were more likely than men to experience societal discouragement from joining, and concerns about sexual assault and sexual harassment were specific to women. Broadly, women were more likely than men, and enlisted personnel were more likely than officers, to report that men and women were discouraged in different ways from joining.

b. Participants in nearly half of the groups reported that women were more likely than men to be discouraged from joining by their families

In nearly half of the groups, participants perceived that women were more likely than men to be deterred from joining by their families. Enlisted personnel were more likely than officers to provide this response.

"It's easier for men going in, but when I told my parents I wanted to join, they said that it didn't make sense. They don't expect women to get in because they think it's harder because of the physical requirements and our physique."

—Enlisted woman

"I would think a parent would discourage a daughter more than a son. . . . If my sister had brought [up joining the military], my parents wouldn't have let her join."

—Male officer

"I think some of it comes to family tradition. . . . Since our country has been [at] war for 18-plus years, that fear of sending our daughter and wives into those [areas is real]. [There is a] perception of not wanting to send our daughters but sending our sons."

—Enlisted woman

"As my kids get older, would I encourage my daughters versus my son? I think my instinct is to want to protect [my daughters]. I don't know that I would trust a military Service as much with daughters as [I would with my] son."

—Male officer

c. Participants in nearly half of the groups reported that women faced greater societal discouragement than men from joining

Participants in nearly half of the groups perceived that women experienced greater societal discouragement than men from joining the military. This theme was reported more frequently by women than men, and much more frequently by enlisted personnel than officers.

"Both of my stepsisters joined the military and received lots of pressure from family and friends to not [join]. It's still male dominated, and [women] experience pressures different [than men], like how to have kids and take care of the house while being in the military. They [experienced] tremendous pressure to not join, but they did it anyway."

—Enlisted man

"[There is] more of a push in society to urge women not to do . . . dangerous things, to tell them [the military] might not be for [them], whether [they] can do it or not."

—Male officer

"I'm from the Midwest, and a lot of people [there] still view jobs as men and women specific. I was a waitress there, and we had an older couple who wouldn't be served by the male waiter because they saw it as a female's job."

—Enlisted woman

"As females, we are doubted immediately. For males, it is 'At least you tried.' For females . . . , you are still going to be doubted up front [when joining]."

—Enlisted woman

d. Participants in some of the groups cited concerns about sexual harassment and sexual assault in the military as a discouragement specific to women

Concerns related to the potential for sexual harassment and sexual assault in the military were mentioned as a discouraging factor specific to women by participants in some of the groups. Enlisted personnel were more likely than officers to provide this response.

"I think for women, some of the things you'll see in the news, like sexual harassment and assault and the way they are handled [in the military], would make parents discourage their daughters from joining."

—Female officer

"I have two daughters, and I'd have to question whether I [would] want them in the military. Thinking about even TV shows [such as] "CSI," [and] "House of Cards" . . . , they bring up sexual assault in the military. I'd question it for my daughters. I know there's more discouragement for women because of the perception of the harm that can be done."

—Male officer

"I think for me, my brothers all look at me [and ask], 'How is she going to protect herself [from sexual assault]?' But if it was one of my brothers [joining the military, it] wouldn't have been a question of how he would protect himself."

—Enlisted woman

"I agree with the sexual harassment [being a concern]. Even with my sisters considering the military, I discouraged them from joining. . . . Seeing how the females in my unit are treated, I discouraged them from joining the military."

—Enlisted man

e. Participants in nearly half of the groups reported men and women experienced similar forms of discouragement from joining the military

Although participants in most of the groups perceived that men and women were discouraged in different ways from joining the military, participants in nearly half of the groups reported an opposite perception. Men were more likely than women to provide this response.

"Especially now and with the community I'm in, I don't really see a huge difference [in reasons why men and women are discouraged from joining], especially [under] my last command. It [had] a greater percentage of women than men. The opportunities are not gender specific. [Joining the military is] equally attractive for men and women."

—Male officer

"In the early 90s, women in the [Service] were limited to where they could be assigned, so the opportunities weren't equal with men. That's where women would get discouraged. It did change [recently]."

—Male officer

"I don't think there are different reasons . . . ; there are common ones, like maybe your family is not pro-military."

—Enlisted woman

“There [are] plenty [of discouraging factors that are] the same [for men and women]. Previous criminal history, fitness level . . . ; there are plenty of things that might discourage someone.”

—Enlisted man

f. Participants also reported a variety of other forms of discouragement from joining the military experienced by both men and women

Participants reported a range of other forms of discouragement from joining the military that men and women experienced similarly, such as the following:

- ▶ Encouraged to pursue other opportunities
- ▶ Low salary
- ▶ Military lifestyle
- ▶ Physical fitness requirements
- ▶ Body composition requirements
- ▶ Criminal history

C. Factors Influencing Choice of Occupational Specialty

DACOWITS also asked focus group participants whether they were encouraged to pursue certain occupational specialties during the recruitment process. Participants reported being encouraged to pursue certain occupations as well as being discouraged from pursuit of a desired occupation for a variety of reasons and from various sources.

When asked whether they felt they had a choice in the occupational specialties they pursued, hand-count data revealed that approximately 8 in 10 participants felt they had a choice, with no substantial difference between responses by men versus women.

1. Participants in most of the groups were encouraged to pursue certain occupational specialties

Participants in most of the groups reported encouragement to pursue certain occupational specialties from a variety of sources such as recruiters and family, and for a variety of reasons such as their perceptions of the working conditions associated with some occupational specialties, the opportunity to learn job skills transferable to the civilian world, their scores on the Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery (ASVAB) test, position-specific salaries or bonuses, and their premilitary careers or postsecondary fields of study. Broadly, women were more likely than men to report being encouraged in the pursuit of a certain occupational specialty, and participants from one Service were more likely to report this experience.

a. Participants in most of the groups were led to a specific specialty by recruiters

Interactions with recruiters were cited as the most likely source of encouragement to pursue a certain occupational specialty. Women were more likely than men, and enlisted personnel were much more likely than officers, to provide this response.

"When I went to the recruiter . . . , I had a different experience. I have a master's degree in rehabilitation . . . and expected that field. I gave them my credentials, and [the recruiter] said [the Service needed me to fill a different occupational specialty]. . . . My friend who was [in the] med[ical] services corps lost her mind because I didn't get that opportunity, [but] It worked out in the end. I love my job now . . . ; I just happened to be at the wrong recruiter at the wrong time."

—Female officer

"My family is not military oriented. I randomly went to a recruiter station and talked to them, and I said, 'I'm in college for computer science right now,' and [the recruiter] said, 'Oh, do I have the job for you, working with top-of-line stuff! It's cool, man, working on computers.' I went to [specialty school] and found out I'd be [working in an unrelated career field]."

—Enlisted man

"[The recruiter said] 'All right, you're going to be in communications. . . . You are going to call in air strikes.' But I sit behind a desk and give people internet. I don't do anything [the recruiter] said I was going to."

—Enlisted man

"My recruiter told me that there were no jobs available and that I had to [join the military] by a certain date, so I had to [join] as [an undefined occupational specialty]. It was the person at basic training who assigned you [a position] after testing. He gave me medical or [contracting]. . . . I thought he was trying to encourage me to go into contracting because it was lucrative, and I wanted to go with medical. So, because I felt like he was trying to discourage me, I went with the other [career field]."

—Enlisted woman

b. Participants in some of the groups were led to certain career fields by their perception of working conditions

Working conditions associated with certain occupational specialties were also cited as a factor that encouraged participants in some of the groups to pursue these jobs. Participants described being encouraged to pursue positions based on whether they involved working indoors or outdoors and whether they involved working behind a desk or in the field. Enlisted personnel were more likely than officers to cite this reason, as were members of one Service versus the others.

"I didn't want a desk job. . . . I wanted to fly. My dad was a helicopter pilot. That was definitely one of my [motivations]. I couldn't sit at a desk for another 2 years."

—Female officer

"Working conditions, like if you're working outside or inside."

—Male officer

"Personally, in high school I loved sports so I wanted a job in the [Service] that was more physical."

—Enlisted man

"I chose communication because I [wanted] to be in the field and deploy, but then I was assigned [specific communications specialty] and I sit behind a desk now."

—Enlisted woman

c. Participants in some of the groups were led to certain occupational specialties by their families

Participants in some of the groups reported being encouraged to pursue certain occupational specialties by family members. Enlisted personnel were more likely than officers to provide this response.

"I signed up with my sister and her two friends. . . . I was supposed to go [occupational specialty, but] I went to [the military entrance processing station], and it didn't work out. [The recruiter] told me I had 30 minutes to decide on a new [occupational specialty], so I called my sister . . . and asked if I could join the same [occupational specialty] as them."

—Male officer

"When I was growing up, my dad was a crew chief on a racer. He always made all the decisions about what I was going to do. He talked about being an [occupational specialist], so here I am."

—Enlisted woman

"If your family already serves or is currently serving, they can influence [your] career path. If [an officer's] son joins the [Service], his son is going to get whatever he wants."

—Enlisted man

"I had several [occupational specialties] to pick from, and my cousin was a head recruiter, so he put his best recruiter in charge of me. My cousin looked at the [list of options for me], and he said, 'I want you to be an [occupational specialist] because I have no doubt they will take care of you the rest of your career.' Twelve years later, and he's still correct."

—Enlisted woman

d. Participants in some of the groups were led to certain occupational specialties by the opportunity to learn job skills that would be transferable to the civilian world

Whether job skills were transferable to positions in the civilian world was an important consideration for participants in some of the groups when deciding to pursue an occupational specialty. Enlisted personnel were more likely than officers, and women were much more likely than men, to provide this response.

"For me it was [about how] if I decided not to make the military my career, what skills could I take out to the civilian world?"

—Female officer

"[At first] I wanted to be a pilot. I thought it was super cool, and . . . I wanted to sacrifice for my country. Then my brain took over, and [I thought], what am I going to do with a helicopter pilot license when I get out [of the military]? That [occupational specialty] doesn't prepare me for the rest of my life. The most transferrable and best training for a civilian career would be the [military intelligence] field, which is what I chose."

—Female officer

"Mine was the correlation between what I would be doing as a civilian counterpart and in the final successful post [referring to selecting a field based on what the Service member would like to do in the civilian world once she was out of the military]."

—Enlisted woman

"[It depends on the] purpose for joining. Some people join wanting to get something out of their career after [the military]. . . . Some people just join for service."

—Enlisted man

e. Participants in some of the groups were led to certain occupational specialties by their scores on the ASVAB test

Participants in some of the groups were encouraged to pursue certain occupational specialties based on their ASVAB scores. Men were much more likely than women to provide this response, as were members of one Service versus the others.

"Money is a huge factor. When I joined, I wanted to be a [builder occupational specialty], and recruiters looked at my test score and said, 'You can be a [occupational specialist that requires high ASVAB scores]. How's that sound?' It sounds cool, but looking back, I think I'd rather have been a [builder occupational specialty]."

—Enlisted man

f. Participants in some of the groups were led to certain occupational specialties by position-specific bonuses

The bonuses associated with specific occupational specialties were an important consideration for participants in some of the groups when deciding which occupational specialty to pursue. This issue was raised only by enlisted personnel, and more frequently by men than women.

"I joined to be an [occupational specialist]. [The recruiter] said, 'You should be a [different occupational specialist]. Here's \$20,000 for you. You'll be special because there's not too many [Service members in this occupational specialty]. . . .' It's all influenced by money."

—Enlisted man

"For me, the number one [influence on my choice of occupational specialty] was money for my job."

—Enlisted woman

"I joined right out of high school. I had one job and chose it because there was a bonus. . . . I chose to be analyst . . . , [which] is something that will benefit me on the outside [as well]."

—Enlisted woman

"When I picked [my occupational specialty] . . . , they had a pretty big bonus for my field."

—Enlisted man

g. Participants in some of the groups were led to certain occupational specialties by their premilitary career or education

Participants in some of the groups reported being encouraged to pursue certain occupational specialties based on whether they aligned with their premilitary careers or education. Officers were much more likely than enlisted personnel to provide this response, as were members of one Service versus the others.

"I was a lawyer [prior to joining], so I only really [had] that option. It was my first choice but my only choice."

—Female officer

"I studied engineering [in college, so] civil engineering was a logical choice."

—Male officer

"I [joined the military] right out of nursing school and liked babies, so I wanted [labor and delivery] nurse. . . . When the recruiters talked to us, I had student loans and was scared of how to pay them. . . . The recruiter said [obstetrics] or medical surgery, [so] I said [obstetrics] it is."

—Female officer

"When I first joined the [military], I knew that I wanted to go to law school. I ended up following the footsteps. Everyone knows that when you go to the recruiter, they only tell you the [occupational specialties] that are needed [by the Service]. I told my recruiter . . . , 'This is what I want to do. . . .'"

—Enlisted woman

2. Participants in most of the groups reported being discouraged from pursuing their desired occupational specialties

DACOWITS also asked participants whether they were discouraged from pursuing their preferred occupational specialties during the recruitment process. Participants in most of the groups reported experiencing this discouragement by recruiters for a variety of reasons, such as the desired occupational specialty not being aligned with the needs of the Service. Similarly, only women reported being discouraged from pursuing their desired occupations because of their gender, but the source of this discouragement was not necessarily recruiters.

a. Participants in half of the groups were discouraged by recruiters

Participants in most of the groups reported being encouraged by their recruiters to pursue certain occupational specialties but not necessarily their desired specialties. Participants in half of the groups reported their recruiters discouraged them from pursuing their desired occupational specialties. Men were more likely than women, and enlisted personnel were much more likely than officers, to provide this response.

"Recruiters are looking at their quotas. It's easier to manipulate an experience with someone [who has] no knowledge. They can [tell recruits] they have to go to a certain [occupational specialty] if they want to leave now, but realistically, there could be something else that opens up but [the recruits] would have to wait longer to leave. That recruiter has his best interests [in mind], and the recruit's interests don't always align."

—Male officer

"My recruiter tried to discourage me because [the Service was] full for pilot slots. I was told there weren't any more pilot positions for the year, so I'd have to wait. I waited 9 months for the new year to open up, and I got one of the first slots."

—Female officer

"I went back home as a recruiter's assistant. . . . There was a girl who . . . wanted nothing more than to be in a [combat occupational specialty]. I heard it from the recruiter. He [said], 'Do you know what this is going to entail?' I looked at him and said, 'If she wants to do it, she has the physical capabilities to do it. . . .' He was doubting her mental strength. . . . Her parents were so supportive. They wanted her to have the opportunity to pursue it. . . ."

—Enlisted woman

"When I enlisted, I was trying to do [combat occupational specialty], [but the recruiter] told me, 'You don't want to do that.'"

—Enlisted man

b. Participants in some of the groups were discouraged by recruiters from pursuing occupational specialties that did not align with the needs of the Service

Participants in some of the groups reported being discouraged from pursuing their desired occupational specialties by recruiters if the occupational specialty did not align with the current needs of the selected Service.

"[My recruiter] told me that I might not get in [to my desired occupational specialty] even [if I wanted until the new year to join]. I get it, [recruiters] had their recruitment [quotas], so they were pushing me towards another [occupational specialty]."

—Female officer

"[My recruiter said], 'Hey, you should pick something else.' I was discouraged from [military intelligence] because too many people wanted to [serve in that role]. [My recruiter said], 'Don't put it on the list. Too many factors, and you don't have this or that. . . .' I said screw it and put [military intelligence], and I got it."

—Female officer

"I had kids who were [combat occupational specialty] who were discouraged. [They said], 'I want to be a [combat occupational specialty], why not?' [and the recruiter replied], 'It's filled up.' When [the occupational specialty is] opened up, it gets filled within a week, so recruiters have to encourage them to go somewhere else."

—Enlisted man

"There was a difference back in 2001. You had 1,200 slots a year for [occupational specialty]. . . . [The expectation was that] you can try but may not get a slot. . . . In my case, I got a [occupational specialty] slot the day I commissioned."

—Male officer

c. Participants in most of the female groups were discouraged from joining certain occupational specialties because of their gender

Participants in most of the female groups reported being discouraged by male unit members and other individuals from pursuing their desired occupational specialties because of their gender. Only women reported this theme.

"I always wanted to go to [occupational specialty]. People told me there was a glass ceiling, and you can only serve at this level [because you are a woman], and it was at a time where that was very true."

—Female officer

"In my community . . . , we are close knit, but from a point early in my career, we had guys telling us we'd be dirty, greasy, and 'Don't break a nail.' So, I'm trying to prove to my counterparts that I can do almost the same things or same things as they can."

—Enlisted woman

"Originally I signed an [occupational specialty] contract, and I was highly discouraged. [I was] discouraged by other males. [They said], 'You don't know how much work it's going to be; are you sure you can handle that? It's a lot of long hours. . . .' It just made me want to do it more."

—Enlisted woman

"We are told it's more of a male [specialty by our families and men in our units]. You hammer, drill, rivet . . . the whole Rosie the Riveter thing. It's not a big thing anymore, but you have to [prove] yourself more as a female . . . than males."

—Enlisted woman

D. Occupational Specialty Preference by Gender

DACOWITS also asked focus group participants whether male and female Service members were attracted to the same occupational specialties. Participants primarily reported that male and female Service members were attracted to the same occupational specialties, but all members of either gender were not necessarily drawn to the same positions. Participants also suggested a variety of reasons why men and women might not be attracted to the same occupational specialties.

1. Participants in most of the groups reported that men and women could be drawn to the same occupational specialties

Participants in most of the groups reported that male and female Service members could be attracted to the same occupational specialties but that certain occupational specialties drew more individuals of one gender and that a Service member's decision to pursue an occupational specialty was more dependent on personality rather than gender. Broadly, women were more likely than men, and enlisted personnel were more likely than officers, to report that men and women can be drawn to the same occupational specialties.

a. Participants in some of the groups reported that certain occupational specialties attracted members of one gender at a higher rate

Participants in some of the groups reported that certain occupational specialties were more attractive to certain genders. Men were more likely than women, and enlisted personnel were more likely than officers, to provide this response.

"I guess everyone is different, but [a lot] of specialties are sought out by both. . . . Sure, there are some [occupational specialties] that are highly sought out by one or the other [gender]."

—Enlisted woman

"[Men and women] may be drawn to similar [occupational specialties] but not in the same numbers. . . . [Women] may be drawn to . . . [combat occupational specialties], but not in the same numbers as men."

—Male officer

"Yeah, I obviously think that some [men and women] are drawn to the same [occupational specialties], but [there are still hardly any women in a recently opened combat occupational specialty]. . . . There are a lot of [occupational specialties] with more females and a lot of [occupational specialties] with more males [than before]."

—Enlisted woman

"If you look at a medical group, there are equal numbers of men and women, and if you look at [combat occupational specialty], there are a few women in there."

—Enlisted man

b. Participants in some of the groups reported that Service members are attracted to occupational specialties based on personality rather than gender

Participants in some of the groups reported that a Service member's choice to pursue an occupational specialty is more dependent on the individual's personality than gender. Women were more likely than men, and enlisted personnel were much more likely than officers, to provide this response.

"I think it's more just the type of person who is drawn to certain types of work, like personality traits. I think it's independent of gender."

—Male officer

"We have plenty of females who like [to say], 'Women are this, men are this.' One person is different. You can put two females in a room, and they can have completely different ideas of what women want."

—Enlisted woman

"I saw a wide spectrum of [Service members] who were not happy, whether in services, maintenance, etc., and wanted something that was [better] suited for their personality, regardless of whether it was something better for their gender. A lot of it was personality or how lucrative it was going to be on the outside."

—Enlisted woman

"Personally, I grew up with two sisters and a mom, so [I was] around females a lot. In today's society, women are trying to prove they're equal to men, so we have quite a few females in our section. So yeah, I think it's like they're trying to prove a point a bit, and obviously, there are some who are actually interested [in the same positions as men]."

—Enlisted man

2. Participants proposed a variety of reasons why men and women might be drawn to different occupational specialties

Participants offered various suggestions on why men and women might be drawn to different occupational specialties; these included the following:

- ▶ Women might be more attracted to support roles.

- ▶ Women might face societal pressure to join a certain occupational specialty.
- ▶ Women might be more attracted to jobs with a traditional (i.e., 9 a.m. to 5 p.m.) schedule.
- ▶ Women might be more likely to prioritize the family role and pursue positions that require less commitment.
- ▶ Men might be more likely to be recruited into certain occupational specialties.

E. Gender Bias During the Recruitment Process

DACOWITS also asked focus group participants to define bias and gender bias in their own words prior to asking the groups about how gender bias might affect the recruitment process. Broadly, participants in most of the groups defined bias as a preconceived notion or stance on an issue that affects someone's ability to be impartial on that issue, and some of the groups reported that biases arose through a person's life experience and upbringing. On a related note, participants in most of the groups defined gender bias as a preconceived notion about the roles people should fulfill or how people should behave based on their gender.

After participants defined bias and gender bias, DACOWITS presented the following definitions of each term and asked participants to answer questions related to gender bias with these definitions in mind. DACOWITS defined bias as prejudiced perceptions, attitudes, or beliefs about an individual or group, and gender bias as any prejudiced perceptions, attitudes, or beliefs based on someone's gender.

1. Participants had mixed perceptions of whether gender bias existed in the recruiting process

DACOWITS asked participants whether gender bias existed in the recruitment process. Broadly, the participant response was mixed, with participants from most of the groups reporting that gender bias did exist in the recruitment process, and only men from some of the groups reporting that it did not.

a. Participants in most of the groups reported that gender bias existed in the recruiting process

Participants in most of the groups said gender bias was present in the recruiting process. In particular, participants noted that a lack of female recruiters and female-focused recruitment activities could discourage women from joining and that recruiters encouraged men and women to pursue different occupational specialties. Women were more likely than men, and enlisted personnel were more likely than officers, to provide this response.

b. Participants in some of the groups believed a lack of female recruiters and female-focused recruitment could discourage women from joining

Participants in some of the groups felt a deficiency of female recruiters and female-focused recruiting activities could dissuade women from joining. Enlisted personnel were more likely than officers to provide this response, as were members of one Service versus the others.

"There are very few female recruiters out there. It may just be because of the number [of women in the military], but when you want to talk to women who have been in the military. . . . I am sought out [by a lot of female recruits]."

—Enlisted woman

"Well, if a potential recruit is not welcomed, or they feel like the marketing campaign is targeting a different segment [of the population] and they have no one to talk to, they might be dissuaded [from joining the military]. I don't think the [Service] suffers from that. . . . I think the [Service] is very inclusive."

—Male officer

"[The military is] a male-dominated organization. One, there are not that many female recruiters, so females in high school are less likely to go into the office and seek out recruiters if they don't already know someone. Having more females . . . recruiting [and] showing that female presence would make an influence. [The lack of female recruiters is] probably a reason a lot of females don't join."

—Enlisted woman

"A recruiter is the first interaction anyone has with the [Service]. If a recruiter ignores a female and goes to a male, then you just lost someone. Females really want to join the [Service] from what I've experienced."

—Enlisted man

c. Participants in some of the groups reported that recruiters encouraged men and women to pursue different occupational specialties

The perception that recruiters were encouraging male and female Service members to pursue different occupational specialties was reported by participants in some of the groups. Women were more likely than men to provide this response, and this opinion was reported only by enlisted personnel.

"My first recruiter was [occupational specialty] also, but he didn't put any of the females in [that occupational specialty]. He would [assign women to be a] linguist. So, if you were [a female], he would decide that those [linguist occupational specialties] were the [best] careers for them."

—Enlisted woman

"I'm an equal opportunity leader. I've been in [Equal Opportunity] school. I know what [gender bias] looks like. . . . Some recruiters don't care and want to build [the Service] the way they want to, and others are ignorant."

—Enlisted woman

"With my recruiter, they have quotas they have to meet. [The recruiters] need this amount of females and this amount of males. They will [focus on recruiting] females, but if it's a job for a [combat occupational specialty], they are not going to offer it to a female, they are going to offer it to a male. They pick and choose who they go after based on who they think is going to make it [in a specific position]."

—Enlisted woman

"I definitely think [there is gender bias in] jobs for sure. . . . There was a female in our department program, and she was looking into [occupational specialty] and being a rescue swimmer, and [the recruiter told her], 'That's cool, but you should just switch into it later. Try [a different occupational specialty] instead. It's really cool.'"

—Enlisted man

d. Participants in some of the groups reported that gender bias did not exist in the recruiting process

Participants in some of the groups reported that gender bias was not part of the recruiting process. This theme was reported only by men.

"I was not a recruiter, but I've known quite a few. From what I've seen, none of them care about gender. They care about numbers. Male or female, [just] sign on the dotted line. . . ."

—Male officer

"No, I don't think [gender bias exists in the recruiting process]. . . . Everyone has equal opportunities. That is sold and believed."

—Male officer

"I don't think [gender bias exists in the recruiting process]. As a former recruiter as well, we are on a mission to recruit females. It's not saying they need to do this job, it's that we need females. We don't say we need 'this many' females to do combat arms. I have seen recently . . . they are asked if they want to do these [combat] roles. They are not recruited for combat first, but they get in and then they are asked if they want to do these [combat] roles. Big-picture speaking, there was never anything about gender bias—it was, 'Hey, we need females.'"

—Enlisted man

"In my experience in [program that allows recruits to delay joining], the only females in my program all went [into the nuclear power field], so I would say [there is no gender bias in the recruiting process] off my own experience. They were qualified. They scored better than I did—much better—and they were qualified for any job out there and chose to [work in the nuclear power field]. They ended up with a great job."

—Enlisted man

2. Participants had mixed perceptions about the presence of gender bias in Service recruitment materials and advertisements

Participants reported mixed opinions about gender bias in Service recruitment materials and advertisements because even though participants in some of the groups reported that equal gender representation was improving in this area, participants in some of the groups reported that Service recruitment materials and advertisements still primarily featured men.

a. Participants in some of the groups perceived that women were underrepresented in Service recruitment materials and advertisements

Participants in some of the groups said women were not adequately represented in Service recruitment materials and advertisements such as television commercials and posters. Members of one Service were more likely than those of the other Services to provide this response.

"[The (Service)] has done a very good job, ahead of the other Services . . . , but again, when you look at [Service-specific occupational specialty], it's a bunch of tall White men, not a cross section of the military or American culture. You don't see the female face there. . . ."

—Female officer

"I don't remember seeing a poster with a female [Service member]. Even that commercial out there [featuring a female Service member] is pretty recent."

—Male officer

"You see . . . [Service] posters and videos advertising females. If they are there, [the women] are sitting behind a desk. I'm not a paper person. I would rather be out there building something. When portraying females, it's, 'You belong in an office behind a desk.' There [are] males blowing things up . . . ; they are doing something awesome. [For women], it's, 'Oh, you cook, and you belong behind a desk.' They push that on commercials and posters. They don't portray us as strong women."

—Enlisted woman

"There are still [females represented] few and far between on the [Service] commercials, [but gender representation is better] than 10 years ago."

—Enlisted man

b. Participants in some of the groups reported that the equal representation of men and women in Service recruitment materials and advertisements has improved

Participants in some of the groups perceived that the representation of men and women in Service recruitment materials and advertisements has become more equal over time. Women were more likely than men, and officers were more likely than enlisted personnel, to provide this response.

"I've seen significant improvements. I entered the Academy in '04. I was blown away by the most recent [Service] commercial with a female."

—Female officer

"There are a few [recruitment posters featuring a female Service member], but when I was younger, there [weren't] a lot."

—Male officer

"There was a . . . commercial this year . . . ; female [Service member], blonde, pretty, out there on a tail gun out of an aircraft. It shook people's world on Twitter and Instagram. They wanted to know who this woman was! We have [great] females. . . . We don't just sit here and sign paperwork. They nailed it finally! A female was in the commercial doing something in the commercial. There was no other guy in the scene—it was just her! It was so cool!"

—Enlisted woman

"On the new commercials, there are brand new ones that have a male and female in combat roles. It's gone away from being gender bias, and now it's both males and females. . . . I just saw this new commercial this morning. It's the perception of what the public sees us as, different than what we've put out in the past."

—Enlisted man

F. Presence and Impact of Gender Bias in the Military

DACOWITS also asked focus group participants whether they believed gender bias existed in the military as a whole, outside of the recruitment process. Participants perceived the presence of gender bias in the military for a variety of reasons.

1. Participants in nearly all the groups reported that gender bias existed in the military

Participants in nearly all the groups reported that gender bias was present in the military in a variety of ways, including the perceptions that women received special treatment and that they could not meet the physical requirements associated with some occupational specialties. Women were more likely than men to provide this response.

a. Participants in some of the groups highlighted a perception that women received special treatment in the military

Participants in some of the groups said women received special treatment compared with men in the military. Enlisted personnel were much more likely than officers to provide this response.

"With the gender bias . . . from what I've seen in my chain of command and leadership, I personally think [the bias is] reversed toward men, as if our leadership is trying to show they're not biased [toward] women. Women get to go to courses and classes [that] guys like me are on waiting lists for. When we ask why that happens, we're shot down and told to wait your turn."

—Enlisted man

"I would say there isn't . . . unfair treatment [toward women]. . . . Where we are predominantly male [as a Service], people are afraid to [be as harsh to a female], and people will think they are not being fair. People may think being harsh on a female is jeopardizing their career. I saw this in school. When you are carrying your rucksack over your head, and a male dropped it, they would get on them, but if a female did, [they would not]."

—Enlisted man

"I've seen favoritism. For example, if we are loading ammo crates off the back of the truck, I've seen guys [offer to carry them for female Service members]. . . . I'm a functioning human being too. I can load them off."

—Enlisted woman

"If a female [Service member] says, 'I'm a meritorious . . .' anything, [the response is], 'Hmmm, I wonder why.' If there was a female [Service member] on a [promotion board with other Service members, people] say that [the female Service member] automatically got it [because of gender]. . . . People say, 'Who did you have to sleep with? What did you have to do to get that?'"

—Enlisted woman

b. Participants in some of the groups highlighted a perception that women could not meet the physical requirements associated with certain occupational specialties

Participants in some of the groups reported perceptions within their Services that women could not meet the physical requirements associated with certain occupational specialties. Women were more likely than men, and enlisted personnel were much more likely than officers, to provide this response.

"I came in at a time where more and more females were joining, and in male-dominated [occupational specialties]. So, me being an [occupational specialist], I had to adjust to how males did things with maintenance. . . . There was playful taunting of, 'You can't lift this or do that.' [The female Service members] had to have discussions with them, like 'We aren't helpless.'"

—Enlisted woman

"[In the command], we only had 20 or so females, and the dichotomy was weird with males. They either wanted to be your dad or were mad that you were there because [they felt we were taking their jobs]. . . . They were like, 'Hey, let me help you because you can't do this,' or they were mad."

—Enlisted woman

"In our last unit . . . , we had a female who checked in. You are supposed to acclimatize before you run the first physical fitness test (PFT). [The unit leader] said, 'Take her out and run that PFT because I don't think she can pass it. . . .' She wasn't fat, just a female [Service member]. When she came back [from completing the PFT, the unit leader] was asking if she passed. She said, 'Yeah, I did [fulfill that requirement],' and he was shocked she could even do [that part of the PFT]. If it was a male, they would have given him 30 days to acclimatize, told him to take this time."

—Enlisted man

"At least from my experience in my career field, yes. I've had many supervisors that, when you've had a female [Service member] show up, we go out to the field . . . ; some of our guns are 40 pounds, and the ammunition is 40 pounds. With all your gear, that is 80-plus pounds. Some of the leaders in the field say, "[What] am I going to do with [the female Service member]?" and all the males see that and follow the trend. That is actually why my wife separated [from the military]. . . . All of my female troops have . . . separated [or] had lots of emotional issues . . . ; one actually took her life. It's really bad in certain career fields."

—Enlisted man

c. Participants offered other examples of gender bias in the military

Participants reported other examples of gender bias in the military; these included the following:

- ▶ Women were more frequently perceived as the caregiver in dual-military families.
- ▶ Women were more likely than men to be labeled with derogatory terms.
- ▶ Women were afforded less respect than men.
- ▶ Women had to work harder for promotions than men.

2. Participants in all the groups reported that gender bias was more prominent in certain occupational specialties

DACOWITS next asked participants if gender bias was more of an issue in particular occupational specialties. Although participants in nearly all the groups believed gender bias existed in the military as a whole (as reported earlier in this section), participants in all the groups reported that gender bias was more prominent in some occupational specialties than others, including those that had just opened to women.

a. Participants in most of the groups reported that gender bias was greater in occupational specialties that recently became available to women

Participants in most of the groups perceived gender bias was more evident in occupational specialties that were recently opened to women. Officers were more likely than enlisted personnel, and men were much more likely than women, to provide this response.

"There's two very different subcultures. Combat arms [(occupational specialties) have a] different [type] of folks than the other [occupational specialties]. We have a lot in common in our [overarching military] culture, but subcultures are there. In combat arms, they have recently been [gender] integrated . . . ; you'll find more bias there, more so than other [occupational specialties], where it is probably all but eliminated, at least from my experience. . . . I might not see it because I'm a male, but there isn't much if at all in most [occupational specialties]."

—Male officer

"Some communities . . . are only just now letting women in and letting them serve. I'd imagine there's a cultural shift going on in [those communities]. They are just now letting women into [those communities], whereas before it was an all-male club."

—Male officer

"I'm in admin[istration], so I see a lot of women, but in some [occupational specialties] that just opened to women, you have male [Service members] that have been there for 20 years without women, and that's uncomfortable."

—Male officer

"Everything is opening up, especially in combat [occupational specialties]. Are there women who can outperform men? Absolutely. But that is the exception to the rule. That bias is still there."

—Enlisted man

b. Participants offered other examples of gender bias that were more prominent in certain occupational specialties

Participants provided other examples of gender bias that occurred more frequently in certain occupational specialties; these included the following:

- ▶ The perception that women could not be successful in occupational specialties with a high level of physical requirements
- ▶ The perception that pregnancy had a greater impact on a woman's ability to perform her job in some occupational specialties
- ▶ The perception that women were more likely than men to be promoted in some occupational specialties

3. Participants reported mixed feelings on whether gender bias affected mission readiness

DACOWITS also asked participants how gender bias might affect mission readiness. Participants offered mixed opinions on the issue. Some participants felt a woman's pregnancy could negatively affect

mission readiness, a perception exacerbated by a lack of trust in a woman's ability to perform her job within a unit; others felt gender bias did not affect mission readiness.

a. Participants in some of the groups perceived that women who become pregnant could be a detriment to mission readiness

Participants in some of the groups reported perceptions within their Services that women who become pregnant could jeopardize mission readiness because they may be unable to fulfill their job duties. Participants from one Service were more likely than those of the other Services to report this, and women were much more likely than men to provide this response.

"We have certain unit-type codes that we have to meet in certain aircraft and crew to go out the door. If you are . . . pregnant, you cannot fill that role. You are a number on the books that cannot fill that requirement. If all the females get pregnant at the same time, you are not going to be able to meet your mission readiness. [However, the] chances of that are unlikely."

—Female officer

"If you get pregnant, you're not fully medically ready. You're not available for certain trainings or opportunities. If you hold certain platforms, you can't fulfill certain roles."

—Enlisted woman

"If you deploy, and you happen to be pregnant, then you are sent home or denied deployment. I've seen that a couple of times. In terms of readiness, sometimes [it can be difficult] to backfill that position."

—Enlisted man

"When I got pregnant, I [had been] trying to get pregnant for a long time, and I couldn't. I got pregnant right before I was supposed to deploy, so I got taken off of deployment. Me starting my family was a burden [on] my unit."

—Enlisted woman

b. Participants in half of the male groups reported that a peer's lack of trust in the ability of female Service members to perform their jobs could affect mission readiness

Participants in half of the male groups reported that if a unit member does not trust the ability of a female colleague to perform her job, it could affect the unit's mission readiness. This theme was reported only by men.

"It breaks down the unit. When you're working on a [unit], the duties you have assigned, you need to trust one another. Without that trust, you degrade the [unit], and they can't complete the mission."

—Male officer

"[It's] another distraction. . . . If you have a [group] of people and preconceived notions of their capabilities as individuals, you are not focusing on the mission. Gender bias is the same thing, maybe in a higher, more general way."

—Male officer

"...The females I work with, they have trouble being able to shut a HMMV (High Mobility Multipurpose Wheeled Vehicle) door. . . . We're more combat oriented, so when we have to imagine a threat, and I take shots to the chest and am immobilized, how are those females going to drag me to safety if opening a HMMV door is very hard? I don't feel safe around them, but if they are able to drag me, then I have no problem with it."

—Enlisted man

"If you have a female capable of doing a job—[combat occupational specialty] for example—if there is a female with super-high shooting skills, and there is a gender bias, and there is a male [Service member] who doesn't shoot as well, they're not going to put the woman in the good squad. They're going to put the other guy there, but then they're risking the mission effectiveness. That can go with any job. If they're not going to put the most qualified person in for a job, they could be putting in a weaker link, which affects the mission."

—Male officer

c. Participants in some of the groups reported that gender bias had no effect on mission readiness

Participants in some of the groups perceived that gender bias did not affect mission readiness. Men were more likely than women, and enlisted personnel were much more likely than officers, to provide this response.

"In my field, gender bias doesn't happen—it's performance bias. . . . It's my job to make sure my commanders and guys on the ground can talk to the pilots in the air as they are doing operations. . . . You need to get communications up within 72 hours. If you can't do it—male or female—you are not part of the mission. I don't think it's gender bias. It's a matter of how some people have more drive to learn the job. . . . I have seen [expletive] radio operators that are female and terrible ones that are male. It's not gender bias; it's how people do the job."

—Male officer

"We are beyond gender biases. If you can do your job and do it well, nobody will say anything about it. If they do, they will get a swift kick from the commander in the room and not be asked to continue to serve. We are too small of a force being asked to do a lot, and we don't have the tolerance for [gender bias] right now. The people in charge aren't putting up with it. . . . We have too much to get done."

—Male officer

"In the field I'm in, we look at the big picture. I have a female [Service member] that came in with a bag of issues, but we worked with her, and she's now far exceeding the male [Service members] she came in with."

—Enlisted woman

"I don't know of any gender bias that affects readiness."

—Enlisted man

G. Perceptions on Gender-Neutral Language and Title Changes

Prior to asking questions about changes to achieve gender-neutral language in the military, DACOWITS informed participants that some Services have begun updating language in various Service manuals and

documents to be gender neutral in a variety of ways, including by changing the word “he” to the phrase “he or she.”

1. Participants reported mixed feelings about changes to make language in Service manuals and documents gender neutral

DACOWITS asked participants about gender-neutral language changes, such as changing language from “he” to “he or she” in Service manuals and documents. Participants had mixed feelings on the topic, reporting negative, positive, and indifferent perspectives on the language changes.

a. Participants in most of the groups reported negative feelings about changes to make language gender neutral in Service manuals and documents

Participants in most of the groups expressed negative responses about changes to make language gender neutral in Service documents and cited a variety of reasons that included the superficial nature of such a remedy to the issue of gender bias. Women were more likely than men, and enlisted personnel were more likely than officers, to provide this response.

b. Participants in most of the groups perceived changes to make language gender neutral as a superficial solution to the issue of gender bias

Participants in most of the groups perceived changes to make language in Service documents gender neutral, changing language from “he” to “he or she,” as an inconsequential step to address the issue of gender bias. Women were more likely than men, and enlisted personnel were more likely than officers, to provide this response.

“ . . . I'd rather be treated equally than have the documents say the right thing.”

—Female officer

“ . . . If [a Service document] says a [Service member is to do something], then a [Service member] will do [it]. That's it. The people making the changes notice [the language] more than [Service members] do.”

—Male officer

“Personally, to me, the word ‘he’ or ‘she’ doesn't matter. It doesn't have to say ‘she’ to know that I am included in that as well. I don't think that it changes anything.”

—Enlisted woman

“I think [gender-neutral language changes are] generally a waste of time. I think you're being too sensitive if you're upset by that. There are [more important] changes that need to be made, so when you see these kinds of changes being made this quickly, it can be frustrating.”

—Enlisted man

c. Participants in some of the groups perceived that changes to make language gender neutral would draw unnecessary attention to the differences between male and female Service members

Participants in some of the groups said that changing the language in Service documents to be gender neutral would unnecessarily highlight the differences between male and female Service members. Members of one Service versus the others were more likely to provide this response.

“Changes in language are important. They are subtle, but they get ingrained in you. [However], it bothers me when people try to be inclusive [by saying], ‘Guys—oh, and gals.’ They just draw attention to [the differences between men and women]. Inclusive language will be good . . . , but drawing the extra attention is a step backwards.”

—Female officer

“‘He and she’ [language changes] kind of highlights [the differences between men and women] and makes it stick out more. . . . It should just say [Service member] instead of focusing on ‘he’ or ‘she.’”

—Enlisted man

“Now it’s going to be a made-fun-of thing instead of it being a positive or not being so gender biased. It could make things worse, or it won’t change [anything].”

—Enlisted woman

“What I hear frequently is that women ask for special treatment. [With] verbiage [changes] like that, some can say that . . . [women] are just complaining about special treatment, it’s not [actually] about changing verbiage. You can’t change the program—you change the people. The people have the bias.”

—Enlisted woman

d. Participants in most of the groups reported positive feelings about changes to make language gender neutral in Service manuals and documents

Participants in most of the groups also reported positive perspectives on changes to make language gender neutral in Service manuals and documents, such as that these changes are a positive step toward addressing gender bias.

“I don’t see an issue with that. [In school], you had to say ‘he’ or ‘she.’”

—Enlisted man

“To me, [gender-neutral language changes] brings us in line with the civilian world. When I was in high school, you couldn’t use ‘he’ to mean the whole spectrum of genders.”

—Male officer

“It’s a no brainer. If someone is going to feel alienated over one word, just change it.”

—Enlisted man

“It’s fair, I guess. It’s not just he and she, but that also supports a transgender person, so it’s appropriate to say that.”

—Enlisted woman

e. Participants in some of the groups reported feeling indifferent to the changes to make language gender neutral

Participants in some of the groups said they felt neither negative nor positive about changes to make language gender neutral in Service documents. Men were more likely than women, and enlisted personnel were much more likely than officers, to provide this response, as were members of one Service versus the others.

"[Gender-neutral language changes will have] no real effect. I don't think it changes anything. It's still the same, just 'he or she.' I don't see it as a negative or positive. It's still the same."

—Male officer

"I don't really care if it says 'he' or 'she.' I've been in [the Service for] 10 years. For example, [participant] has kept saying 'guys,' but I don't know if you only work with guys."

—Female officer

"Doesn't affect us because we never read into it. . . . We didn't notice it. . . . When I see 'man,' I'm thinking of human, not male. . . . That's probably ignorant on our part because we are males, and it didn't affect us. It could have been an issue for women, but we didn't know it."

—Enlisted man

"[Gender-neutral language changes don't] affect our day-to-day life in any shape or form."

—Enlisted man

H. Impact of Changes to Make Language Gender Neutral

DACOWITS asked participants about the potential impacts of gender-neutral language and position title changes in a variety of areas, including recruitment and attracting women to pursue occupational specialties historically viewed as male oriented.

1. Participants reported mixed opinions on whether changes to make position titles gender neutral would affect recruitment

DACOWITS asked participants whether changes to make Service position titles such as airman, seaman, and infantryman gender neutral would have an effect on recruitment. Participants expressed mixed feelings in response: most of the groups said these changes would negatively influence recruitment, half said the changes would positively influence recruitment, and some said the changes would not affect recruitment.

a. Participants in most of the groups perceived that changes to make position titles gender neutral would negatively affect recruitment

Participants in most of the groups said that changing position titles to make them gender neutral would have an adverse effect on recruitment. Enlisted personnel were more likely than officers to provide this response.

"[Making] terms that include men [gender neutral], you might actually lose some retention from [potential recruits with] a long family history that feel like [the military is] going away from the traditional."

—Male officer

"Maybe a small percentage [of recruits would be negatively affected], but I feel like if you are [concerned about that], then this is not the place for you."

—Enlisted woman

“There are some . . . traditions that make us want to join. There are some things that shouldn't change because of tradition and the meaning behind them.”

—Enlisted woman

b. Participants in some of the groups perceived that changes to make position titles gender neutral would negatively affect the tradition associated with the Services

Participants in some of the groups said that changing position titles to make them gender neutral would adversely affect Service tradition. Women were more likely than men, and enlisted personnel were more likely than officers, to provide this response, as were members of one Service versus the others.

“We come in knowing what [the position terminology is] called, and it's tradition. I don't find it degrading.”

—Female officer

“When the [Service] tried to change the positions to numbers, I was against it. Some of the newer Service members were okay with it, but I liked the tradition. The oldest rank in the [Service] should never change. The more traditional things shouldn't change.”

—Male officer

“I see it as a heritage. The Airman, seaman, [Service member], it is a word that isn't supposed to be gender specific.”

—Enlisted woman

“At the end of the day, it's going to [be] the same job, but it is going to take away the brotherhood or sisterhood. It's what has been known throughout . . . our history. To change the name is a statement that goes beyond what is necessary for the Service.”

—Enlisted man

c. Participants in half of the groups perceived that changes to make position titles gender neutral would positively affect recruitment

Participants in half of the groups said that changing position titles to make them gender neutral would aid recruitment for a variety of reasons, such as that it would make the military appear more inclusive to recruits. Men were more likely than women, and officers were more likely than enlisted personnel, to provide this response.

“I think it's going to be [a while], but being more inclusive will make [joining] more of an option for some people.”

—Male officer

“You do it with officers; you say sir or ma'am. Why not [use female-specific occupational terms], like [we use male-specific occupational terms]? Might make [women] feel more prone to [taking those positions].”

—Male officer

“You could just as easily say [female-specific occupational term] or [female-specific occupational term]. I think people who want to hear [male-specific occupational term] or [male-specific occupational term] are stuck in their old ways.”

—Enlisted man

"It would be nice if it was an [male-specific occupational term] or an [female-specific occupational term]. When someone thinks of a [Service member], they don't think of male or female, so we are a long way away from [not having gender bias]."

—Enlisted woman

d. Participants in half of the groups perceived that changes to make position titles gender neutral would have no impact on recruitment

Participants in half of the groups said that changing position titles to make them gender neutral would not affect recruitment. Men were more likely than women, and enlisted personnel were more likely than officers, to provide this response, as were members of one Service versus the others.

"I don't think [gender-neutral position title changes are] going to have an effect [on recruitment]. We say Service men and women, overarching. When someone is in the Service—seaman or airmen—that is an overarching title versus gender specific."

—Female officer

"They don't know what [the position terminology is] at recruitment anyway; they don't care."

—Male officer

"I don't think [gender-neutral position title changes] would change anything [for recruitment]."

—Enlisted woman

"The majority of us don't care about [gender-neutral position title changes]. Ninety-nine-point-nine percent of people in the [Service] . . . don't care. It's a matter of they were sold on the pride of belonging and joining the [Service] for the spirit of [the Service]."

—Enlisted man

2. Participants reported mixed perceptions on whether changes to make position titles gender neutral would attract women to occupational specialties historically viewed as male oriented

DACOWITS also asked participants if changing position titles to make them gender neutral would draw women to occupations historically viewed as male dominated. Participants expressed mixed feelings in response: most of the groups said the changes would not affect whether women were drawn to such positions, whereas some said the changes would encourage women to fill such roles.

a. Participants in most of the groups perceived that changes to make position titles gender neutral would have no impact on attracting women to positions perceived as male oriented

Participants from most of the groups said that changing position titles to make them gender neutral would not affect whether women were drawn to such positions.

"I don't think it would make a difference. You know you're pursuing a male-dominated field anyway. I don't think it would make a difference."

—Female officer

"At [officer training school], we talk to recruiters a lot of times to see if there are any issues. [Attracting women to positions perceived as male oriented] never came up as an issue for them. The biggest thing for the recruiter side is physical fitness. . . . We tend to kick out more females because they can't pass the [physical fitness test]."

—Male officer

"I think for the most part, women that are interested in male career fields don't give any weight to the title. They are looking at it because it is something they want to do, and the title doesn't really matter."

—Enlisted woman

"I don't think changing the [position title] is going to change the job. They either want to do it, or they won't."

—Enlisted man

b. Participants in some of the groups perceived that changes to make position titles gender neutral would have a positive impact on attracting women to positions perceived as male oriented

Participants in some of the groups said that changes to make position titles gender neutral would encourage women to fill such roles. Officers were more likely than enlisted personnel, and men were much more likely than women, to provide this response.

"I can see the benefit of changing [the titles to be gender neutral because they were] created in the day when it was more male dominated."

—Enlisted man

"Image is a big piece of [attracting women to occupations perceived as male oriented]. The more you normalize [the positions], the more you will see more females come in."

—Male officer

"I would think [position titles] wouldn't outright detract women, but I think [gender-neutral position titles are] one step towards removing unconscious bias in the English language."

—Male officer

"I think there would be a difference slowly [to attracting women to positions perceived as male oriented]."

—Enlisted man

I. Leadership Response to Gender Bias

DACOWITS asked participants whether Service leadership was doing enough to address gender bias and whether their Services offered any initiatives or trainings focused on gender bias.

1. Participants reported mixed opinions on whether Service leadership was doing enough to address gender bias

DACOWITS asked participants if Service leadership was doing enough to address gender bias. Participants reported mixed feelings on the issue: most of the groups reported Service leadership was making an adequate effort to deal with gender bias, whereas some reported leadership was not doing enough in this area.

a. Participants in most of the groups reported Service leadership was doing enough to address gender bias

Participants in most of the groups said Service leadership was making an adequate effort to address gender bias. For example, participants reported perceptions that unit leadership has worked to address gender bias, that the issue of gender bias has declined over time, and that gender bias existed at the unit level rather than the Service level. Men were more likely than women to report that Service leadership was doing enough to address gender bias.

b. Participants in some of the groups reported that unit leadership was making an effort to address gender bias

Participants in some of the groups reported that unit leadership was working to address gender bias.

"My current [commanding officer] met with all of us [female Service members] and had a heartfelt conversation with us. At the time, I wasn't trusting that it was sincere, but I do believe it now."

—Female officer

"Our [commanding officer] has a leadership statement that talks about equal opportunity for everyone to see. We also have one from higher leadership."

—Male officer

"My unit is predominately male, [as is] our career field. Our senior leadership has done some small focus groups to dig at the bias issues and how we can better take care of . . . those at a senior level to see if there are differences between the female and male [Service members]. We . . . actually sat down and did some focus groups to see how we can address the inequity and the [in]dignity that is directed at males and females. That was not mandated to us by the [Service]; that was because we were aware of some of the incidents that happened to our female [Service members] that were coming on. That was a unit thing, but not [mandated]."

—Enlisted woman

"Just when they started telling us [about gender bias] was when the females came. My other chain of command's take was, ' . . . It's going to work because we're going to [expletive] make it work.'"

—Enlisted man

c. Participants in some of the groups reported that the issue of gender bias has diminished over time

Participants in some of the groups reported that gender bias has become less of an issue. This opinion was reported only by men and much more frequently by enlisted personnel than officers.

"I don't think [gender bias is] as glaring of an issue as it once was. I don't think there's a need for us to be hammered with the 'everyone is equal.' I don't think it's an institutionalized issue. It's always a one-off situation."

—Male officer

"I personally don't think I see [gender bias] all that much, so whatever we are doing, I think we are doing it right."

—Enlisted man

“. . . Now the process is there, the terminology is there, and it's put into training. The downside is that you have people that are so used to society and that culture. It will take time to have the mindset change. It takes a generation to change a whole mindset of how things work. People who are set in their way, eventually, they will be gone. A new generation will come instead of the stubborn old timers."

—Enlisted man

"It feels like it's up to us because we're so close to it, but go back in time 20 years. This is the same type of stuff that was brought up then, and it was pushed. If we fast forward 20 years from now, [issues of gender bias] will be off the table. But if it's not pushed now, then it won't work."

—Enlisted man

d. Participants in some of the groups reported that gender bias was localized to specific units

Participants in some of the groups reported that gender bias was a problem for only certain units rather than at the Service level. Men were more likely than women, and enlisted personnel were more likely than officers, to provide this response.

"I think [Service leadership is] doing all they can do. There is only so much you can do from the echelons above, really. It's a localized, one-of-a-kind thing to make a real impact. Does your shop have an appropriate nonbiased culture? The one next door may be very biased. There is very little command, much less [Service-level] leadership, can do about that other than supporting regulations and stuff."

—Male officer

"The majority of us in the room have done [equal opportunity] training year after year. It's in the individual shop—if you are actually following it. We get an email from the commander [to] go do this training, [and] okay, you get it done. The only thing from up high is you will do this training. It's from the lower level that [Service members] can do anything about it."

—Male officer

"[Service leadership] is doing the best they can, but those who are actually [implementing] the change [at the unit level] . . . , they have no idea. . . . In a [unit] of 64, I have 2 men who will stand up and say something [about gender bias]. Until [the efforts to address gender bias] get all the way up [to] the senior enlisted advisor, it is not going to change."

—Enlisted woman

e. Participants in some of the groups reported that Service leadership was not doing enough to address gender bias

Participants in some of the groups reported Service leadership was not making enough of an effort to address gender bias; for example, there was no enforcement of ongoing training focused on addressing gender bias. Women were much more likely than men, and enlisted personnel were much more likely than officers, to provide this response.

"You can go to training, but there is no enforcement. We go to so many trainings, and they say, '[Gender bias] is not appropriate,' but if we don't have the reinforcement from the top down. . . . You can give us all the training you want, but if we don't have senior leadership [reinforcing it] . . . , training is not going to be enough."

—Enlisted woman

"I think it has to do with the mindset [of] all the same people that come in and say, 'Don't treat them different because they are a female' when they go into the office . . . ; those things still exist. I think it's a training thing from when you first get [into the military]. But the people who are higher up still need to be trained too. I don't know if they realize that they are doing it."

—Enlisted woman

"As far as other commands go, they don't focus on [gender bias], especially when leaders prioritize males. If everyone [else] in a command is a male, and you're in a predicament, you can't be 'that female who complains.' I can't complain, or they'll see me as weak. I'll be judged about it."

—Enlisted woman

2. Participants in most of the groups cited the Equal Opportunity program as the primary source of training for addressing issues related to gender bias

DACOWITS also asked participants if their Services provided any trainings or initiatives to address gender bias. Participants in most of the groups reported that the main source of training focused on issues of gender bias was the Equal Opportunity (EO) program. Enlisted personnel were more likely than officers to provide this response.

"EO training is the biggest [training to address gender bias]. Required EO training covers most of those topics."

—Female officer

"We have refresher EO training—not specifically taught, but resources are there. . . . If you think you [are experiencing gender bias issues], you go to EO."

—Male officer

"The only thing I have heard of is that if you get in trouble with EO, then they come and give you classes."

—Enlisted woman

"Within the EO program, [gender bias] has definitely been a part of the training."

—Enlisted man

3. Participants in some of the groups reported that gender bias was not addressed through any Service trainings or initiatives

Participants in some of the groups reported that gender bias was not addressed through any trainings or initiatives offered by their Services. Men were more likely than women, and enlisted personnel were much more likely than officers, to provide this response.

"Gender bias isn't usually an issue in the [Service], so we don't have to push it."

—Enlisted man

"Commanders [put out] policy letters about not discriminating [by] race or sex. The information is out there. As far as [computer-based trainings] on gender bias, it doesn't exist."

—Male officer

"I haven't seen any trainings address gender bias or women initiatives."

—Enlisted woman

"There is no gender-specific or bias training that I'm aware of."

—Enlisted man

J. Recommendations to Address Gender Bias

DACOWITS also asked participants for personal recommendations on how Service or unit leadership could address gender bias. Participants offered a variety of suggestions, including the implementation of gender-neutral physical fitness standards and fostering unit environments where Service members felt comfortable addressing gender-related issues.

1. Participants in some of the groups recommended implementing a gender-neutral physical fitness standard

Participants in some of the groups proposed implementing a gender-neutral physical fitness standard. Only enlisted personnel offered this recommendation, and men were much more likely than women to provide this response, as were members of one Service versus the others.

"I am a realist. I agree that anyone who is in the Service on the battlefield should be held to the same standards. If 'Sergeant Scruffy' is a cook, and 'Sergeant Joe' is an [occupational specialist], they need to be able to do the same thing if they get stuck in the same fight. If they can't do it, then they shouldn't have joined [the military]."

—Enlisted man

"I got told by a female [Service member], 'I don't know why men don't max out their [Physical Readiness Test].' I asked how many pushups she had to do, and she said '19.' We have to do 50. If that's the standard, then set that for everyone. This is what it takes to be in the [Service]. Just do it."

—Enlisted man

"We need to push for not just female empowerment but also female improvement. If they want us to be equal and feel equal, then they have to push the same standard for everybody."

—Enlisted woman

". . . Why [is a woman allowed to complete her] run in 13 minutes [instead of the time allowed for men]? Why does it matter? I think everyone would be so happy [if we implemented a gender-neutral physical fitness standard]."

—Enlisted man

2. Participants in some of the groups recommended fostering unit environments where Service members felt comfortable addressing gender-related issues

Participants in some of the groups suggested encouraging unit environments that allowed Service members to feel comfortable addressing gender-related issues. Women were much more likely than men to provide this response, as were members of one Service versus the others.

"The deciding factor is comfort to report. I filed my first [sexual harassment and assault response program] report at this duty station. I could have filed first at [my] old company but did not. The command climate there was not comfortable. Here you feel comfortable. If you can't report it, the culture persists."

—Female officer

"We need to support the culture of men being comfortable calling someone on the carpet. . . . I see formal avenues every day, but it's more effective to stop a male in his tracks and tell him to stop acting like a child. [We need to be] more confrontational. We're not; we are people that stand by, don't address anything. We need to work on that at a personal level as well."

—Female officer

". . . Leaders need to step in and correct [gender bias] on the spot. I see a lot of leaders that don't correct it on the spot. If I see some of the guys doing [an activity but not allowing a woman to participate], I stop and say right then and there, [tell them] that they should let her do [the activity]."

—Enlisted woman

"Make it more comfortable to talk about, like sexual assault and stuff. The [Service] makes things seem so uncomfortable to talk about when they're really not."

—Enlisted woman

3. Participants offered other recommendations for addressing gender bias in the military

Participants shared other suggestions for addressing gender bias at the Service and unit leadership levels; these included the following:

- ▶ Clearly communicate expectations regarding gender bias from leadership.
- ▶ Focus efforts on addressing gender bias in occupational specialties recently opened to women.
- ▶ Reduce the number of trainings required of Service members.
- ▶ Increase the number of female drill instructors.
- ▶ Consistently implement consequences for bad behavior by leadership.

Chapter 3. Pregnancy and Parenthood

DACOWITS has been studying issues related to pregnancy and parenthood for more than 20 years. The Committee recognizes that these are issues of vital importance to women’s well-being and success in the military Services. To build on its study of career and family planning issues conducted for the 2018 focus group report and its study of child care experiences conducted for the 2017 focus group report, DACOWITS explored Service members’ perceptions and experiences related to pregnancy, maternity uniforms, breastfeeding and lactation support, postdeployment reintegration for parents, and the marketing of child care options.

The Committee conducted 16 focus groups with both enlisted personnel (E4–E8) and officers (O3–O5/W1–W5) on the topic of pregnancy and parenthood (see Appendix C.2 for the focus group protocol). This chapter discusses the focus group findings on pregnancy and parenthood and is organized into the following sections:

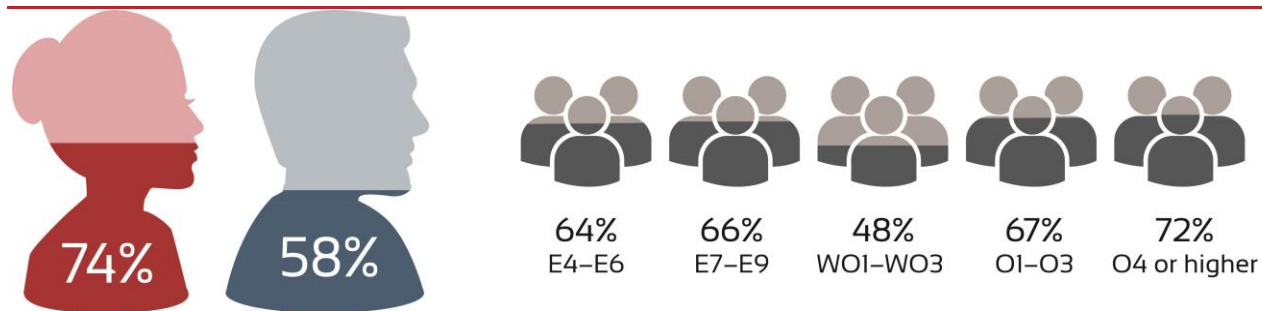
- ▶ Perceived difficulty of having a family and advancing one’s career
- ▶ Experience with pregnancy during military service
- ▶ Maternity uniforms
- ▶ Breastfeeding and lactation support
- ▶ Postdeployment family reintegration
- ▶ Child care marketing and awareness of child care options

When interpreting the findings outlined in this chapter, it is important to consider that these focus groups consisted of individuals with a range of family backgrounds and experiences that included single, married, and divorced Service members; some participants had children, and some did not. All pregnancy and parenthood questions were asked of both male and female groups.

A. Perceived Difficulty of Having a Family and Advancing One’s Career

In 2018 the Committee found gender and rank differences among Service members regarding the perceived ease or difficulty of having a family and continuing to advance their careers in the military. Using the mini-survey questionnaire, DACOWITS asked the same question in 2019. Participants could select from the response options of very easy, somewhat easy, somewhat difficult, or very difficult. Although many participants from all demographic groups felt that having a family and progressing in one’s military career was somewhat or very difficult, women were more likely than men, and enlisted personnel and junior officers were more likely than senior officers, to feel this way (see Figure 3.1).

Figure 3.1. Proportion of Participants by Gender and Rank Who Found Planning a Family and Advancing One’s Military Career Somewhat or Very Difficult

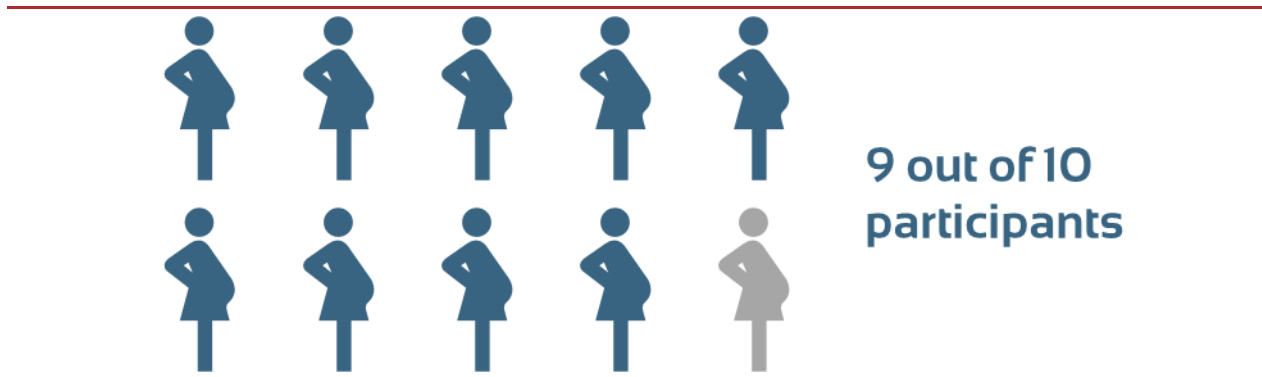


Source: DACOWITS mini-survey

B. Experience With Pregnancy During Military Service

The Committee was interested in the experiences of pregnant servicewomen and asked participants several questions about their experiences and/or perceptions of pregnancy during military service. During the focus group, DACOWITS asked participants to indicate how many had been pregnant or had known someone who was pregnant during their military service. Hand-count data revealed that the majority (9 out of 10) either had been or had known someone who was pregnant during their military service (see Figure 3.2).

Figure 3.2. Proportion of Participants Who Had Been or Had Known Someone Who Was Pregnant During Their Military Service



Source: Focus group transcripts

1. Participants described a variety of challenges pregnant servicewomen could encounter

DACOWITS asked focus group participants about the challenges pregnant servicewomen faced and how a servicewoman’s unit was affected when she became pregnant. Participants described several challenges that negatively affected pregnant servicewomen and their units. Although most of the groups described how pregnancy had an adverse impact on the unit, some of the groups reported that there was little to no effect on the unit.

a. Participants in most of the groups felt pregnant servicewomen were stigmatized

The most prevalent challenge raised by participants was the stigma associated with pregnancy. Women were more likely than men to raise this issue, and close to half of the participants who discussed a pregnancy stigma described it as originating within the unit or working environment among peers and direct leadership.

"I got pregnant when I was a [rank] . . . ; [my unit] hated me. They were mad I got 3 months of maternity leave. They thought they were doing all the hard work while I was sitting at a desk all day . . . ; no one would help me when I got back. . . . I think about it now. If I want to have another kid, I'm scared it will set me back in my career, and I'm afraid the [unit] will hate me again. It makes you feel guilty about wanting to have a family."

—Enlisted woman

"I'd say perception is probably one of the biggest challenges. . . . I guess it can be perceived by the unit, not necessarily rightfully or wrongfully, [that] the female has chosen to be pregnant instead of working."

—Male officer

"I'm from a [occupational specialty] background. [Pregnant Service members] are viewed as dead weight, [and] from the leadership level, too. . . . It can be an issue because they try to make them feel [bad] for being pregnant or unable to do certain things. That's been my experience. . . ."

—Enlisted man

"I know I told myself I wouldn't have children unless I became a lifer, and not until my second enlistment. In the units I've been in, women have been shunned after getting pregnant. The minute you get pregnant, you aren't allowed to do your job. You're no use to us anymore because you can't do your job. I've yet to see a [unit] transition their [Service member] to another shop and check on them. Now it's someone else's problem. Once you have the baby, maybe they'll care about you again, but maybe not. You might get crap because you're gone for months. It's a big issue in [my occupational specialty] because you'll be shunned if you get pregnant."

—Enlisted woman

"When you don't have many females in a unit, and that female is pregnant, that's all [her peers] around her are going to know. It's tough getting [Service members] that have never [worked] around females, and that's the first thing they are opened up to, that [pregnant women] cannot share the load. It creates a toxic environment for that [Service member] and what she's going through. It's up to the leadership to help that. You need to teach [them] how to react to that; if you don't, it creates a toxic environment."

—Female officer

“When I [was pregnant], it was an expectation out there that I was going to become lazy and try to get out of work and not pull my part. It kind of bothered me. I’m a female that can do what you can do. If I can do it, I will do it. If it’s my job, absolutely. I was [an instructor at that time]. I kind of pushed myself to continue on teaching. . . . It was tough, and the students [told me to] sit down. It bothered me because my peers, all males, were like, ‘You can’t do this.’ I’m not dead or handicapped, just pregnant. I see that stigma out here: ‘She can’t do it or will try to get out of it’ (nonverbal agreement from other participants).”

—Enlisted woman

“I wore the uniform and boots up until, with both children, the day before. I went to work on Friday and gave birth on the next day. Never half days, any of that. Some of that was on me. I did not want the thought out there [in a] male-dominated work center [that I couldn’t do it]. . . . I had something to prove.”

—Enlisted woman

“I’m from a [occupational specialty] background. As soon as [female unit members] get pregnant, they cannot be near [certain materials]. The unit puts them into an admin[istrative] position. There is the perception that they got pregnant to [sit at a desk] or [the perception that a desk is] where they belong anyway. That attitude is out there.”

—Enlisted man

“. . . Being pregnant in [my occupational specialty] didn’t work because . . . of the negative connotation because you are pregnant. [The males will say], ‘We have to do all of this work because [we] have one less person because you are pregnant.’”

—Female officer

b. Participants in most of the groups described how pregnancy had a negative effect on the unit

In most of the groups, participants felt that pregnancy has a negative impact on the unit because pregnant servicewomen may have to reduce their workload during pregnancy and may be away from the unit for an extended time during maternity leave. When asked about the challenges that pregnant servicewomen faced, men were more likely than women to talk about the negative impact that pregnancy had within the unit.

“[Because of my occupational specialty], if a woman gets pregnant, she can’t continue to do production-type work, so she is no longer doing the job she was trained to do.”

—Enlisted man

“The smaller the team, the more you feel the work [loss]. Also, when your job is a job that you can’t do when you are pregnant, finding the work that you can do to help the unit [and] contribute [is hard], finding things [to do so it doesn’t] look like you disappeared for a year.”

—Female officer

“When a female becomes pregnant, the female has to be pulled from an operation, and how are they going to fill in the hole for that position, especially if [the pregnant female] is key leadership?”

—Male officer

“There's [an open position], it's an immediate impact. Women are out for a certain number of months with no backfill. I would say when you are out that long and come back, there are certain periods of time where you have to catch up on what everyone else is doing, so that can be an issue when they get back.”

—Male officer

“I was very hesitant to tell people [that I was pregnant]. I worked in [occupational specialty] at the time. . . . I knew it was a huge inconvenience in [occupational specialty] to be pregnant. I didn't want to be that girl. Someone has to take over her job and find a new person for me. . . . I never wanted to be [that] person. . . . The unit was disappointed in me because now we've got to find someone else to do your job and somewhere for you to sit for 9 months essentially.”

—Enlisted woman

c. In the majority of groups, participants reported that confusion about pregnancy-related policies negatively affected servicewomen's experiences during and after pregnancy

Participants reported that misunderstandings about pregnancy and postpartum regulations adversely affected servicewomen's experiences during and after pregnancy. Examples of policies cited by participants included the initial notification of pregnancy, work and duty limitations for pregnant Service members, and physical fitness training limitations.

“Sometimes when you go to your command for the first time [when you're pregnant], they may not know the process and steps. It may be stressful because you don't know what you're supposed to do.”

—Enlisted woman

“For pregnant servicewomen, the first thing that comes to mind being a frustration is the early notification of your commander. As soon as you find out you are pregnant, you have 2 weeks to notify your [commanding officer] that you are pregnant. This can be difficult in the case of a miscarriage. It's supposed to be confidential, but everyone knows that you are pregnant. You can be 6 weeks and lose the child, and now you are in a very awkward situation at work. . . . If there are equipment requirements, okay, but there is a better balance that can be found between 'you [find] out you are pregnant' and 'you have 2 weeks to notify.’”

—Female officer

“I think one challenge is that they believe [they] are mandated to report [a pregnancy] to leadership, but they might not want their colleagues to know immediately.”

—Male officer

“. . . I came back after 6 weeks maternity leave, and [was told], ‘You’re going to train to prepare for deployment.’ I’m on a 6-month postpartum profile to not do that. Without documentation, [my supervisor] would have snatched me up to take me downrange.”

—Enlisted woman

“One of the things I see is sometimes at the beginning, they don’t get support from their shop. Whether they’ve never had a pregnant female in their shop, or the leaders don’t know what they have to pay attention to, there is a lack of knowledge. . . .”

—Enlisted woman

d. Participants in some of the groups described the negative impact pregnancy could have on women’s career progression

Another challenge for pregnant servicewomen was the adverse effect pregnancy could have on a female Service member’s career progression. Officers were much more likely than enlisted personnel to voice this concern.

“In my [occupational specialty], they have specific training pipelines and milestones they have to meet for certifications and qualifications. Extended time out puts an obstacle in their way for someone who has a gap in that pipeline [because of pregnancy]. It could set them back however many weeks or months depending on how long they are out.”

—Male officer

“Some of the challenge is figuring out if this is the right time in my career to have a baby. . . . [The] first time I had a child, I was a [rank] . . . , but my unit supported me 100 percent. [With] my third child, it was around the time I needed to do a special duty assignment, so there was a delay, so after my third child, I had to immediately start selecting for [this assignment], and the expectation is not to have a child during that period. Now I’m close to 40. I want to have a kid, but I kind of don’t because . . . I’m going to a new duty station next week. The perception is I have an important job, and I’m going to a great unit, so I don’t want to have a baby.”

—Enlisted woman

“[In my occupational community], you can’t be pregnant and [do your job]. On those same lines, if you want to remain competitive in the field and your specialty . . . , there’s no good time for [pregnancy]. . . . To continue on the ‘golden road,’ we call it, you can’t do that if you have a baby. Those orders are 3 years long . . . , [so] you have to make a choice: career or kids. There’s a chance to do both, but it’s very difficult.”

—Female officer

“When those [Service members] go up on [promotion] boards against other [Service members] that aren’t pregnant, but are in the same time in service, you have to take out the time for postpartum recovery and the last stages of pregnancy, but for some [occupational specialties], you just can’t do that and maintain qualification. . . . They have to decide to have a kid or choose a job.”

—Male officer

e. In some of the groups, participants discussed the medical challenges women faced during and after pregnancy

Participants identified the medical issues faced by pregnant servicewomen, some of which were exacerbated by the military working environment. Women were much more likely than men to share this sentiment.

"I just had a baby, my fifth child. . . . One of the challenges I had here is with parking. Sometimes you have to walk far. I had to go to the hospital for bleeding once a month, and I was close to having a miscarriage several times. I brought it up and was told that I just need to get here earlier because a parking spot closer would be available. I see [other] pregnant women walking far distances. The command has parking spaces they can reserve for [Service members]. I don't understand why they don't offer them to pregnant women."

—Enlisted woman

"I've spent a lot of time coaching [younger Service members] to tell them what is ok to discuss and what is not ok to . . . discuss with their supervisors. . . . They fight [a negative] perception. . . . [They are sometimes seen as] complaining [or using] pregnancy as an excuse. . . . If you are concerned, then you need to get the care that you and your child needs. I've had some folks that have lost babies because they didn't get the care they needed."

—Female officer

"My youngest [child] just turned 1. I had [caesarian sections for both kids]. I went to physical therapy to let them know I'm having pains. Basic exercises were difficult. He said to me, 'I'm looking at your [restrictions], and you've been on [restricted duty] for longer than a year.' I just had two kids and a [caesarian] section. He told me, 'At some point, you need to ask yourself if you want to stay in or get out. If you want to get out, we can stop this and you can talk to your commander here, and we can get you the help that you need.' That's not what I was there for. I'm trying to stay. I want to work."

—Enlisted woman

"Women of a certain age that get pregnant have different issues than younger women. For instance, a person I know had gestational diabetes and liver issues with that. She was basically one step away from being bedridden her second trimester. The expectation was that they would make no adjustments to the [physical training] program based on her situation."

—Enlisted man

f. Participants in some of the groups noted pregnancy did not have a substantial impact on their units because of less demanding physical job requirements within their occupational specialties

Although groups identified many potential challenges for pregnant servicewomen, some of the groups stated that pregnancy did not have a substantial impact on the functioning of their units. In particular, participants who held occupational specialties with less demanding physical requirements reported it was easier for women to work throughout pregnancy without restrictions or disruptions to their normal

jobs. Men were much more likely than women, and officers were much more likely than enlisted personnel, to make this comment.

"In [my occupational specialty] . . . , it's predominately females, so it's never been an issue. It's not, 'Oh, here we go again, [another pregnancy].' It's not an issue for us. We hear about it being a big deal in other places, but there's no significant impact for us other than missing programs, trainings, etc."

—Male officer

"We had an operations person, and being in an office environment, she was able to work right up until [her] pregnancy [ended]. They also worked it out with the rest of the [Service members] in the shop about what kind of impacts this might have."

—Male officer

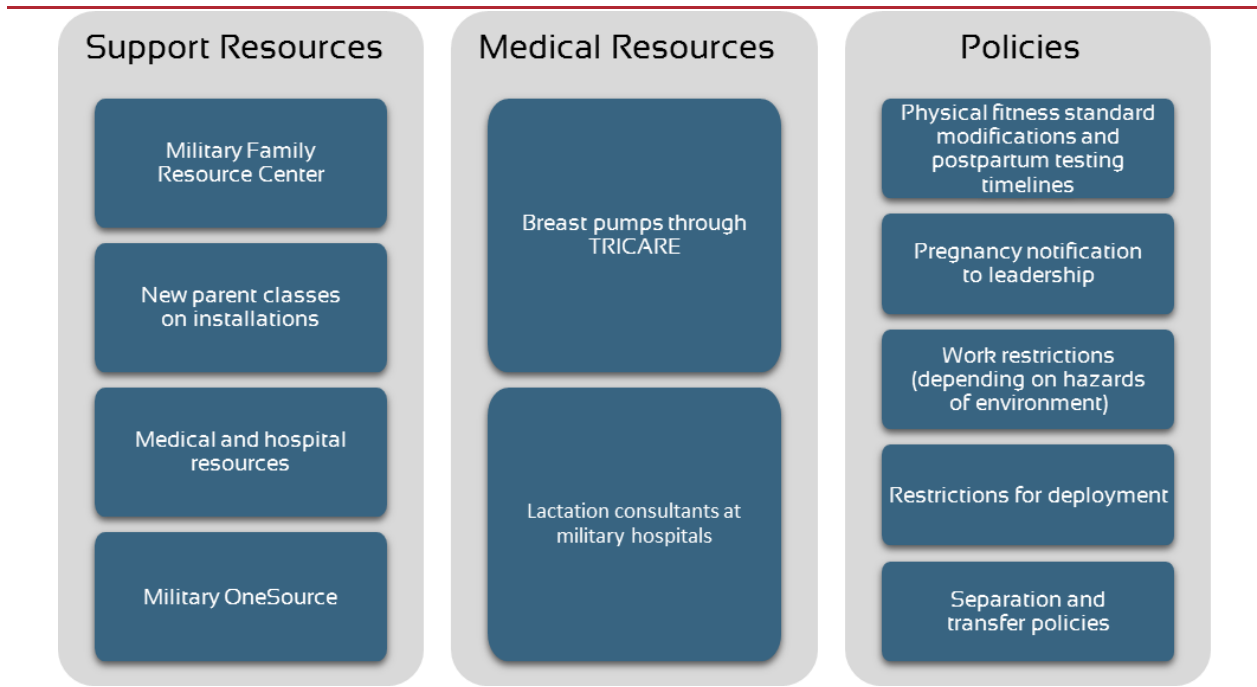
"As an [occupational specialist], you don't do much physical stuff, so you can be pregnant on the job as long as your brain works. The only thing is after you get back from convalescence leave, you have to qualify again to ensure you can still do your job."

—Enlisted woman

2. Participants identified a range of policies and support resources available to pregnant servicewomen

Participants were asked about their awareness of specific policies or resources for pregnant servicewomen. Many of the groups cited support resources for servicewomen, some identified medical resources, and some mentioned Service-related policies (see Figure 3.3).

Figure 3.3. Available Resources to Support Pregnant Servicewomen



Source: Focus group transcripts

C. Maternity Uniforms

DACOWITS asked participants about maternity uniforms, which are uniforms that pregnant servicewomen may wear throughout pregnancy and, potentially, during the postpartum period. These questions focused on Service members' assessments of the availability, affordability, function, and appearance of maternity uniforms. When participants were asked to indicate whether they had known someone who had worn a maternity uniform or had worn one themselves, hand-count data revealed approximately 9 out of 10 participants had known someone who had worn a maternity uniform or had worn one themselves.

1. Participants had mixed opinions on the availability of maternity uniforms

Participants expressed mixed perceptions about the availability of maternity uniforms for pregnant servicewomen. Both men and women reported that maternity uniforms were generally available; however, women were more likely to describe challenges to obtaining maternity uniforms and problems finding maternity uniforms in the correct size.

a. Participants In the majority of groups reported that maternity uniforms were readily available for pregnant servicewomen

In the majority of groups, both men and women reported that maternity uniforms were readily available for pregnant servicewomen who needed them.

"[From] my experience, they've always been readily available. I've never seen an issue where [Service members were] not able to get their uniforms in any of the units I have been in or my wife was in; [they are] always able to get them."

—Enlisted man

"They are available—no issue getting them in my experience."

—Enlisted woman

"I have a decent percentage of women in my unit, and I haven't heard about them being difficult to obtain. I have never heard that comment over the course of my career."

—Male officer

". . . I've never heard of a [Service member] not being able to get the uniform. I've known [Service members] to say, 'I'm not wearing them,' because they want to wear the [regular uniform], and they just keep buying [the regular uniform] bigger and bigger."

—Male officer

b. Participants described a range of sources from which servicewomen obtained maternity uniforms

Participants described obtaining maternity uniforms from a variety of retail or other sources. Uniform or exchange shops were commonly mentioned, but women were more likely to mention other resources

such as thrift stores or social media groups, or borrowing maternity uniforms from other Service members.

"I was able to get all my uniforms from other women that were my size. I had to check in when I was 6 months pregnant. I went to the uniform shop, and they had never seen these uniforms or how to tailor [them]. This is the uniform people, and even they didn't know what to do with it!"

—Female officer

"When I was stationed at [installation], I was on the largest base in the world, and we had multiple thrift stores on base. I was lucky, though; one woman who wasn't going to have another baby gave me her uniforms."

—Enlisted woman

"Our troops always go through hand-me-downs. They may find the bottoms but not the tops. It's all hand-me-downs. [The moderator asked, 'How do they find them?'] Facebook. [Another participant chimed in to say, 'Thrift shops.']"

—Female officer

"They are very available, but they are very expensive. I've heard of women lending uniforms to each other because of the price."

—Enlisted man

c. Participants in some of the groups described difficulties with obtaining maternity uniforms

Although participants in most of the groups perceived that maternity uniforms were readily available, those in some of the groups reported difficulties procuring these uniforms. In particular, women were more likely to mention challenges to obtaining maternity uniforms, especially if there was not a major military installation nearby.

"If you don't have an [exchange] or uniform store, it's hard to [obtain a uniform]."

—Female officer

"Previously I was in a national guard unit. There they issue you the uniforms. We had two [women] that became pregnant. They were almost all the way through their pregnancy before the uniforms came in. They could not button their pants before they got the uniforms."

—Enlisted woman

"Depends too if you're around a [Service]-saturated base. I've been stationed on a [Service branch] base, and they didn't have them."

—Enlisted man

"I think it depends largely on where you are stationed and the resources. It is not an across-the-board [availability]. My daughter, who recently got out of the [Service], had two babies while she was in [city]. There is [Service] there, surprisingly, but it was a couple of hours away for her facilities, so it was hugely inconvenient for her, and you can only get [maternity uniforms] in person."

—Female officer

d. Participants in some of the groups reported various sizing issues with maternity uniforms

In some of the groups, participants described problems with sizing or obtaining the proper size of maternity uniforms; women were more likely than men to comment on sizing issues.

“For females over 6 feet, it’s completely difficult. With all four kids, they didn’t have tops big enough for me. I walked around not in compliance [while pregnant].”

—Enlisted woman

“The [uniform] is not supposed to be tailored. It’s supposed to be flowing. I’ve never had issues, but I know a lot of people that do, people who go from the first to the third trimester [and] blow up. They only give you a certain amount [of maternity uniforms], just one set, and it’s hard if you get a lot bigger [during the pregnancy].”

—Female officer

“In my case, it was our supply sergeant who was pregnant, and she came to me as the [supervisor] and said, ‘Is there any way that I can wear civilian clothing? . . . There are no available sizes for my uniform.’ She was asking to wear civilian clothes to work in lieu of the [proper uniform], and she’s the supply [personnel]. I think she would know how to get it.”

—Enlisted man

2. Challenges for servicewomen attempting to obtain maternity uniforms

DACOWITS asked participants if they were aware of any issues servicewomen faced when trying to acquire maternity uniforms. The most prominent challenge mentioned by both men and women was the additional expense of purchasing maternity uniforms. However, participants in some of the groups were not aware of any issues servicewomen faced in procuring the uniforms.

a. Participants in some of the groups described the expense of maternity uniforms as the main challenge for pregnant servicewomen

In some of the groups, participants said the expense of purchasing maternity uniforms was a significant problem for pregnant servicewomen. Enlisted personnel were more likely than officers to describe this financial challenge as an obstacle.

“The women I’ve spoken to who purchased it, unless you find a person to borrow from, it gets expensive because you have to get all new uniform items. It’s just another cost on top of all the other uniform costs, especially recently. There have been a lot of changes to the female uniform, adding extra stuff. It’s frustrating to see women have to buy so many more uniform items than men do.”

—Female officer

“It’s difficult sometimes to get the money. They will [tell a pregnant servicewoman], ‘Hey, you need to show up in this uniform tomorrow,’ but they haven’t gotten the money to buy the uniform yet.”

—Enlisted man

"I had to [attend a] court martial when I was 8 months pregnant, and they would not issue me [the uniform I had to wear]. I had to purchase all of that. I couldn't give the uniforms back after the alterations; [it was] a lot of money to spend just for that."

—Enlisted woman

b. In some of the groups, men reported no issues for servicewomen looking to obtain maternity uniforms

Participants in some of the male groups said they were not aware of any challenges for servicewomen who needed to acquire maternity uniforms.

"At [installation], the uniforms were issued . . . ; it had nothing to do with your unit or supply. You brought her to [supply], and they issue[d] maternity uniforms on the spot."

—Enlisted man

"I haven't seen any [issues with maternity uniforms]."

—Male officer

3. Participants suggested improving the appearance and functionality of maternity uniforms

DACOWITS asked participants for recommendations on how to improve the look and function of their respective Services' maternity uniforms. Although both men and women discussed their thoughts, women were more likely than men to offer recommendations, especially based on their personal experiences with maternity uniforms.

a. Participants in half of the groups said maternity uniforms were not flattering to pregnant servicewomen

Women were more likely than men to describe how maternity uniforms were not flattering and drew negative attention to pregnant women from their peers, potentially furthering the stigma of pregnancy.

"[The maternity uniform] looks like a . . . potato sack. It's atrocious. I've been dying for a uniform board to come to complain. I loathe it. Wait until someone has to put that on; they'll feel horrible."

—Enlisted woman

"I had a friend who just gave birth, and she hated her maternity uniform. She thought it was ugly and looked unprofessional. It looks bad."

—Male officer

"The [maternity dress uniforms] are hideous, and they stick out like a sore thumb. . . . We had a brand new [rank], and she had to wear the smock [referring to pregnancy uniform], but it was awful, and I don't know if it was comfortable or not, but that contributes to the stigma [of pregnancy]."

—Female officer

"I don't think anyone in this room has experience with pregnancy uniforms, but I can make assumptions that no matter how functional they are or not, I'm not sure how comfortable we can make them. No matter what . . . , by wearing the uniform, there is probably some sense of overt difference that is a daily reminder that you are in a different category. I imagine it's not comfortable to wear and probably is a reminder of that all the time. It's a challenge, and I can see that as a challenge."

—Male officer

"I called [my maternity uniform] my tent (laughed)."

—Enlisted woman

b. In some of the groups, participants commented that maternity uniforms lacked pockets and had uncomfortable waistbands

Participants shared feedback that the maternity uniforms lacked pockets, which diminished their utility, and had uncomfortable waistbands (see Table 3.1).

Table 3.1. Selected Participant Feedback About Design of Maternity Uniforms

Lack of pockets	"... There are no pockets in the pants. Where am I supposed to put all my stuff?"	—Enlisted woman
	"There's no pockets in the tops."	—Enlisted woman
	"The [Service member] I had complained that there were not enough pockets."	—Enlisted man
Uncomfortable waistband	"With my previous pregnancies, the pants didn't go up high enough, and I would get red lines on my body, and they itched and hurt. Your belly is so sensitive, but I want my pants to stay up. It had the cinch on the sides, which were the problem."	—Enlisted woman
	"I think the waistband should be changed. Make it thicker and softer. After a while, it sinks into the top of your belly, and it's painful."	—Female officer

c. Participants offered recommendations for improving maternity uniforms

Participants shared various suggestions on how to improve the look, comfort, and functionality of maternity uniforms for pregnant servicewomen; these included the following:

- ▶ Increase the adjustability of uniforms.
- ▶ Improve the professional look of uniforms.
- ▶ Increase the comfort of the elastic waistband.
- ▶ Add pockets.
- ▶ Include women in the design and development process.

- ▶ Use more stretchy, breathable fabric for the entire uniform.
- ▶ Add functionality for breastfeeding support.

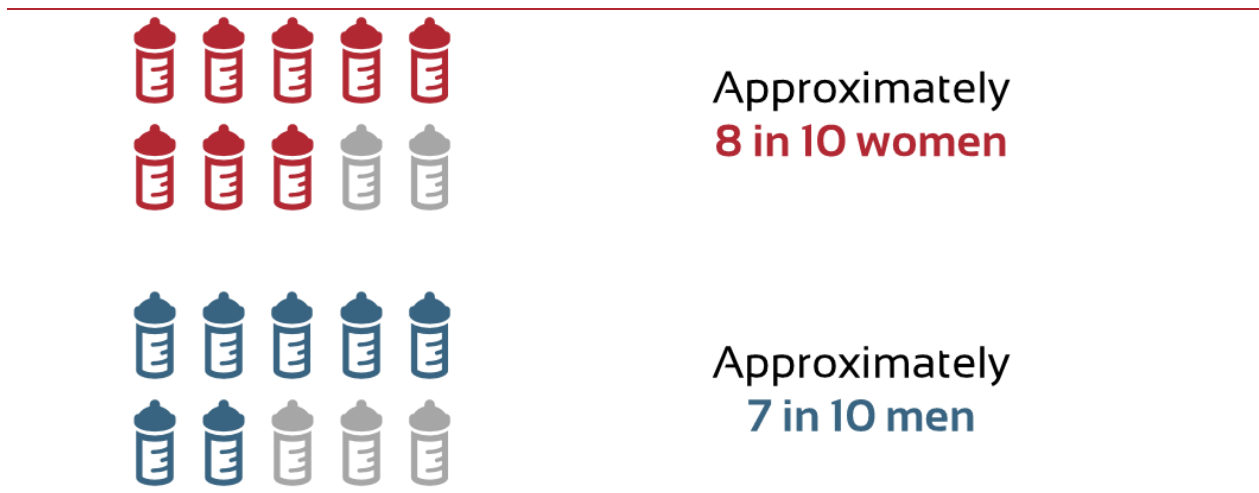
D. Breastfeeding and Lactation Support

DACOWITS recommended in 2015 that DoD increase the number and quality of lactation rooms within each Service. As part of the Committee’s continuing study of breastfeeding and lactation support, focus group participants were asked about their awareness of lactation policies; challenges for breastfeeding servicewomen; and the quality, cleanliness, and availability of lactation rooms.

Prior to the questions about breastfeeding and lactation support, the concepts of breastfeeding, expressing or pumping milk, lactation, and lactation rooms were explained to focus group participants. In the following section, breastfeeding and lactation are used as terms to refer to the overall activities of breastfeeding and expressing milk. Expressing milk refers to the process by which a woman expels breastmilk from her breast, regardless of the method used (whether by hand or pumping).

DACOWITS asked participants to raise their hands to indicate whether they had known someone in the military who had breastfed or expressed milk while at work. Women could raise their hands if they had personal experience with breastfeeding or lactation activities during their military service. The majority of participants knew someone who had breastfed during their military service. Hand-count data revealed that women were slightly more likely than men to have known someone in the military who had breastfed or pumped while at work, as shown in Figure 3.4.

Figure 3.4. Proportion of Participants Who Knew Someone Who Had Breastfed or Expressed Milk at Work



1. Policies and resources for breastfeeding and lactation support in the military

DACOWITS asked participants about their knowledge of DoD or Service-specific policies that applied to breastfeeding and/or expressing milk. The Committee also asked participants whether their Services provided certain resources for women who wanted to breastfeed or needed to express milk while at

work. Although all the groups included participants who identified a need for designated lactation rooms, participants described mixed experiences with the existence of and access to lactation rooms. During the discussions, a few military resources were identified for breastfeeding servicewomen.

a. Participants in all the groups identified the existence of specific DoD or Service-specific policies requiring a designated lactation space

Participants in all the groups confirmed there were policies that required a designated lactation room for servicewomen who were breastfeeding or needed to express milk during the workday; however, participants did not always know the source of these policies (Service or DoD) and did not consistently identify the required elements.

“The command must provide a room, not a bathroom, that has running water and a refrigerator, and you have to put the time and when [the breastmilk] will expire on the bottle.”

—Enlisted woman

“I think we just dealt with one of these at work. The DoD policy, as far as I know it, is that superiors are supposed to work with breastfeeding or lactating women, but there is not a specific amount of time or locations, which can make it difficult.”

—Male officer

“I think there’s so many women then you have to have a lactation rooms in the building. I don’t know the number, but there is a policy out there.”

—Female officer

“I know we are required by law to have expression stations, with a refrigerator, and there’s another place on base with a fridge that was just created for expression.”

—Enlisted man

b. Participants in half of the groups described having experiences with designated lactation rooms; however, participants in some of the groups stated they did not have access to a lactation room

When asked about their awareness of policies for lactation rooms, participants also shared their experiences, or lack thereof, with these types of rooms. Participants in half of the groups had experience with a designated lactation room in either their current or prior units. However, some of the groups shared they had not seen or currently did not have a designated lactation room in the buildings where they worked.

“There is a closet in the [building]—a large closet. My last command had a large closet that used to be a breakroom. They put a sign on the door that said that because of regulations, this will now be solely used for a lactation room, off limits to anyone not lactating.”

—Enlisted man

"This is an issue that we're trying [to address]; we have a lactation room that is designated, but it is not a welcoming room. We want to have a welcoming room, and it's a process that we are working on."

—Male officer

"I can't remember the policy right off the bat, but I know there is a policy for having a certain [number] of rooms per office space. My facility doesn't have it, but [breastfeeding women] would go to a facility nearby."

—Male officer

"I know there are policies that say facilities should provide space for pumping, but that's not how it works. You're still in a bathroom. I've been higher in rank with my last two pregnancies, so I had my own office, but the machine is loud, so people know what I'm doing on the other side of the door."

—Enlisted woman

c. Participants in some of the groups described a range of existing support and resources for breastfeeding servicewomen

When asked about support and resources for breastfeeding servicewomen, participants in some of the groups described support programs and medical provisions such as breast pumps, access to lactation consultants, and other family programs and resources. Men were much more likely than women to suggest these types of resources and support.

"I know pumps are proved by TRICARE, and there are classes here by [family support center]. I had a [Service member] whose wife just had a baby, and [family support center] had all kinds of stuff."

—Enlisted man

"My wife is pregnant, and we had a baby in January. When you have appointments, when the baby is first born, they give you [referrals] to [find] help off base. We got a referral to a place that is based around helping women lactate better, learn positions to breastfeed. As far as place to go, you can ask for a referral during your appointment."

—Enlisted man

"I think [the family support center] has new parent support groups, lactation specialists, baby bootcamps, and a lot of support activities."

—Male officer

2. Challenges for servicewomen who were breastfeeding

The Committee asked participants what challenges breastfeeding servicewomen faced when they wanted or needed to express milk during their military service. In particular, the question asked participants to reflect on their own experiences and observations. Three main challenges were named: (1) a lack of designated lactation rooms, (2) the stigma breastfeeding women experienced within their units, and (3) logistical challenges related to needing time at work to express milk.

a. In the majority of groups, participants reported the lack of designated lactation rooms as a challenge for breastfeeding servicewomen

A lack of designated lactation rooms was an equally shared concern across gender and rank in the majority of focus groups. The lack of designated lactation rooms was mentioned more commonly by members of one Service.

“. . . I asked the [school] if they had a nursing room, and they looked at me like I was an alien.”

—Female officer

“. . . A couple units, especially when I was at [(installation), had] trouble coming up with room for a lactation room or [ended up using] a closet basically. A lot of units don't have the space because these buildings are outdated and/or newly built, but the thought of a lactation room in the building was not thought of in construction of the building. At some places, there is a space issue.”

—Enlisted man

“A personal story: My boss wanted to be supportive, but we don't have the room. He would say, ‘Tell me when you need to pump, how long you are going to do this for,’ and I don't know this yet, I'm a new mother, it's overwhelming. I got the pump, the kind where I could do it in my car because that was the only solution. The bathroom wasn't private. It was challenging to figure out resources and speak to this [Service] chaplain and give them answers and then have to cc everyone on the email. . . . Those were the barriers for me.”

—Female officer

“[Expressing milk] is always an inconvenience to the mission, period. I made it known this is the way my child eats; you don't interfere with that. Luckily with 3 out of 4 children, I had my own office. I invite other females into the office if they need to pump or whatever.”

—Enlisted woman

b. Participants in nearly half of all the groups said servicewomen who needed time to express milk at work were stigmatized

Participants in almost half of the groups described how women who needed to take time away from work to express milk experienced stigma within their units. Participants reported that breastfeeding servicewomen were made to feel like a burden because of this need. Both men and women commented equally on this issue.

“Senior officers, male officers, were well intentioned, but they ask too many private questions. . . . They will say, ‘All right, fine, you have to do that again,’ or, ‘Oh, she's got to go do milk ops.’ Those are overwhelming barriers that young [Service members] don't know they are going to face.”

—Female officer

"The policy on [lactation] is so vague. It says women can go to pump 'as needed' to continue to lactate for the child. It's hard to say, 'Well, you've already gone five times to pump today,' and you have other female [Service members] who say that they didn't go that many times. But typically if I have that issue, I have a female [Service member] talk to them. The policy is so vague because you can't regulate it."

—Enlisted man

"Again, [in this occupational specialty], you can't work . . . if nursing, so they really discourage it. If you tell them you will be nursing . . . , [they say], 'Oh, so now we have another year where you can't work. It is a burden, you know, if you choose to do that.'"

—Enlisted woman

"The [challenge is the] perception that they are taking a break to go do this, as in, 'Are the members my unit/group/section going to talk and gossip' about [the time I take for this] activity?"

—Male officer

c. In some of the groups, participants described the logistical challenges associated with finding time to express milk while at work

Participants in some of the groups also identified issues around timing as a challenge for servicewomen who needed to express milk while at work.

"Depending on what your [occupational specialty] is, the job comes first. . . . They depend on you to control that session, but if you miss a pump, you're going to explode. The availability to do it when you need to, not what's convenient for the job, is a challenge."

—Enlisted woman

"I think a big hindrance for Service members that decided to nurse is that you have to have a time commitment . . . to pump or breastfeed, and that doesn't really work with military [schedules]. You have to be like, 'Um, sir, it's 10 a.m., and I have to pump,' and it really doesn't work. People would say, 'Oh, you have to pump again,' and I would say, 'You just had your third smoke break.' It just comes to down to the time commitment with the military and the unpredictability [of your schedule]."

—Female officer

"Operations [are the biggest challenge]. Most women are going to feel the need to pump potentially at different times, especially if it's uncomfortable because it's been a while since they pumped, and if they are in the middle of operations, it can be difficult. So, finding the time would be challenging—feeling the need to do that and lining up with what you have going on operationally."

—Male officer

3. Lactation rooms and facilities

DACOWITS asked participants where a servicewoman would go if she needed to express milk while at work. Participants described places they had seen or heard of women using, or women themselves described the spaces they had used for expressing milk. The majority of participants identified office space as the area a woman would use for a lactation space. The following locations are listed in order from most to least commonly mentioned:

- ▶ Office or closet space
- ▶ Bathroom
- ▶ Designated lactation room
- ▶ Personal vehicle
- ▶ Family support center
- ▶ Medical facilities

a. Participants reported that the level of cleanliness for lactation spaces varied, particularly when certain types of spaces were used

DACOWITS asked participants about the quality, cleanliness, and availability of lactation rooms at their installations. Participants reported that the level of cleanliness varied, especially when servicewomen were using office or closet spaces.

"[For] my unit right now, [the lactation space is] literally an old office, really dusty. There are old supplies and things in there. No couch or anything like that. One chair. No refrigerator. I store my stuff in the office downstairs and around the corner. [It's] just a room that has a paper sign [that says], 'Lactation Room.'"

—Enlisted woman

"Like others have said, [the lactation space is] a closet, an office—something that maybe someone is in for a majority of the day, and they vacate the area when needed. I guess it's as clean as you keep your office. There is no standard to it for any time. That's what we did at [installation; we said], 'Everybody, we're going to empty out this room.' We posted a 'Do Not Enter' sign, and . . . that is how it worked."

—Enlisted man

"We were scrounging for an office, and [the space we chose] was . . . questionable (group laughter). The regional legal service office used to be a galley. It's a mess. It's just a windowless room back there, which is probably fine, I guess. They told me, 'Here's a table. Please go set this up.' I don't how well I did. I should've hung some lilacs in the corner or something (group laughter)."

—Female officer

b. Participants in some of the groups said they were not familiar with the quality, cleanliness, or availability of lactation rooms

Participants in some of the groups stated that they did not know anything about the condition or availability of lactation rooms on their installations. This was more commonly mentioned by men than women.

“. . . I've seen women go into the locker room and bathrooms. There's only been one woman I know of who works under me [and has used the lactation room], and I've never asked her about it because that's her business and not mine, but she's working in a very dirty place. . . .”

—Enlisted man

“In 19 years, this is the first time I have heard about a unit [that has] lactation rooms.”

—Female officer

“I took over a brand-new building [with] \$500,000 in renovations, but still not a room available for lactation.”

—Male officer

c. In some of the groups, participants described a lack of privacy in existing lactation rooms or designated spaces for lactation

Participants in some of the groups commented that the spaces servicewomen used for lactation activities lacked privacy, primarily because these rooms were used for other purposes and then converted into lactation spaces.

“Oh, we have a very small [unit], and there are two other [units] in there. We had a room, but then [Service members] would go in there and take naps, so we had to lock it.”

—Female officer

“[A lactation room mentioned by another participant] is the only lactation room I've ever heard of in the military. I used an old sewing room where I put the sign up and locked the door, and they still came in, and I'm pumping.”

—Enlisted woman

“The only negative thing I heard [about the lactation space] was that there was [a] person in the room who shouldn't have been. He was taking a nap [group laughter].”

—Enlisted man

4. Participant recommendations to support breastfeeding servicewomen

DACOWITS asked participants about the best ways to support servicewomen who want to breastfeed and need to express milk during working hours. Participant suggestions included establishing more designated lactation rooms, providing additional education about the needs of breastfeeding servicewomen, and reducing the stigma of breastfeeding.

a. Participants in some of the groups suggested designating more lactation rooms for breastfeeding women

Men were much more likely than women, and officers were much more likely than enlisted personnel, to suggest the military needed to increase the number of designated lactation rooms to support women who want to breastfeed.

"I would say [make] it a priority in the different [facilities] to make sure that they have lactation rooms, and leaders [should ensure Service members] have the time to go. I know that not all of the facilities have them, and it's probably a matter of not being able to fund it."

—Male officer

"I think a big support surrounding [breastfeeding] is to mandate that there are lactation rooms in every building or command. Part of the problem is that you have to meet the requirement to put one there. . . . If they are there [even if they are] not in use, it creates the expectation that they are there."

—Female officer

"Money is the answer. If the funds are not appropriated, these projects are never going to stack up to all the competing demands. I've seen in the airports the lactation pods where they have a need for them. The equipment purchase could be where the installations have pods where they could deliver wherever they need it. If the money is not there, it's not going to happen. The command is not going to [prioritize] the needs of one person versus the needs of all the other people."

—Female officer

"That is the problem . . . that some people need it and others don't. . . . If you just mandate it, and everyone needs more money and more resources, and your [unit] doubles in size, and you have a new need, are you going to block off another room? . . . It's just the trouble with throwing numbers at commanders and saying everyone will need this."

—Male officer

b. In some of the groups, participants recommended better education on breastfeeding needs and lactation policies

Women were much more likely than men to suggest that additional policy education would help support breastfeeding servicewomen. Education suggestions included more information about the physical need for lactation breaks for women who are breastfeeding and more information supporting the need for lactation breaks throughout the day.

"Females understand breastfeeding and [the need for] a clean room, but males don't. They need a class to explain to them what engorging is [and] how long you can keep milk at room temperature. We [women] are aware of our struggles."

—Enlisted woman (Participant A in group)

“(Responding to Participant A’s comment) I think it’s [an issue for both men and women]. Just yesterday or the day before, I had a female in my area without kids, and I walked out of my office to go to the command suite to wash my [pumping] supplies, and she [treated me] like I was a disease. When I take my milk out of the freezer at the end of day, they are like that. . . . That really embarrassed me.”

—Enlisted woman (Participant B in group)

“I think part of it is knowing what you can and can’t do while you are pregnant or breastfeeding, etcetera. . . . [They] should make that [information] as accessible as the leave policy.”

—Female officer

“I think what we could do is the EO [equal opportunity] training that we have every year, even just stating that for each [unit], these [lactation rooms] are things that should be available for those that breastfeed—even if it’s just a 30-second walkthrough [during the training].”

—Male officer

c. Women in some of the groups discussed a need to reduce the stigma surrounding breastfeeding among their peers

Women were the only participants to recommend that the stigma of breastfeeding should be reduced to help support breastfeeding servicewomen.

“Here’s my thing: You can go smoke for 5 or 10 minutes, maybe more, but you get mad when a female says they have to breastfeed for myself and my child? You’re giving someone leisure time while they’re working, but then get mad when I have to do something for my health benefits.”

—Enlisted woman

“I think [it would be helpful] if there’s any way to reduce the stigma surrounding it, especially in certain career fields. It’s like, if you decide to get pregnant, then that’s your problem, and there’s no support surrounding it. . . . [They are] like . . . , ‘Sorry, we’ll do the minimum requirement to support you,’ but there isn’t any education surrounding [that] support. . . .”

—Female officer

“There also needs to be a normalizing of breastfeeding and pumping. I’ve had officers tell me it’s gross. It’s not normalized, and the Service needs to do more in terms of normalizing it.”

—Female officer

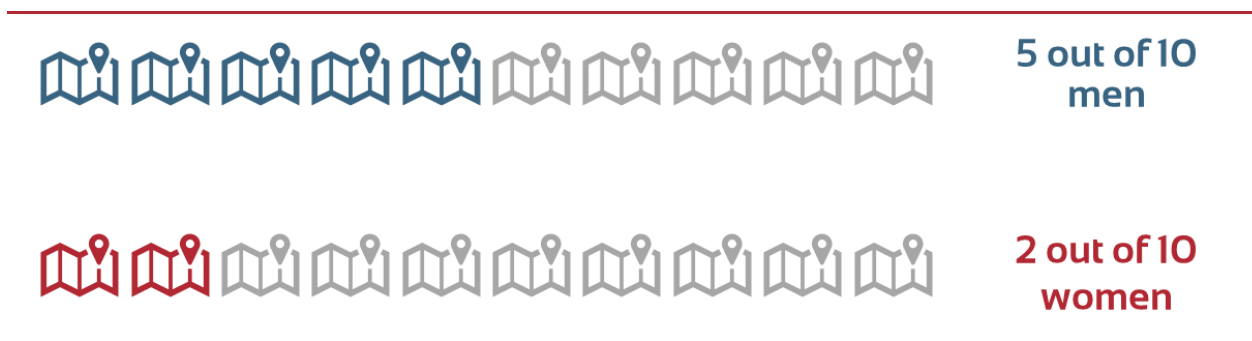
Participants offered other recommendations to support breastfeeding women; these included the following:

- ▶ Create a civilian position to oversee breastfeeding and lactation support at each installation.
- ▶ Modify installation building codes and requirements to include lactation rooms.
- ▶ Document and explain the need for breastfeeding women to take lactation breaks.
- ▶ Fund shipping of breastmilk while on temporary duty or temporary assignments.

E. Postdeployment Family Reintegration

The Committee was interested in the postdeployment experiences of Service members, particularly as it relates to parents and the family reintegration process. DACOWITS asked participants about the challenges parents faced when they returned home from deployment, support programs and resources available for parents after deployment, and if participants believed military mothers had different experiences than military fathers in the family reintegration process. These questions were asked of all participants, regardless of their parental status. Although the majority of participants (9 out of 10) reported knowing someone who had deployed as a parent, men were more likely to have had the experience of deploying as a parent (see Figure 3.5).

Figure 3.5. Proportion of Participants Who Had Deployed as a Parent



Source: Focus group transcripts

1. Parents faced challenges when returning home from deployment

DACOWITS asked participants about the challenges that all parents, regardless of gender, faced when they returned home from deployment. Participants in most of the groups reported that reestablishing the parent-child connection was a substantial challenge for parents who returned home from deployment. In some of the groups, parents described the emotional challenges that developed during deployment and that could carry over into the postdeployment phase.

a. Participants in the majority of groups described the reconnection process with children as a substantial challenge for parents returning home

In the majority of groups, participants stated that the biggest challenge parents faced when returning home from deployment was reconnecting with their children.

"My child wanted nothing to do with me coming back. It was not my first deployment, so I had that expectation. She kept touching my hand to make sure I was real. She could touch me, but I couldn't touch her. It was very painful."

—Enlisted woman

"Depending on the age of the child, that interaction—they may feel you abandoned them (agreement from several other participants), or they don't remember interacting with you very much. On my first deployment, when I came back home, it took 4 to 5 months before my son would let me pick him up. He was terrified and hid behind his mom. I'd buy him ice cream, and he'd say no, and then mom would give it to him, and he would take it. That was a little emotional to deal with."

—Enlisted man

"My husband and I both deployed at the same time and were gone for around 10 months. My oldest son, it took him 3 months before he would calm down whenever I dropped him off—he would be screaming and crying. I had to take them to another location [for daycare]. To this very day, I wonder if he still sleeps with his mom and daddy pillows because we left him (tears up). That's very hard because it's a big weight on your heart."

—Female officer

"The biggest challenge is with my daughter. They are afraid I'm leaving for 6 months again every time I leave for work. That took about a month. [I have to tell them], 'No, I'm not leaving.' Any time I go [on a temporary duty assignment], they think I'm leaving for 6 months again, to this day. They're 7 and 3. I still have to explain that to them. Skype and Messenger and things like that help in a place with internet access. My youngest child didn't know me. She was 9 months. She knew who I was but didn't want me home."

—Enlisted man

b. Participants in some of the groups commented on the emotional challenges for parents in the postdeployment reintegration period

Participants in some of the groups discussed how emotionally challenging deployment could be for parents, which could affect them as they return home and reintegrate with their families.

"[This subject] makes me want to cry. I came back in 2015, and it still makes me cry. The reintegration process—as a woman and mother, you have to desensitize yourself. It sounds heartless, but you have to stuff family in the back of your mind and try to not think of them at work. . . ; you're carrying that guilt of being away from your kids and convincing yourself that the job is worth the guilt. Reintegration . . . after desensitizing yourself, then finding those emotions that you think should come natural to mothers. I cried myself to sleep because I couldn't bond to my children like I could before my deployment. They'd hug me, and I couldn't return the emotion that they gave me. It makes me cry (starts tearing up). I couldn't believe I couldn't feel that way. It took a week or so to get the notion that I even have those feelings."

—Female officer

"When my daughter—my oldest child, she's 10 now—when I was in Iraq, my wife was pregnant, but because of the mission requirements, they kept me. . . . I was not able to make it to her birth, and until this day, [my daughter] holds me to it. 'You were not there, dad.' She says that all the time. No way I can explain what happened. It left a hole in my relationship with her."

—Enlisted man

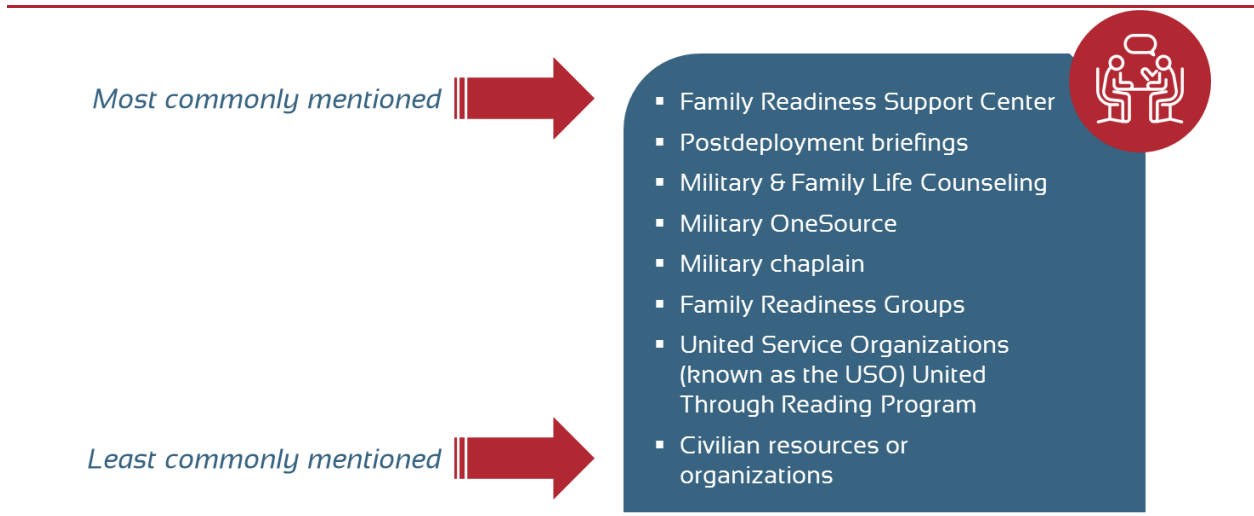
"I think that was the hardest part. They say you're coming back, and they say be careful how you come back in, and you think, 'I'm not that person.' I got that. . . , so for the [Service members], I tell them, don't worry, [the children] are not going to remember you for a little while. . . . Then I tell them that they won't even remember the deployment. It will actually be harder for you because you remember the deployment."

—Female officer

2. Supports and resources for parents returning home from deployment

Participants identified various kinds of support and resources available to Service members returning home from deployment. These resources are listed in Figure 3.6, shown in order from most to least commonly mentioned.

Figure 3.6. Support and Resources Available to Parents Returning Home From Deployment



3. Participants offered mixed opinions on whether military mothers and military fathers faced different experiences in the postdeployment reintegration period

DACOWITS asked participants if they perceived any differences between military mothers and military fathers in the postdeployment reintegration process. Participants had mixed perceptions about whether the experiences of these mothers and fathers differed. Participants in most of the groups said the deployment reintegration process was more emotionally challenging for women, and those in some of the groups said women had to resume more household responsibilities upon their return, but participants in some other groups said the reintegration process was the same for both mothers and fathers in the military.

a. Participants in most of the groups perceived that postdeployment reintegration was more emotionally challenging for military mothers

Most of the groups felt that military mothers had more emotional difficulty with deployment and reintegrating with their families.

"Absolutely . . . , there is [a difference]. I want to go out and play with my son, and he doesn't remember who I am. Me, I'm like 'You'll come around.' When my wife came back and her son called for dad and not her, she was in tears, in a panic attack. . . . She needs that emotional connection. Females are considered to be more emotional than men. As soon as that happened, it crushed her for weeks because her son did not want to go to mommy for something. It destroyed her for a while. Eventually the relationship was repaired, but during the [reintegration], it was 1,000 percent different."

—Enlisted man

"[For] both mothers in my unit, there was a tremendous amount of guilt about missed time, guilt during deployment, and guilt about how to reintegrate back as the mom [after] someone else had been caring for their kid. There are a lot of challenges coming back from the mother perspective."

—Female officer

"Psychologically it is different. Naturally females are more inclined to be nurturing and have patience. I take the extra time to sit down and read a book and to look at a star—things that moms do. We do it well because it's in us naturally. It seems natural for us. To [deploy] and come back, it hurts the males, too—I believe that—but I don't think it is as painful for them psychological as it is for females. You birthed that child and carried them."

—Enlisted woman

b. Participants in some of the groups perceived that mothers were expected to do more within the household, which made the reintegration period more difficult

Participants in some of the groups felt that mothers who returned from deployment were responsible for more of the household work, which made reintegrating with the family more difficult. Women were much more likely than men to discuss this issue as a unique challenge for military mothers.

"If you're in a relationship, I would imagine [it's] hard on the female Service member reintegrating because the kids' . . . expectations of their mother are higher. Us as dads and fathers and men, we get passes. They make that accommodation, saying that he works, he is away. Their expectation of mom is that she will be present and available for them. . . ."

—Enlisted man

". . . You can see the videos—when dad comes home, daddy is home, and the house is restored. When mom comes home, it's like, 'Get back on your duties.'"

—Enlisted woman

"I think when mothers get home, you get back to being a mom. Now say the mother has been [at home], and the father comes back [from deployment]. It's , 'Oh, yay, you're home!' but those responsibilities back home, [fathers] don't have as much responsibilities as the mother. [Fathers] just come back to work."

—Female officer

c. Participants in some of the groups perceived that the reintegration process was the same for military mothers and fathers

Participants in some of the groups felt the postdeployment reintegration process was the same for both military mothers and fathers. Men and officers were much more likely to share this opinion than women or enlisted personnel.

"It's a tough question because everyone comes from different backgrounds, [and] you don't know what that woman or male is used to. [With my wife and I] both being active duty, I deploy[ed], and then my wife deployed, so I played both sides. How I think and how I dealt with it may be different than how someone else dealt with it."

—Male officer

"I think male or female integration or reintegration is a challenge. Anyone who has been away from their family for an extended period of time, it is a challenge to figure out the dynamic."

—Male officer

". . . It's probably equal in terms of reintegration and not being received by their children. It's hard to know who it impacts more. I think it is equally as difficult for men."

—Female officer

4. Participants had mixed responses regarding whether military mothers and fathers should receive different postdeployment reintegration support and resources

DACOWITS asked participants whether they perceived a need for different support and resources for mothers and fathers during and returning from deployment. Participants' opinions were mixed. Although half of the groups felt there was not a need for different resources, some of the groups felt there should be separate resources for mothers and fathers.

a. Participants in half of the groups felt military mothers and fathers did not need different resources for deployment and postdeployment reintegration

Participants in half of the focus groups felt there was no need for military mothers and fathers to receive different resources during and after deployment. Men and officers were much more likely to share this opinion than women and enlisted personnel.

"I don't think if there is a need for different ones for female versus males; then you are saying one is better or worse than the other one. . . . Having one is ideal, especially if you are trying to be equal across the board."

—Male officer

"You're still a parent whether you're a mom or dad. . . . You're still a parent, and you love the child unconditionally, so it still sucks. A different person talking to you won't make a difference."

—Enlisted woman

"I don't think the resources should be any different for us. You have a chaplain, usually with your group . . . , that may be your only resource. [In a unit], you may also have a mental health technician."

—Enlisted man

b. Participants in some of the groups felt there should be different resources for military mothers and fathers who return home from a deployment

Participants in some of the groups felt that there should be separate resources for military mothers and military fathers because of their different experiences during and after deployment. Men and enlisted personnel were much more likely than women and officers to share this view.

"We're wired differently; physiologically [and emotionally], we are different. . . . They might require different support."

—Enlisted man

"I think it wouldn't hurt to have a gender-specific [post]deployment briefing, because what will affect a man won't affect a woman. Because women, like (other participant) said, will do laundry and dishes, unlike a man, who will sit back and watch a show for a little bit while the family runs through the course."

—Female officer

"It also depends on [whether they are] single parents. If you are a single mother, then certainly . . . , you're worried about who is watching [your] kids? No spouse to lean on, [or] family members or friends. It would drive you crazy while deployed. Have different resources, but [it] would depend on if they are a single parent also."

—Enlisted man

5. Participants provided several recommendations for supporting military parents in the postdeployment reintegration period

When asked how the Services could better support military parents returning home from deployment, participants offered suggestions such as increasing postdeployment leave time, updating postdeployment trainings and resources, and extending postdeployment support resources. The ideas and recommendations in this section are listed from most to least commonly mentioned:

"Maybe go 10 days [on leave] and then half days. After 10 days, I'm back to work 12 hours like before. If you can gradually go back to work to show your kids you are working, but it's not deployment . . . , [that would be better]. Ten days is not enough time. Do your 10 days, and then do half days."

—Enlisted man

"The ultimate factor that can't be controlled is the human being. I was taking [postdeployment] trainings, and people [in the trainings] were . . . playing on their phone. Maybe update the trainings [to] make them more fun."

—Male officer

"Our systems do a good job of addressing the problem right up front. With the immediate return, things are okay, but once time has passed, you see the development of underlying things that have happened from that deployment. Maybe [schedule] a checkup 2 to 3 months post return to see how things are going? Programs could check in with families a couple months later to see how things are going, [to] remind [them] of these programs, etc. . . . It's still up to families to take advantage of it."

—Male officer

Participants offered other recommendations; these included the following:

- ▶ Longer time at home between deployments
- ▶ Targeted resources for parents versus nonparents, both before and after deployment
- ▶ Marriage retreats
- ▶ Financial management classes
- ▶ Family retreats
- ▶ Tailored postdeployment resources based on military occupational specialty community

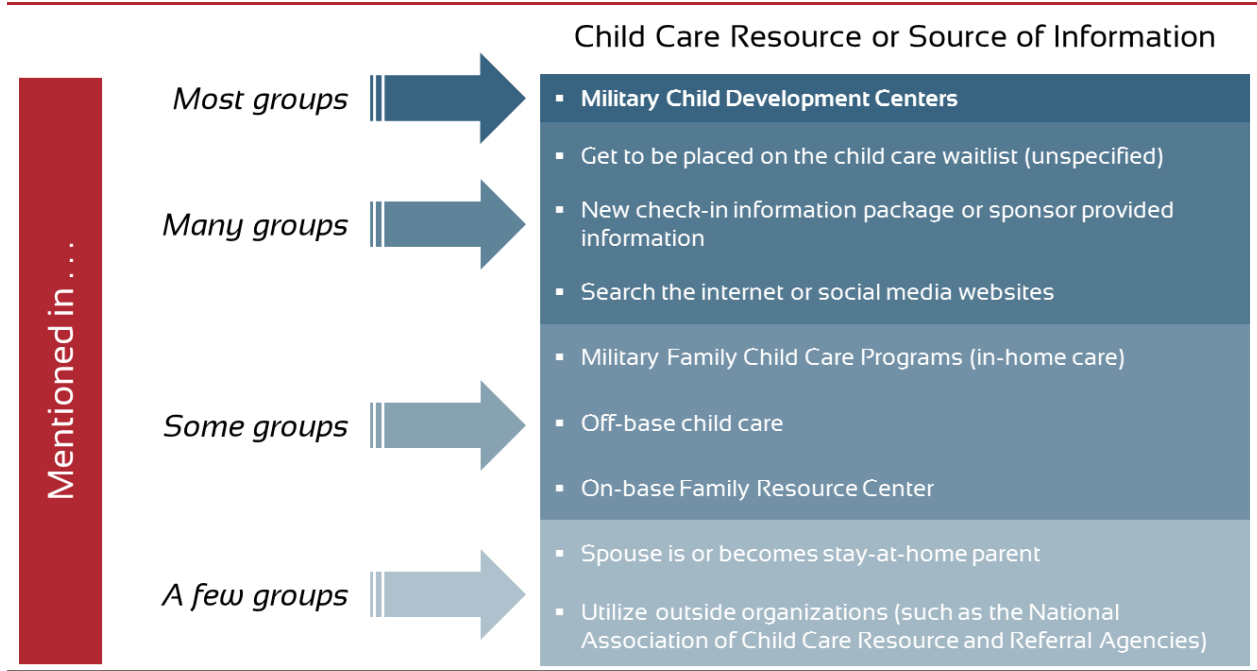
F. Child Care Marketing and Awareness of Child Care Options

DACOWITS recognizes that child care is a vitally important topic for Service members and their families. During the past 35 years, the Committee has made 33 recommendations related to child care. In 2019 the Committee wanted to understand Service members’ awareness of military child care options and resources as well as their perceptions of the child care options available to them. These questions were asked of all participants regardless of their parental status.

1. How participants would find child care when moving to a new location

To understand participants’ awareness of child care options, DACOWITS asked participants how they would find child care in a new location for themselves or someone they knew. Figure 3.7 shows participants’ responses and catalogs the frequency with which each option arose.

Figure 3.7. Common Sources of Information for Participants Seeking Child Care



2. Participants’ perceptions of different child care options varied

When participants were asked about their awareness of military child care options, they shared their perceptions of different forms of child care. Participants had varying experiences, both positive and negative, with military child care options.

“... Child care is one of the biggest reasons my husband is a civilian. We realized early on that there aren’t any options. I have never been on a base without an investigation against someone in the [Child Development Center] or base housing, and I said ‘Nope.’ I would rather have my husband find a job every time I move.”

—Enlisted woman

"My youngest is in [the Family Child Care program]. It's a home care. However, some of them are just glorified babysitters. I had him in an off base one that fell under [Family Child Care]. It was amazing."

—Enlisted woman

"[Child care] is a contentious subject for me. With the [Child Development Center] on base, I never refer anyone there. Cost is enough to make a family broke. The more you make, the more they take, and you're getting the same level of care. We opted to go off base. Better care off base. More financially reasonable off base. When someone comes into my [unit], I say we go off base, anywhere but the [Child Development Center]. I feel like it's the best level of care for my child."

—Enlisted man

"Normally when I [move], I get on that base's website and look at it. They have tabs for family readiness and child care where you can find base options. Many times they are full, and it's difficult to get in there. Everyone is [doing online searches] and figuring out options if you need them."

—Male officer

"I did [an online search for child care] because [my kids] were about to turn 4 and 5, and the [Child Development Center] was not enough supervision. I ended up doing Google and Yelp interviews [to find child care]; that's what I did."

—Female officer

"That's why my wife decided to stay at home: costs of child care. We are looking at prices, especially with [the Child Development Center]. . . . We're terrified of all the things you see with child care. [She said she would] watch the kids."

—Enlisted man

3. Awareness of militarychildcare.com

The secure DoD website militarychildcare.com provides a single gateway for military parents to find comprehensive information on military-operated or military-approved child care programs worldwide.

DACOWITS wanted to know how many participants, regardless of their parental status, had heard of militarychildcare.com. During this section of the focus group, participants were asked to raise their hands and indicate whether they had heard of the website. Approximately 2 out of 10 participants affirmed they had heard of the site. Women were slightly more likely to have heard of the site (see Figure 3.8). After discussing militarychildcare.com, DACOWITS provided participants with a description of the website. After reading this description, some participants indicated that although they did not recognize the name of the website, they had heard of a military website for child care waitlists.

Figure 3.8. Proportion of Participants, Both Parents and Nonparents, Who Had Heard of MilitaryChildCare.com



After hearing a description of the website, several participants indicated that they had heard of militarychildcare.com, although they did not initially recognize the website by name.

a. Participants who had visited militarychildcare.com shared mixed opinions about their experiences with the website

For those participants who had visited militarychildcare.com, DACOWITS asked if they found the website useful. Most participants said they had not found it useful because it was hard to navigate or because they also needed to complete paper forms; women were more likely to share this sentiment than men. A few participants said they found it easy to use.

"I found it unnecessary. I used it in [overseas location]. They had just implemented it 2 years ago. I had to sign [my kids] up for school. The person told me I had to do everything online, we can't do the registration face to face. I didn't find it necessary. It was a bit extra for me."

—Enlisted woman

"I went there last week, and they gave me a form to fill out from the website, but you actually have to walk into the [Child Development Center] to fill out a bunch of forms."

—Male officer

". . . It's just too hard to navigate."

—Male officer

"Yes, [I visited militarychildcare.com]. . . . It was easy to use. . . ."

—Male officer

"It tells you the estimated child care wait time, and you can figure out the wait list options. It's very fluid."

—Female officer

4. Participant recommendations for supporting Service members' child care needs

Participants were asked how the military could better support Service members with dependent children in need of child care. Participants in most of the groups suggested they would like to see the military child care system become more flexible to accommodate the unique demands of military life. Participants in some of the groups reported that long child care waitlists were a persistent challenge within the military child care system.

a. Participants in the majority of groups suggested more flexibility in the military child care system to accommodate shift work hours, long workdays, and early physical fitness training sessions

Participants in most of the groups suggested that military child care options provide greater flexibility in the types of care offered to support Service members with alternative schedules or long workdays.

"Have 24-hour facilities for children. It doesn't have to be just for babies but school-aged kids, too. The [Service] loves using the family care plan as a default for this. It's not designed for that, though. It's designed for training and emergencies, not because I'm a shift worker."

—Enlisted woman

"We have [physical training] at 0615. The [Child Development Center] opens at 6:30. Our members are now getting asked, 'Why are you never at [physical training] and formation?' Unless [their] kid is coming too, they will not be there. It was frustrating for [one] member. They were telling us they don't want to be the person who is skipping out. They really cannot bring their kid with them. [Now leadership is saying], 'We'll adjust the formation to 0630.' How can [members] drop their child off and get to mandatory formation if [leadership] won't work with them, female or male?"

—Enlisted woman

"The best example of [the need for more flexible child care] that I have is how they don't provide [child care] during exercise season. They don't allow the [Child Development Center] hours to adjust to exercise hours, so for exercise seasons, the Service members that have children are stretched. We had a problem this year and last [year]. It's not ideal for any of them. I can't speak for manning or capacity, but it is lacking."

—Male officer

"[They need] extended hours [at] the [Child Development Center]. . . . If you are a night shift, [you need] the option [to] come here at 1600. What do night shift [Service members] do? [They need] some of sort of option so you are not always back and forth [to daycare]."

—Female officer

"The [Child Development Center] should extend hours. I know it's [based on DoD regulations]. I have friends that are single moms and need flexibility because they have to figure out the smart way for getting some [physical training] . . . ; in the morning, they drop off their kids, and after work, they have to go get the kids. You see the parents going to the gym. They have to get their kids or pay extra for kids being there too long. "

—Enlisted woman

b. Participants in some of the groups felt long waitlists for military child care were an impediment to the military child care system

Participants in some of the groups described how long child care waitlists within the military child care system were the main challenge for parents in need of care for their dependent children. Officers were the only participants to raise this concern when asked how the military could better support military parents who need child care.

"My [fellow Service member] was dual-military, and she gave her [Child Development Center] notice when she was having her baby, and she had a long waitlist. . . . In my [unit] . . . , it became a problem very quick. That waitlist is really a problem."

—Female officer

"Well, I think [what is needed is] better and more available [Child Development Centers] instead of a waitlist; have [the centers] more structured for younger preschool areas; [lower] the price . . . ; [Another consideration is the] location. We've got people from [current installation] driving to [other installation], and people from [other installation] driving to [current installation]. Let's figure this out. If you get on a waitlist for 3 years, [and you are] only here that long . . . , why bother?"

—Male officer

"Right now the waiting list to get a 2-year-old into the [Child Development Center] is 6 to 8 months. It changes. For infants, it can be faster or shorter, but my 2-year-old has been on the list since December [and it's now April/May], and he doesn't have a spot."

—Male officer

"Increase the capacity of the [Child Development Center] so parents do not] have to wait so long."

—Female officer

Chapter 4. Physical Fitness Assessment

As a follow up to DACOWITS's 2016 and 2017 recommendation to the Secretary of Defense surrounding the use of scientifically supported physical training methods and nutritional regimens and education surrounding the differences between physical fitness assessments (PFAs) and occupational standards, DACOWITS investigated Service members' understanding of and experience with PFAs and their impact on men and women. The committee was also interested in learning about the resources available to Service members as they prepared for the PFA and maintained a healthy lifestyle.

The Committee conducted 16 focus groups with enlisted personnel (E4–E8) and officers (O3–O5/W1–W5) on the topic of PFAs (see Appendix C.3 for the focus group protocol). This chapter discusses the focus group findings on PFAs and is organized into the following sections:

- ▶ Service members' understanding of and experience with the PFA
- ▶ Impact of the PFA
- ▶ Perceived purpose of the PFA and occupational standards assessment (OSA)
- ▶ Perceptions of the effectiveness of the PFA in achieving its purpose
- ▶ Training and preparation for the PFA
- ▶ Resources available for Service members to improve wellness and fitness
- ▶ Participant suggestions for improving overall wellness and fitness

A. Service Members' Understanding of and Experience With the PFA

When interpreting the following findings, it is important to note the PFA and the OSA vary by Service (see a list of PFA standards by Service in Appendix D). Participant perceptions, which were analyzed across Services, addressed the inherent differences in the Services' PFAs. To protect participant confidentiality, this report does not associate specific Services with individual participant quotes.

DACOWITS asked participants to describe the frequency and components of the PFAs for their respective Services. Participants addressed a range in frequency for completing the PFA as well as variation in the components of the assessments.

1. Participants reported a variation in the frequency of the PFA

When asked how frequently they completed the PFA, participants in some of the groups indicated they took the test twice a year, once a year, or that the frequency depended on one's medical exemptions. When asked whether the frequency of the PFA varied for anyone in their unit, participants in most of the groups reported that Service members who were medically exempt or on a medical profile (e.g., those who are injured, pregnant, or postpartum) took the test on a different schedule than other Service members. Participants in approximately half of the groups reported that the scoring of the PFA components varied by age. Men were much more likely than women, and officers were much more likely than enlisted personnel, to report this sentiment.

2. Participants in most of the groups described similar components for the PFA but differences in scoring for men and women

DACOWITS asked Service members to describe the current components of the PFAs for their respective Services. Participants in most of the groups reported that the assessment included cardiovascular (cardio); strength (e.g., pushups or pullups); and core (e.g., situps) components. Participants most commonly mentioned cardio exercises, strength activities, core exercises, body composition, and alternative cardio events. Participants in at least half of the groups noted that there was an alternative cardio activity (e.g., swimming, bicycling, or walking) for Service members who were medically exempt.

Participants in the majority of the groups reported that the scoring parameters for the PFA varied by sex. Men were more likely than women, and officers were more likely than enlisted personnel, to mention this issue. Participants in some of the groups similarly reported that the number of repetitions needed to earn a passing score on the PFA varied by gender. Enlisted personnel much more commonly reported this theme than officers.

B. Impact of the PFA

DACOWITS asked participants whether their performance on the PFA affected their career progression and whether it affected men and women differently. Participants indicated that scoring poorly on the PFA could have a negative impact on one's career—for example, enrollment in a fitness improvement program, administrative action, impact on promotion potential, and being discharged from the Service. When asked whether the PFA affected men and women differently, participants in the majority of groups said there was no difference in the impact of the PFA by gender.

1. Participants in most of the groups reported that scoring poorly on the PFA resulted in enrollment in a fitness improvement program

Participants in most of the groups reported that a Service member who failed the PFA would be required to participate in a fitness improvement program sponsored by the member's Service. Enlisted personnel were more likely than officers, and women were more likely than men, to provide this response. A handful of participants noted that Service members could stop participating in the fitness improvement program when they achieved a passing score on a PFA or a mock PFA that served as a practice test.

"If you fail, you're enrolled in [the Physical Enhancement Program]. You're enrolled in this 3 times a week. The coordinator musters you in the morning and makes sure you are doing activities in the morning."

—Enlisted man

"For any part of the program that you fail, if you fail the body fat, you're on [fitness improvement program], even if you pass everything else."

—Female officer

"They are also supposed to be put in a remedial [physical fitness assessment] program so that they can work on the areas that . . . they failed."

—Male officer

“Service members who fail the PFA] gets put on [a] remedial conditioning program.”

—Enlisted woman

2. Participants in some of the groups reported that scoring poorly on the PFA could result in administrative action

Participants in some of the groups noted that a Service member who failed the PFA could be subject to administrative action by the Service. Men were more likely than women, and officers much more likely than enlisted personnel, to provide this response.

“In my [unit], I handle first-time failures [with] counseling, second is [letter of reprimand], third time is administrative demotion, fourth time is recommendation for retention or not.”

—Female officer

“The proper procedure is you’re flagged for administrative action, like you’re under watch now, then required to retake [the PFA] within 90 days to see if [you] pass it. If [you] pass, the flag is removed. If [you] do not pass it, they start paperwork to chapter [you] out of the military.”

—Female officer

“[The consequences depend] on how many times they fail [within a certain time period]. For your first one, it’s usually some sort of paperwork. For your second one, [it depends on the] time period. Everything is within a time period of 2 years.”

—Male officer

“You also get paperwork; you get a [Letter of Counseling or Letter of Reprimand] depending on if it is your first or second fail.”

—Enlisted woman

“I believe you get two attempts once you fail within a year; then if you fail, you can possibly be put on admin[istrative] separation.”

—Enlisted man

3. Participants in some of the groups reported that scoring poorly on the PFA could result in being discharged from the Service

Participants in some of the groups reported that a Service member who failed the PFA could be discharged or separated from the Service. Officers were more likely than enlisted personnel to report this.

“If you fail one time, you can’t be promoted but can reenlist. If you can’t recover, or you can’t pass once you’ve failed twice, you’ll be separated from the [Service] when your enlistment is over because you can’t reenlist.”

—Enlisted man

“If they fail a second time, then they are chaptered [after the] second time. [Chaptered is] when you are separated from military.”

—Male officer

"You would go on a [physical training] program with your unit, if you fail the first test, you don't get marked, but on the second, you get marked, and [on] the third, you're automatically processed out."

—Female officer

4. Participants reported that the PFA could both positively or negatively affect promotion or career advancement

When asked how the PFA could affect promotion, participants noted a range of impacts both positive and negative; for example, that failing could affect one's ability to be promoted, or that high scores could have a positive effect on promotion potential.

a. Participants in most of the groups reported that failing the PFA could affect one's ability to be promoted

Participants in most of the groups reported that a poor performance on the PFA could hinder one's ability to be promoted. A few participants noted that failing the PFA could have a lasting impact on the likelihood of promotion even several years later. Enlisted personnel were more likely than officers to report this.

"If they are looking for people for promotion, they can see failures for [PFA], and they would put them lower on the list. If you are applying to a certain program, you have to meet the standard, or you won't be approved for [the] program."

—Enlisted man

"If you fail, it adversely affects all of that; if you fail it twice . . . , you get your promotion points based on your score . . . , [you lose] some of the points."

—Enlisted man

"As far as promotion status goes, it changes every few years in the policy for if they look at your [Physical Readiness Information Management System] or not. If you're competing against a lot of people, an 'outstanding' is much better than a 'satisfactory.'"

—Female officer

"[For] promotions all the way up to [but] not including staff sergeant, those scores get factored into your composite score. Each person has their own score, so your [PFA], [other test scores], [and] conduct marks are all factored into one score. Based on what you are doing with your [PFA] scores . . . , [you] can adjust your overall score yourself, and it gets compared to other [Service members] in your [occupational specialty]. . . . Based on that, you are on a list, and then a score will come out saying everyone who has this score and above will get promoted. If you have a third-class [PFA score], you could be one person below [the required score], but if you have a first- or second-class [PFA score], you could be above it. It affects how you get promoted."

—Enlisted woman

"[Your PFA score] normally stays on there for about 5 years. If you're going up for board[s], they look up to 5 to 7 years of your records. It can affect you on promotion boards. For some, if you have one 'F.' they don't consider you."

—Male officer

b. Participants in approximately half of the groups reported that scoring high on the PFA had a positive impact on career progression

Participants in approximately half of the groups reported that achieving a high score on the PFA could result in a positive impression or reputation for Service members among their peers and/or leadership. Enlisted personnel were much more likely than officers to report this.

“Some people probably look at how well you do [on the PFA]. For certain types of jobs, [a] consistent ‘excellent’ will [beat out] someone in the ‘under’ category.”

—Female officer

“It also impacts people’s impression [of you]. At my last base, they marked it down even though I passed it, they marked it down.”

—Enlisted woman

“I’ve seen consistent[ly over] time that a high [PFA] score has never hurt you. There is a lot of leaders that look into the [PFA] score, physical ability, mental state, what kind of decisionmaking that score represents. Someone talked about the whole [Service member] concept earlier, and when you are living a physically fit life . . . , it gives you a window into their character . . . ; what kind of care they are taking of themselves more than just the physical ability.”

—Male officer

C. Perceived Purposes of the PFA and the OSA

DACOWITS asked participants what they believed was the purpose of the PFA and the difference between the PFA and the OSA.

Participants indicated that the purpose of the PFA was to ensure mission readiness and promote health among Service members. Participants most commonly noted that the difference between the PFA and the OSA was that the PFA is a general assessment and that the OSA is occupation specific.

1. Participants in the majority of groups reported that the PFA was meant to ensure Service members were mission ready

Participants in most of the groups said the PFA was administered to ensure all Service members were combat ready or mission ready. Enlisted personnel were more likely than officers to share this opinion.

“We do jobs that have more physical activity than civilians do and to make sure you’re ready to deploy.”

—Female officer

“[The PFA ensures] combat readiness, essentially, and if you’re not capable to perform your job, then it’s not good. . . . It’s frowned upon. [Physical fitness is] required to perform well in our jobs.”

—Enlisted man

"The official reason is preparing us for the rigors of combat. It also acts as a forcing function to keep the force fit."

—Male officer

"[The PFA] prepares us for combat. If you are not fit, you are putting someone else's life on the line. If you don't pass, it has to all come together."

—Enlisted woman

2. Participants in some of the groups reported that the PFA was meant to ensure Service members were healthy

Participants in some of the groups reported that the PFA was administered to ensure Service members were living a healthy lifestyle.

"In my opinion, it is to check that the members are maintaining a healthy lifestyle in the military. It's saying that person . . . is living a healthy lifestyle for this gender and this age."

—Enlisted man

"I think [the PFA's purpose is] really just to . . . keep everyone healthy. For most of our jobs, you [are deployed] for long hours, so you need to stay mentally and physically healthy."

—Male officer

"[The PFA's purpose is] to make sure you're taking care of your body nutritionally and the cardio or physical part."

—Enlisted woman

"If a [Service member] is incapable of regulating his time and being physically fit, he's going to have a hard time passing the [PFA] . . . , and that starts to raise red flags."

—Female officer

3. Participants in some of the groups reported that the PFA was a standard assessment but that the OSA was career specific

Participants in some of the groups noted that the PFA was a generic and standard test. Men were much more likely than women to report this opinion. Participants in some of the groups responded that the OSA assessed one's ability to perform a job. Participants in some of the groups similarly noted that the OSA included additional tests and activities that were not included on the PFA.

"The regular [physical fitness test] is what the [Service] determined a basic [Service member] must do. Can you pull yourself up over an obstacle a certain number of times or in a proficient manner, can you run, maneuver under fire, rescue a fellow [Service member]? [Determining whether you can] appears to be the purpose. I think that's why they added the combat test."

—Enlisted man

“The [physical fitness] test is across the board. [OSA] is depending on [occupational specialty]. [The physical fitness test] is different depending on where you are. They didn’t finalize that. It’s still in the works whether it’s based on the type of unit or the [occupational specialty]. They were still debating on if I need to meet the infantry standard or my occupational standard because I’m in an infantry unit.”

—Female officer

“For the occupational test, it’s a job-specific test. . . . The [career field] came out with a test to see if you could be a [occupational specialist] to see if you can [lift heavy ammunition]. It was put in place. I never had to do it, but it’s easy. It’s a different test.”

—Male officer

“[The] occupational [fitness assessment] is just . . . for my specific job, but the physical fitness assessment is a blanket for like everyone. All females in your age group, you have the same standards across the board. It doesn’t matter what job you do.”

—Enlisted woman

D. Perceptions of the Effectiveness of the PFA in Achieving Its Purpose

After participants discussed their perceptions of the PFA and the difference between the PFA and the OSA, focus group moderators provided the following generic definitions to explain the purposes of the PFA and OSA:

- ▶ The purpose of the PFA is to assess a Service member’s fitness level as it relates to general health and wellness.
- ▶ The purpose of the OSA is to assess a Service member’s ability to complete the physical requirements of job-related tasks. During the focus group, moderators noted that occupational standards may not be required for all jobs.

1. DACOWITS asked participants whether the PFA effectively measured Service members’ health and whether this perceived effectiveness varied for men and women

Participants reported mixed opinions on the PFA’s ability to properly measure health. For example, participants noted that the PFA did not effectively measure or adjust scores for the varying body types of Service members and did not identify or measure a wide spectrum of health and wellness outcomes. When asked whether the PFA properly measured health, participants in some of the groups believed that the PFA properly measured how healthy Service members were. This opinion was shared only by male Service members, and enlisted personnel were more likely than officers to report this opinion.

“It does help with health because you have to complete a questionnaire about if your heart skips a beat or if you have trouble breathing during physical activity. During the physical assessment, you find out if someone has gained a lot of weight, and then you look and you find out that they have a thyroid problem. If someone during the test says that they have a pain in their chest and they cannot complete it, they go to medical. The assessment, occupationally, doesn’t relate. [For] general health, yes, it helps because you do find out medical things during the test. During the physical screening, we find things that should have been found during medical.”

—Enlisted man

"It's definitely a good tool. A commander could, by seeing the scores, see how the guys are doing on a day-to-day basis, or even showing up and watching them perform. It gives you a visual of what your guys are doing day to day and if they're doing what they're supposed to."

—Enlisted man

"I think if the goal is a general assessment, then it gives a general idea about if they're reasonably fit."

—Male officer

"When the scores are averaged, you can be bad at running but good at pullups, and it averages out good, so you're still [considered] physically fit even though you're bad at one activity. It's really well rounded."

— Enlisted man

a. Participants in some of the groups reported that the physical fitness test did not properly measure health

Participants in some of the groups said the PFA did not accurately measure how healthy Service members were. Women were much more likely than men, and enlisted personnel were much more likely than officers, to report this opinion. Similarly, participants in some of the groups said the test did not measure health and was a poor indicator of physical fitness because it was possible to pass the PFA despite living an unhealthy lifestyle. Men were more likely than women, and officers were more likely than enlisted personnel, to report the PFA was a poor measurement of health.

"You have to train for the specific components. Overall fitness has nothing to do with that. An Olympic swimmer who cannot run might not pass. If you have not trained for that specific task, you may not be considered fit by [Service] standards."

—Female officer

"You can see [Service member]s with drinking problems who do well on the [physical fitness assessment]. They are liquored up, [but] they can knock it out of the park with a great [PFA] score. You cannot rely on that score to say that they are all physically fit and that they are doing well [and] that their wellness is good. That's my opinion."

—Male officer

"Just because I can run a [PFA] doesn't mean that I'm not depressed or anxious or that I don't have high cholesterol. The only other thing we do is height and weight. You don't have to go get a medical screening in conjunction with the physical fitness test or combat fitness test."

—Male officer

2. Participants in most of the groups reported that the physical fitness test was equally ineffective for men and women

Participants in most of the groups believed that the PFA was equally ineffective for male and female Service members. Men were more likely than women, and officers were much more likely than enlisted personnel, to report this opinion.

"So overall, it's not that effective, but that doesn't change by gender."

—Enlisted man

"[The PFA] equally does not measure physical health."

—Female officer

"I think for both, male and female, [the PFA components] don't capture whether you are actually in excellent condition."

—Male officer

"I don't think the effectiveness varies between a man and woman. I think it is ineffective for both [men and women]."

—Male officer

"It's just not effective."

—Enlisted woman

3. Participants in some of the groups reported that the PFA was not effective because it did not account for unhealthy lifestyles or underlying health conditions

Participants in some of the groups noted that the PFA did not account for health conditions that could positively or negatively affect one's health assessment. Men were much more likely than women, and officers were much more likely than enlisted personnel, to report this opinion.

"If you're a 2-pack-a-day smoker, that should fail you instead of not being able to do sit-ups. I get that there needs to be a standard, but it's not comprehensive."

—Female officer

"You could eat horribly and still do very well on this test. It does not mean you're healthy. If I eat Burger King and fast food daily but still make assessments, it means I test well."

—Enlisted man

"I know a lot of people who retire and die of a heart attack 20 years later, so . . . yes, it could assess your physical fitness level, but you could have high blood pressure that is unrelated to that. It could be a result of your diet, your stress, a bunch of other things."

—Male officer

"I have consistently run first class [PFA]s, and my blood pressure is through the roof still."

—Male officer

4. Participants in some of the groups reported that the PFA was not effective because it did not account for different body types

Participants in some of the groups said the PFA did not consider a range of body types and waist measurements. Women were more likely than men, and enlisted personnel were more likely than officers, to report this opinion.

“ . . . One of the biggest issues I find with most of the fitness standards is with the waist measurement. I'm a taller female, and I find it hard to meet the standard for 31 inches on a 5-foot person . . . ; 31 inches on me is going to be different. I understand that there has to be a standard, the line has to be drawn somewhere, but for someone that enjoys weightlifting, I can throw someone over my shoulder and get them to safety. Am I going to be able to do it as fast as someone next to me, no, but I'll be able to get that person to safety.”

—Enlisted woman

“I want to speak upon this because I think this is the biggest issue in the [Service] that no one want to change. The height and weight requirements are not gauged to women—in particular, for Black women who have hips and are curvy. The way that women are taped [is] at the most protruding areas. Even if a woman tries their hardest, it is inevitable that they are going to fail. This is the biggest issue.”

— Enlisted woman

“They say, ‘If a person is this tall, they should weigh this amount,’ but say we get a linebacker in here . . . ; he's fit, but he's going to fail the weigh in.”

—Male officer

“It's very challenging. For females like me, I'm fit. I weightlift, so I always fail the [Body Composition Assessment] and have to get taped. It's challenging.”

—Enlisted woman

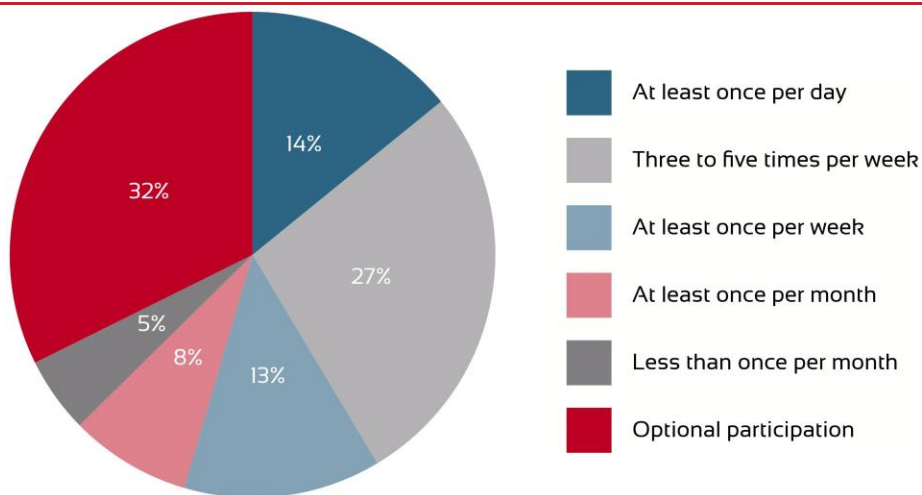
E. Training and Preparation for the PFA

DACOWITS asked participants how they trained for the PFA. Similarly, DACOWITS asked participants whether they thought men and women should train differently and what resources they desired to support their training. Participants reported variation in training for the PFA and had mixed opinions on whether men and women should train in the same manner.

1. Groups reported variation in training for the PFA

Using the mini-survey questionnaire, DACOWITS asked all participants how frequently they trained with their units for the PFA. Participants provided a variety of responses. The majority of participants said they trained three to five times per week or that group physical fitness training was optional (see Figure 4.1).

Figure 4.1. Participant Experiences With the Frequency of Unit-Level Training for the PFA



Source: Mini-survey data

a. Participants in approximately half of the groups reported preparing for the PFA by training both individually and as a unit

When asked how they trained for the PFA, participants in approximately half of the groups said they trained for the PFA through unit-led workouts and individual training sessions. Enlisted personnel were much more likely than officers to report this experience. Of note, participants in some of the groups said command-led physical training had a positive impact on unit morale. Men were more likely than women, and enlisted personnel were much more likely than officers, to report this opinion.

“Most units do some form of [physical training]; [it] depends on where you are at. They also do something on their own if they want the higher marks. They might think what I need to do to be healthy doesn’t apply to the assessment, so they will do something outside of that to meet their personal goals.”

—Enlisted man

“I [train] with a personal trainer. I’ve tried to get someone to [train] with me, but then they’ll do it for a day, and then they’ll [pretend to be] sick for months and months, so I pay \$75 a day for a personal trainer. On Thursday, I work out with a group; Friday, I work out with my job field; and Saturday, I work out on my own.”

—Enlisted woman

“[I do physical training] as a unit and after that, it’s individual—like if you work out after work, it is individual.”

—Enlisted woman

“Every unit is supposed to do [physical training] 5 days a week, but what you do doesn’t necessarily benefit you. Sometimes it’s not intense, and it can just maintain where you’re at. To improve your score, unit [physical training] isn’t enough. Sometimes people get worse because of their nutrition too. The only way to improve is to individually work on it.”

—Enlisted man

b. Participants in some of the groups reported preparing for the PFA by training individually

Participants in some of the groups said they trained individually for the PFA. Women were more likely than men, and enlisted personnel were more likely than officers, to report this experience.

"I work out 6 days a week. Sunday is my off [day]. Saturday, I do spring [jumps]. Monday, Wednesday, and Friday, I have multiple things I do: situps, pushups, and running. Thursday, I do 13 flights of stair runs. . . . Tuesday, I usually just do abs by myself."

—Enlisted woman

"I'm fortunate because I work on headquarters staff, so I do [physical training] on my own every morning. I've been doing [physical training] for 19 years, and doing [it] on my own has helped me be healthier than doing organized [physical training]. . . . Now that I'm able to do it on my own, you kind of learn what you can do and [what] you can't do on your own."

—Male officer

"I will say as a junior officer, you have more time to figure out and work with your schedule. People think as you become more senior, you have more control over your schedule, but that's not true. You also try to balance family and kids; there just aren't enough hours in the day. I don't know many people that train for the [physical fitness test]. You train to be healthy for you, then you do the [physical fitness test]. I'm senior enough, so I don't have to do mandatory [physical training], but those kinds of things I can use to control my own destiny. I don't train for the [physical fitness test]; it's just a thing you have to do."

—Female officer

2. Participants in approximately half of the groups reported there was no difference in how men and women trained for the PFA

When asked whether men and women train differently for the PFA, participants in approximately half of the groups perceived that male and female Service members trained similarly for the PFA. Men were more likely than women to report this opinion.

"It's the same test, so there's no reason to train differently."

—Enlisted man

"Now that the standards are the same, there is no need to train differently. If females were doing different [physical fitness tests], maybe, but they got rid of the arm hang."

—Enlisted man

"I think organized [physical training] is organized [physical training]. They are all doing the same thing, but they may be at different speeds or rep[etitions]."

—Male officer

3. Participants in nearly half of the groups suggested that men and women should not train differently for the PFA

When asked whether men and women should train for the PFA differently, participants in approximately half of focus groups said that men and women should not train differently. Men were much more likely than women to report this opinion.

“Especially if you do your training together as a section or company, generally, [men and women should] do the exact same thing unless on profile (e.g., medically exempt). On the individual level, they may train differently based on what they need to focus on more. I have long arms, so I focus on pushups. It’s my Achilles heel.”

—Enlisted man

“I [was in a unit] that was all men. I trained with them even though it took a while to get to their level. My body type or physiological difference might prevent me from doing what they did in terms of training, I may not have been as strong at certain events, but they were not as fast as me in others, so it evened out.”

—Female officer

“I would say not because it’s run, waist, pushups—it’s the same components. We are all preparing for the same test, so the preparation techniques should be the same.”

—Male officer

“I think as far as the [physical fitness] test, it is the same across the board. You do your pushups and situps and run. Anything after that is just for personal gain.”

—Enlisted woman

a. Participants in many groups suggested that training for the PFA should be customized for each individual test taker

Participants in many groups perceived that each test taker should train based on their individual needs.

“Every person has to train according to their differences.”

—Female officer

“Everyone needs to train differently. [Some occupational specialties] need to work more on cardio than strength.”

—Enlisted man

“I think there’s different options that tailor to the person and what they need to work on, not necessarily male or female.”

—Female officer

“I think they should train where they did the weakest on their last [physical fitness test]. if they have already [determined] they didn’t do that well then, they should focus on that.”

—Male officer

F. Resources Available for Service Members to Improve Wellness and Fitness

DACOWITS asked participants how they trained for the PFA and what resources were available to support them in these efforts. Participants said several resources were available to Service members, including fitness facilities, fitness trainers, nutritionists, and nutritional classes. Participants revealed that the availability and effectiveness of fitness trainers and nutrition classes varied from installation to installation.

1. Participants in most of the groups reported that fitness facilities were an available resource for Service members preparing for the PFA

When asked what resources were available to prepare for the PFA, participants in most of the groups noted the availability of gyms and other fitness equipment.

"We have two 24/7 fitness facilities . . . , an outdoor track . . . , [and] two turfed areas, [and the installation fitness facility] is back open again for out and backs."

—Male officer

"There's a free gym on base."

—Enlisted man

"As a [Service member], we have a bunch of gyms, [high-intensity interval training] classes, a lot of stuff. If a [Service member] is not meeting the standard, it's because they are not doing what he/she should do to meet the standard."

—Enlisted woman

"Within those two facilities, you have a plethora of activities and equipment [such as the] CrossFit area, which is very popular . . . , [and] classes."

—Female officer

"Not every unit has a gym, but they will create one. I have two mini-gyms in my [units]."

—Female officer

2. Participants in the majority of groups reported that physical fitness leaders were an available resource for Service members preparing for the PFA

When asked about available resources to prepare for the PFA, participants in most of the groups mentioned physical fitness leaders. Men were more likely than women to report this opinion.

"I am a [physical fitness leader]. I show everyone how to pass the test, what they look for, what you need to reach, how to do a situp properly and pushup, how to run the 1.5 mile."

—Enlisted man

"In our unit, the [Master Fitness Trainer] runs the remedial program. They know information about nutrition."

—Enlisted woman

"We have a Fit Boss on the [unit], and specialists and nutritionists at the gym, and [Command Fitness Leaders]."

—Male officer

3. Participants in most of the groups reported that fitness leaders were available at their installations; however, participants in some of the groups said fitness leaders were inaccessible or unhelpful to Service members preparing for the PFA

When asked whether physical fitness leaders were available, participants in most of the groups said physical fitness leaders were available; however, participants in some of the groups said physical fitness leaders were not available for consultation or were not properly trained to serve as effective resources for those who needed to improve their PFA scores.

"We have Command Fitness Leaders. . . . [Through them, we receive] training by an instructor who goes to school for it and gets certified by the [Service], and they have assistants who help them. Every command is mandated to have one."

—Enlisted man

"I've been in a unit where someone was a Master Fitness Trainer or someone trained as Master Fitness Trainer, but they didn't stand up or anything like that."

—Enlisted woman

"The resources that are underutilized are the resource quadrant leaders. They are supposed to be a dedicated person to lead physical fitness activities or to provide advice. . . . The [Service] does not train them properly. They are not resourced well enough to do that job."

—Male officer

"Every command has a [Command Fitness Leader] and an [Assistant Command Fitness Leader]. They [serve] more of an administrative role."

—Female officer

4. Participants in the majority of groups reported that nutritional training was available

When asked whether their Services provided nutritional training, participants in most of the groups said such training was available; however, the level of specificity ranged from a brief mention about nutrition in a larger training to a full nutrition-specific curriculum.

"They have some classes that are completely voluntary. . . . You have to seek them out. There is a nutritionist at the [health and wellness center]."

—Female officer

"I've had some commands with an all-hands training, and our flight [doctor] would come in and do a training on nutrition. That wasn't broken out by gender."

—Female officer

"It depends on units sometimes. I was at [installation] that had a similar program. At [other installation], they implemented one that talked about sleep, nutrition, how it affects you, part of your [physical fitness] program. Individuals who had gone through it would take 5-10 minutes to discuss, to talk about the topics like that."

—Enlisted man

"[The] Occupational Support Team that was with us, they talked about nutrition, but in the 4 years that I've been in, that was the only time I've talked about nutrition. They had a nutritionist on the team, and they talked about what our defenders consumed on a daily basis, and it usually was fast food and caffeine. They usually recommended what we should eat."

—Male officer

5. Participants in some of the groups reported that nutritionists were available

When asked whether their Services provided nutritionists, participants in some of the groups reported that nutritionists were available; however, there was a wide spectrum of opinions surrounding the nutritionist's helpfulness.

"Yeah, there are nutritionists in the hospital and clinics. They have to do a complete panel and blood workup to see what will increase their metabolism. . . . The diets are curtailed to male versus female . . . [and] because not all women are built the same themselves. They are board-certified nutritionists and dietitians. When you meet with them, it's a one-on-one meeting."

—Enlisted man

"At [installation], one infantry unit had issues with people being overweight, and we had nutritionists do a class with everybody. [It was] not different by gender, but I was the only female in battalion. . . . We had them submit meal plans and stuff."

—Female officer

"The nutritionist is at the [health and wellness center], and they are underutilized, so they are not [well] known, but they will schedule things for you. . . ."

—Female officer

"There is [a] nutritionist in the basement of the hospital. . . . I had to wait 30 minutes to track down the lady that is supposed to work at the front desk. [The nutritionist] will give you a journal, but it did not work out for me because he wanted me to eat 1,200 calories a day, but then I was faint. But then I started upping my calories so that I wasn't faint and lightheaded. So, they give you a start, but you have to work on it [and] customize it for yourself."

—Enlisted woman

G. Participant Suggestions for Improving Overall Wellness and Fitness

DACOWITS also asked focus group participants which additional resources they desired to prepare for the PFA or improve their general health and nutrition. Participants in many groups provided the following suggestions surrounding the PFA or general health and nutrition:

- ▶ Access to nutritionists or nutritional classes to all Service members, including the opportunity to build a customized meal plan
- ▶ Increased access to fitness facilities, e.g., 24-hour access to gyms
- ▶ Healthier food options in dining halls and vending machines
- ▶ Better promotion of the currently available resources for fitness and nutrition

Although DACOWITS did not explicitly ask participants for suggestions on how to improve the current PFA, a handful of participants offered recommendations; these included the following:

- ▶ Design the PFA to better assess one's ability to perform a job.
- ▶ Incorporate measures of broader health and wellness into the PFA.
- ▶ Implement an objective standard to the PFA.
- ▶ Adjust the PFA so the components of the test vary based on the Service member's body type.
- ▶ Increase accessibility to trained fitness leaders.
- ▶ Embed a trained fitness professional in every unit/squadron to provide in-depth health and nutrition support.
- ▶ Provide more funding and resources for conditioning programs.
- ▶ Provide physical therapists that can help prevent injuries leading up to and during the PFA.
- ▶ Provide a course and resource that focus on meal planning, lifestyle balance, and nutrition (similar to civilian weight management programs) and that have been piloted on certain military installations.
- ▶ Design the PFA so it accounts for the weight, height, body type, and abilities of Service members, including postpartum women (e.g., adjusting the waist measurements for postpartum women).
- ▶ Vary scoring components of the PFA for Service members with different body types.

Chapter 5. 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.3).

This chapter summarizes the most common themes from these discussions and is organized into the following sections:

- ▶ Perspectives on gender integration
- ▶ Challenges for women in the military
- ▶ Participants' recommendations for the Secretary of Defense

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 4 present these responses and provide additional information on each topic.

A. Perspectives on Gender Integration

When asked how well they thought the gender integration of the military was proceeding, in general, participants supported integration but cited a perception about the lowering of standards in newly integrated units or positions and emphasized the importance of ensuring women were able to meet the job requirements. Some participants saw the status of the initiative as positive, and their comments tended to mirror those from previous years. Although participants in some of the groups thought the process was going well, some participants also raised obstacles to gender integration and cited challenges with gender-based discrimination. Finally, participants from some of the groups described challenges with a lack of female role models.

1. Participants in most of the groups perceived standards had been or would be lowered in newly integrated units or positions

Although they had not personally experienced the lowering of standards in their own units, participants from most of the groups emphasized the significance of ensuring women could meet physical job requirements and perceived that standards were going to be or had already been lowered for women in newly integrated units or positions. As a result of this perception, participants reported that the accomplishments of some women in these fields were undermined.

"If they can meet the occupational test, then that's fine. I don't have a problem with it."

—Enlisted man

"Don't change the standards. Don't lower the standards. They're the standards for a reason. People need to rise to those standards."

—Male officer

"I have been putting together a package for [a previously closed position]. There is the physical standard for the physical assessment, but for a female, you have to completely blow it out of the water. If you can just keep up with the guys, they don't want you there. You have to go past the guys. If you're just meeting the standard, the instructors don't want you there."

—Enlisted woman

"She is the first female officer . . . , but she went through the [Officer Course] twice; maybe they lowered the standards for her."

—Enlisted man

"[About a recent female graduate, men say], 'They made it easier for her.' They try to discredit it."

—Enlisted woman

2. Participants in some groups shared positive perspectives on the status of gender integration

Participants in some of the groups provided positive perspectives on gender integration in the military, including positive stories of servicewomen and increased equality between men and women. Others commented on the need for improvement. Sharing positive perspectives was more common among members of one Service versus the others and much more common among women than men.

"We need more progress in career fields that have been open to women but are male dominated, like [in positions that have been] male dominated and . . . [in which women] are still having . . . issues in that culture. Respect is still a big issue. [Sometimes servicewomen] bring an issue up, and it is dismissed. . . . It's like you have a shop where there are 15 men and 1 woman, and she's in there, which is great, but she may not be heard. We need to do a much better job of integrating and putting women in numbers in the rest of the career fields."

—Female officer

"[In our unit], we didn't have females, but 5 months in, they did have females. They were [all] officers, and they were the most remarkable officers I've ever worked with, so if there are any burdens or roadblocks keeping [women] out, then please address them. [Women] add value to any community they are a part of."

—Male officer

"I feel like we are getting to where more females are in special [operations] to show we're not as weak as the men or we perceive we are. It's not just males saying we're weak; [women] tell ourselves that too. So, I'm seeing progress."

—Enlisted women

"You look at the negative perceptions and things that happen to [women] in the military. It's men doing things to women. There has to be a cultural or mindset shift among men. We have to be better, hold each other accountable for our actions or words or the jokes, locker room talk. We have to be better."

—Enlisted man

3. Participants in some of the groups cited obstacles to gender integration

Participants from some of the groups reported challenges to successful gender integration. The most frequently cited obstacles to gender integration included space constraints when cohabitating and issues with uniforms.

a. Participants in some of the groups reported challenges with space constraints when cohabitating

Challenges with space constraints when cohabitating was an obstacle to integration that was more commonly reported by men than women and much more commonly reported by members of one Service versus the others. This obstacle included not having enough female-designated spaces for women, which included beds and bathrooms.

"The only thing holding us back now is . . . not having enough . . . space for the females. We have a long way to go, but if they can do the mission, then let them do it."

—Enlisted man

"I think the biggest issue is fraternization. When I was on an all-male [group], there wasn't any worrying about the drama. . . . My next [unit] was integrated, and immediately, I caught on to the favoritism of gender, and man, that is messed up. Just because she is female, she is automatically put in an [administrative] position."

—Enlisted man

"Sometimes we've had to leave female [Service members] . . . because there's not enough [room]. . . . We literally have to leave females [out] because there's no room. . . . We try to find any [female-designated] space and put them where we can fit them, but they [can't go] . . . if there's no room."

—Male officer

"[Servicemen] were scared to death of females coming [into a previously closed unit] . . . , so they went overboard on training but didn't plan for the manning portion. . . . There are females coming off [deployment] and struggling to find a place to rotate to."

—Enlisted woman

b. Participants in some of the groups noted difficulty with uniforms

Participants mentioned challenges accessing uniforms in the appropriate sizes or designed with a female body in mind. Women were more likely than men, and officers were more likely than enlisted personnel, to provide this response, as were members of one Service versus the others.

"The specific thing is that you have to use the bathroom sitting down . . . , [so where] the flight suit [zipper] stops. . . . is a problem. You have a female [Service member] dehydrating herself for 12 hours before a flight to avoid completely undressing to use the restroom. That is unacceptable."

—Male officer

"I see progress, but I don't know how the equipment—like adapting the uniform—adapts to us. I used to have lots of problems carrying the vest. It's extremely heavy and smashed my breasts back. I don't know if they have a different model now . . . , but the helmet [fit badly] too. So, for short people, small people, like females . . . , the helmet falls off over your head [and blocks your eyes]. . . . For the boots, they had only male sizes. I think they have female sizes now. We have a lot of females who are size 4, 5, 6, and there were no combat boots available, so they used inserts, [and] the size was never right."

—Enlisted woman

"I think that sometimes the biggest thing I struggle with is being an afterthought. When they deploy uniforms . . . , there are no regulations for getting gear that fits us. I have male boots and male long johns."

—Female officer

4. Participants in some of the groups reported challenges with gender-based discrimination

Regarding integration, participants in some of the groups felt they had received unequal treatment, favoritism, and discrimination linked to gender. Women more frequently voiced this concern than men, as they felt that they were often treated differently from their male peers while attempting to integrate into male-centric spaces.

"At my last unit, this thing came up where a guy told me he could rape me and get away with it. Then everyone said, 'This is why we don't have females.' . . . Trying to integrate into a company and being the only female, it's really hard, and then they wonder why most [women in my occupation] don't stay in."

—Enlisted woman

"I went to school to be an [occupational specialist]. It was horrifying. . . . [The instructors] treated me [badly], looked me in the eye and said they wanted me to fail, and said there was no room in the [occupational specialty] for me. That was from my instructors. They did that to all of [the women]. I made it through and finished. On graduation day, if they could have spit on me, they probably would have."

—Enlisted woman

"[Integration] is happening, but the attitude towards it is not good. It's the males who are very against women being next to them in combat. [The men] don't have the confidence; they don't think [the women] can do it. . . . Combat is not related to your strengths, it's related to your drive, logic, and ability to handle certain situations. [Integration is] happening, but the attitude towards it is the issue."

—Enlisted woman

"The [Service] is still dominated at the top by men. . . . I see things where you have very few women in [a] position, and men will take advantage of a woman because women want to be in that field, and they have [male] superiors that are over them, and [the men in power] kind of take advantage. . . . I have seen where [the men in power] have said inappropriate things to [the women], or they might say . . . , 'If you sleep with me,' you know? I just don't want to say too much, but this integration where we are trying to put women into spots, it's also dangerous. Not that I don't think [women] should be there, [but] they are surrounded by all of these males."

—Male officer

5. Participants in some of the groups reported challenges with a lack of female role models

Participants in some of the groups described how servicewomen did not have many women they could look up to and emulate. Women were much more likely than men to mention this issue. In comparison with enlisted personnel, officers more frequently mentioned concerns about the lack of female role models.

"I think someone else mentioned that if you have a mentor or someone to look up to, you are more likely to go into that job. We don't have anyone in the special operations [to look up to] as a female right now."

—Female officer

"I think I see a lot of similar issues in positions even that were open before. You get a decent number—maybe 18 percent—at lower ranks, but higher up, you see fewer and fewer females. There's almost none. It's kind of an issue everyone talked about already. There are not many women to look up to, and not many that exist, [mainly because] of issues like people have to choose between family [and work]."

—Female officer

"[Women walk] different paths than what men would walk, so having the mentor at a higher level [can] help out and make the road a little [easier] to travel . . . , and we could go as far as having a mentor group. . . . It's just tough for female Service members to deal with everyday issues that [male] leadership might [not] necessarily think about. Sometimes it's just a comfort level. Sometimes younger [female Service members] would rather talk to higher ranking females. Now the other piece is mentorship to navigate the road."

—Male officer

"I had only male leadership once [when we were] with junior female enlisted [Service members], so they had no female leaders or mentors that whole time. . . . In my community, there's still a [strong] desire to have someone who is like them in a position of leadership. . . . Men have so many options for mentors, but women are lucky to have three or four during their career."

—Male officer

B. Challenges for Women in the Military

As it has done in past years, DACOWITS asked both male and female participants to identify the biggest challenge faced by women in the military today. Common challenges included gender-based discrimination, pregnancy and childrearing, and striking a healthy professional and personal life balance.

1. Participants in most of the groups reported challenges with gender-based discrimination

Participants reported experiencing prejudice or stereotyping based on their gender during their time in the military. These experiences included confrontations with the perception that women were unequal to men, which led to servicewomen working harder than men to prove themselves; a male-centric culture that placed a higher value on male voices; and discrimination surrounding pregnancy and childrearing (as outlined in the next section).

a. Participants reported a perception that women were unequal to men, causing women to work harder than men to prove themselves

Offering opinions similar to those voiced in previous years, participants described how women were sometimes considered inferior to men or viewed as incapable of performing certain jobs and found themselves working harder than men to prove their worth.

"We are in a lose-lose situation. If you do well and progress, it's because you're female. If you do well and don't progress, it's because you're female. . . . [After my promotion], people would say how did I make it so fast, and then it would be, 'You slept with so-and-so or did this.' I was like, 'No, it's because I'm better than you.' . . . Unfortunately, there is no way for me to know if it's true [that I'm better]. Then [I'm] wondering why [I] got here. Is it because I'm a female?"

—Female officer

"The perception is females get more for doing less even though they're probably getting more because they're working twice as hard."

—Enlisted man

"When I showed up [to work], they said, 'How are you going to help us?' They made it seem like there was no way I could contribute to the [unit]. . . . I'm small, I can get into small places, but at the beginning, they didn't want me there. We have to work 10 times harder to get the equality, and if something even small goes wrong, you're labeled, and you can't bounce back."

—Enlisted woman

"If a male gets hurt, it's fine, but if a female gets hurt, it's just another girl that's broken or trying to get out of something by going to medical. It doesn't matter if you outshine 20 males. You can be the top [Service member] in your unit, and it's thrown out the window if you do one small thing wrong."

—Enlisted woman

“One [woman I work with] is really good at her job. [She] can organize better than anybody. I say, ‘You lead; I’ll follow.’ She wins a lot of awards. She’s had male [Service members] say she won because she was a girl. No, she won because she rocked it. [I tell those men], ‘You want the award, step up your game.’”

—Enlisted man

b. Participants reported the male-centric culture as a challenge to women

Participants reported challenges related to the male-centric culture in the military, including difficulties women faced to ensure their voices were heard.

“I’d say . . . the perceptions of [servicemen are still an issue]: ‘Why are you in the military? it’s a man’s world.’ I don’t think we are past that yet. I think that drives not having lactation rooms. I think that drives a lot of . . . the issues for women in the military.”

—Male officer

“I’ve dealt with . . . the perception of incompetency. Being a leader, as a woman, we are looked at [as] . . . not smart enough, not strong enough, [not skilled at] decisionmaking. . . . [I’ll see] there is a meeting going on with all the senior [noncommissioned officers]. . . . Was it broadcast? No. They have this group, and they isolate the females in the decisionmaking. . . . They just don’t think [women] can lead.”

—Enlisted woman

“Some [male Service members] have expressed that the female [Service members] have the spotlight on them. . . . Part of the problem [servicewomen] deal with is that there are so few of them that anything [negative] that happens [to one] is [projected onto the rest of them] because there are so few cases. It’s human nature—we peg our biases.”

—Male officer

“There are so many times, even during conversations in the hallways, [when] the opinion of a male is valued . . . over the opinion of a female, even if the female has been deemed a subject matter expert and the male has not. I’ve seen where females have been shut down and turned [physically moved out of the way], and this happens a lot.”

—Female officer

2. Participants in most of the groups reported challenges related to pregnancy and childrearing

Participants acknowledged that women faced stigma surrounding pregnancy and childrearing and additional difficulty navigating their careers when planning to start a family or after becoming a caregiver. Service members also described perceptions that women might use pregnancy as an excuse to evade certain duties, and difficulties with being understaffed when a Service member took caregiver leave. Participants also discussed challenges meeting physical fitness standards during pregnancy and postpartum periods.

a. Participants described discrimination surrounding pregnancy and childrearing

Participants reported how servicewomen received unequal treatment and discrimination while pregnant or after becoming a caregiver.

"I think [servicewomen] get pregnant too early. I've had a few females in my unit, and 90 percent get pregnant. So, when I get a female checking in, there is a preconceived notion that there will be issues, whether it be rumors about them, getting married, or getting pregnant."

—Male officer

"I think one thing I've noticed is being pregnant and having to show up for the job. My current [leader] is a mother and has to leave at [5 p.m.] every day to pick up her kid, and that's great boundaries, but with that, if I need something after [5 p.m.], I have to call her."

—Male officer

"I knew a woman who had orders that were great for her career. Her commander found out she had three kids, and he said, 'She's not coming here.' She ended up coming to my command and was great. . . . I think he lost out."

—Male officer

"I didn't feel like I was treated with the same amount of respect [once I had children]. I didn't feel like I was given the same amount of chances, being a woman and having children."

—Enlisted woman

". . . In my last unit . . . , they were writing down the women who were pregnant and putting that they were pregnant on their [evaluation]. And that's illegal. (Starts to tear up) I was personally told that I could not do my job if I took time to pump. People that took more maternity leave after their 6-week convalescence after the maternity leave was changed, their leadership roles were threatened. They were told, 'If you take your full maternity leave, you will lose your position.' . . . [When leadership illegally wrote that women were pregnant in their evaluations], the women filed a complaint. It was completely ridiculous because they didn't follow policy. The investigation was supposed to take 60 days, but it took 5 months (tears up again). Then they didn't like the outcome of that investigation, so they started a second investigation. They decided that we were [to be] assigned advocates, and I should have been given one within 24 hours, but I didn't get one. With the second investigation, they waited until that [commanding officer] was on his way out, so they delayed and delayed. I was told I should transfer, but I didn't have a way to get out. If the system doesn't work, there's no avenue to proceed. . . . I did everything I was supposed to and I waited patiently for the system to work. It wasn't just the men; there was a woman in the chain of command, but she was weak as a leader and didn't help us. He decided that since everything had gotten quiet, he could start up doing it again."

—Female officer

b. Participants in most of the groups reported women faced additional difficulty navigating their careers when planning to start a family or after becoming a caregiver

Participants described ways that servicewomen had more difficulty directing their careers when planning to start a family and commented on the sacrifices women made to advance their careers after becoming a caregiver. Officers were more likely than enlisted personnel to provide this response, as were members of one Service versus the others.

c. Participants reported difficulty for women navigating their careers while planning when to have a family

Participants mentioned that the time required for planning and carrying a pregnancy to term could negatively affect women's careers, and servicewomen felt pressured to time their pregnancies around significant career milestones or avoid having children to prevent being viewed negatively.

"Family planning is a huge component—trying to navigate when the proper time is in the middle of your career so that it won't affect your long-term goals. . . . I'm pregnant with my first child at a very senior rank. I sacrificed until I knew I'd have a [smaller] chance [of deployment], but then it made it less easy for me to get pregnant, and there are fewer resources available for women who want to wait to get pregnant for their career. . . . When you're older, you may have to use [in vitro fertilization], and that's not readily available, or it's very limited. If there were more options, like egg banking or taking a career sabbatical, which they kind of do now, then you'd have better retention of women."

—Female officer

"Have [a] look at the career progression of any officer, and then . . . say to the [male Service member], select 15 months of nondeployable time—9 months while you're pregnant and 6 months postpartum—pick 15 months for each child to be nondeployable and see how that goes, how it affects your career."

—Female officer

"The reason I went to the [installation] for 5 months was there was a pregnant woman [who] they kicked . . . out. They should have given her a chance to finish her career. . . . It's very hard to get into [previously closed positions] . . . ; she had the opportunity to be one of [the first] women, but after that, she was done."

—Male officer

"You're expected to [deploy] during your career, and if you don't, then you're not selected for promotion. . . . We need to allow these [deployment] opportunities for women, but if they're pregnant, then they're not eligible for command or other [promotional] opportunities."

—Male officer

d. Participants reported women having more difficulty than men in navigating their careers after becoming a caregiver

Participants described ways that taking caregiver leave had a greater negative impact on women's career progressions than men's and commented on sacrifices women made to advance their careers once returning from caregiver leave. Such difficulties were cited as the leading factor that motivated women with children to separate from the military.

"So, going back to the biggest obstacle for women in the military: it's family. [My wife] partly left [the military] because . . . she would show up to work, and her commander would say, 'You're not going to be able to do your job because you have a kid.'"

—Male officer

"It's definitely not every female with a family [who separates from the military], but it's a high percentage: 75 percent or more. If they could . . . go to a command that is not deploying, then they'd stay active duty. The other quarter wants to [deploy] earlier because they want to jumpstart their career. The ones who come to me to try to [stay nonoperational] are correlated with those that eventually separate. Our retention would directly reflect a [lower] percentage of females with children by quite a bit."

—Enlisted man

"I think right or wrong that it is still harder for women with family to progress in their field than it is for men with family. . . . There is not much [that is different] between a male with a family and a male without a family in terms of promotion potential and where they would go, but there is a difference between a female who has kids and her responsibilities and where she can go in her career and a woman without kids."

—Male officer

"I am so scared to have kids. I think the one thing I think about is not [getting pregnant] until I have rank. . . . I don't want to cry at work because I work late and then have to get my kids, and my leadership is [asking], 'Why did you leave?' or having a total stranger . . . pick up your kids. . . . Some units won't let you leave because your kids aren't part of the mission."

—Enlisted woman

"I'm going to say that for pilots, the decision is real because it's a very inflexible career path. If they want to progress and [be] promote[d] to major, having a child is almost not possible. There are some pilots that do it, but it's very difficult to come back and get back to flying and hit the specific things you need to do in order to keep [being] promot[ed]. [For] a lot of women, I know it's one or the other—have children, stay in or not. I don't know if there is a good way around it to be honest."

—Male officer

e. Participants in nearly half of the groups described a perception that women might use pregnancy as an excuse to evade certain duties

Service members acknowledged a perception that women used their pregnancies or children to avoid work or deployments. This belief was held more frequently by male and enlisted personnel.

"I've had to work a lot with females who get [sent home from deployment] for pregnancy, and . . . a lot of them have their kid and go through convalescent leave and go back [to deployment], but there are a few who choose to play the system like any [Service member] would, and sometimes that involves multiple pregnancies back to back. . . . they just find those ways to get out of work."

—Enlisted man

"I had a child . . . , [and] I wanted to reenlist, but I couldn't do the [physical fitness test]. . . . I had to go above and beyond to prove I could do [the physical fitness test] again because I chose to have a family. . . . We can't use that as an excuse. The 'I just had a baby' excuse."

—Enlisted woman

Although discussions of this perception arose among both men and women, women were much more likely than men, and enlisted personnel were much more likely than officers, to discuss the stigma that resulted from this perception.

"I can say my kid is sick and pick them [up from] daycare—that may [be acceptable] one time, but that is it. That will set me apart from my male counterparts. . . . I'm torn every day. How is everyone else going to look at me if I leave to go to my kid's performance? The general will talk work-life balance, but if the people on this post don't agree with it, you are shirking your responsibility. That is a struggle every single day for me."

—Female officer

"[Male Service members] think there's always a reason, like you want to get out of deployment, and there are probably people out there like that. I was 20 years old and found out I was pregnant on [deployment] and got told when I was leaving that I . . . wouldn't amount to anything. . . . I stuck around, but it crushes you, you know? I didn't [get pregnant] on purpose."

—Enlisted woman

"You hear a female afraid of getting pregnant because of the perception that they get out of deployment and got pregnant to avoid it. [It's] not a problem but a perception."

—Male officer

f. Participants in a few groups cited challenges with their units being understaffed because of Service members taking caregiver leave

Participants described staffing challenges when Service members took time away from work for caregiver leave. Men were more likely than women, and officers were more likely than enlisted personnel, to describe these difficulties and feel resentful towards those taking leave.

"With manning, as far as active duty, there is not a way to backfill a position when someone is out for pregnancy. [We need to] take advantage of reservists to backfill or allow temporary backfills of active duty positions with active duty members for those out for long periods of time."

—Male officer

"We had a couple of females that did end up getting pregnant, and it greatly affected our watch bill, with senior leaders having to step down to junior watch stations to make it work."

—Enlisted man

"The difference is when a female is pregnant, she's gone, but a male [Service member] who gets married and gets someone pregnant goes back to work. He gets 14 days for paternity leave. The stigma isn't that [a female Service member] is going to get pregnant; it's that there's a gap in usage, and she's going to become less useful to the organization."

—Male officer

"If I have 25 percent female[s] [in the unit], and we deploy, and they all wind up pregnant, I'm deploying at 75 percent. The [Service] doesn't look at that, and we are deploying handicapped."

—Enlisted man

g. Participants in a few groups cited challenges with the physical fitness standards during pregnancy and postpartum periods

Service members discussed pressures that women faced to quickly regain optimal fitness after childbirth and concerns for meeting the fitness requirements under a gender- and age-neutral physical fitness assessment. Women were much more likely than men to raise this issue.

"You want to have a family—it is a very difficult time for you as a female. You are going to be out for 3 months for postpartum and then 3 more months for getting into shape for the [physical fitness] test. The [gender- and age-neutral physical fitness assessment] will be interesting for that because [women's] abdomens don't close up in 6 months [after a caesarian section]."

—Female officer

"The new [gender- and age-neutral physical fitness assessment] they want to implement [may be an issue]. The [isolated abdominal exercise]—for a woman with [a caesarian] section, that is difficult. They give you 6 months [to recover]. I just had [my] abdominals cut, and now you want me to [use those muscles with no muscle strength after they were cut]? . . . Being a mother [is] a weakness now with this new PT test."

—Enlisted woman

"There seems to be a disproportionate majority of females that are . . . postpartum and . . . are so afraid of coming back . . . overweight [and] that they will fail the [physical fitness] test and height [and] weight [standard] that they spend their own money to get tummy tucks and lipo[suction]. . . . Seventy-five percent of women [who are] pregnant do this stuff, especially the officers."

—Enlisted man

3. Participants in approximately half of the groups reported challenges striking a healthy professional and personal life balance

Issues related to work-life balance were cited by participants in approximately half of the focus groups as a challenge for women in the military. This theme was more common among members of one Service versus the others.

"I think [the biggest challenge for women in the military is] balancing family and family obligations and the [Service]. That causes a lot of people to get out. It caused me to get a divorce."

—Enlisted woman

"Women now are expected to do everything and do it all exceptionally well: be the warrior, the mother. . . . they are full-time military but then go home and do all the cooking, take care of the kids, go get the kids from soccer games. . . . There are a lot of problems in expecting the women to be able to do a full-time military gig when husbands aren't filling the gap."

—Male officer

"I'm at the point where I am like, I love my job, but this ends in a few years, and [my daughter] does not. It is very frustrating because it doesn't seem like [the military] consider[s motherhood as] a job."

—Enlisted woman

"I'm also transitioning out because of having a child and not being able to provide the stability for him. He's 18 months old and has lived in 4 States, and he's on his third or fourth daycare right now. I love [my Service]; I've done fun stuff that I love, but I can't do both."

—Female officer

C. Participants' Recommendations for the Secretary of Defense

When asked what suggestions they would make to the Secretary of Defense, participants offered recommendations on a variety of topics. 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 4.

1. Participants in approximately half of the groups suggested recommendations around family support

The most commonly offered suggestions by Service members were related to family support; these included increasing the capacity of DoD child care centers and expectations for family care plans, increasing the access to and knowledge of sabbaticals and other alternative career paths, and lengthening caregiver leave. Although these findings echo those reported in Chapter 3 on pregnancy and

parenthood, these recommendations were also provided by participants outside of the pregnancy and parenthood focus groups.

a. Participants in some of the groups made recommendations around increasing the capacity of DoD child care centers and expectations for family care plans

Participants recommended increasing child care capacity through 24-hour DoD Child Development Centers (CDCs), shorter wait lists, more staff, and more resources for children with special needs. Participants felt that extending the hours of DoD CDCs would be particularly helpful for Service members who worked irregular hours or long shifts and for those who were sole caregivers or part of dual-military couples in which one caregiver was deployed. Consistent with previous years, participants felt that family care plans were for emergencies but that their leadership relied too heavily on these plans when an everyday child care problem arose because of restrictive CDC hours or long waitlists. Participants also felt that these resources targeted single mothers rather than single fathers, implying that child care responsibilities fall to the mother. Finally, participants reported that moving to an installation away from family created difficulties in forming new family care plans given that these Service members would not likely know of trusted child care providers in the area. In particular, single mothers in these situations felt that their only choices were to leave their children with strangers or separate from the military. Enlisted personnel were more likely than officers, and women were much more likely than men, to offer these recommendations.

“More special needs programs on base for kids [are needed]. My son is autistic, and nothing is offered on base. It’s difficult to get into programs; [it] can take 9 to 10 months to get in, and that’s stateside. . . . Try to offer more things on base.”

—Enlisted man

“A lot of people want to set up in the [Service] the need for a family care plan. . . . I’d say more than 80 percent [of single parents] don’t have a detailer coordinating with them. . . . If a [Service member] can serve, why not [station] them to a location where they can have their family to take care of their kids? . . . Single moms [are] thinking about their family care plan and getting out of the [military] because there’s no one to care for their kid when they go underway.”

—Enlisted woman

“We need 24-hour child care for all installations worldwide across the military. . . . This is my third kid, and at [installation], the infants are in [the same] room with toddlers because they’re understaffed. There needs to be more staff to take care of our kids while we’re out.”

—Enlisted woman

“[We need] more money for daycare. I was on a waiting list for 5 months, and I put it in early because I heard it was ridiculous to get your kids into daycare. I was still late when I put it in early.”

—Enlisted woman

b. Participants in most officer focus groups made suggestions around sabbaticals and other alternative career paths

Participants in most officer focus groups recommended increasing the access to and knowledge of sabbaticals and other career paths that could alleviate some of the negative impacts to women's careers when starting a family. This theme did not arise in any focus groups with enlisted personnel.

"[If I could send one recommendation back to the Secretary of Defense, it would be to] restructure the [sabbatical program]. Right now, you only can take it once. You request how much time you want—up to 3 years—but as far as my understanding, it's a one-time deal. . . . For women who can't get pregnant or fail when they're trying, there's no other avenue to get out and try again."

—Female officer

"[We need] career options that don't mean taking a sabbatical. I didn't want to take a sabbatical. I ended up changing from aviation to [human resources] because I couldn't have a family if I stayed in aviation. So, I had to take a different career path, but I would have liked to stay in aviation."

—Female officer

"Especially for females, the question is when to get pregnant; there's never a good time. . . . You need to have a better structure of human resources to expand opportunities because that's where you may lose your top talent. When [women] get pregnant, have it not hamper their career[s]."

—Male officer

"I showed up 6 weeks pregnant [to a career course]. I could not take the [physical fitness] test, even with an [obstetrician] waiver, which I had. [If I'd been able to take the course], I could have gone to the next unit and start my career; [I could have] moved forward and not be almost 6 months to a year behind my peers. Waiving [the physical fitness assessment requirement to finish a career course] would be easy."

—Female officer

"There is a rumor about sabbaticals for women being able to delay their service, but if I remember correctly, the order used to say [that if] you delay 1 year . . . , then you owe 2 years; no one would take that. If the policy was something that was fair and reasonable for parents, then maybe."

—Female officer

c. Participants in some of the groups recommended changes to caregiver policies

Men and women felt very strongly that the allotted caregiver leave should be lengthened. Participants emphasized the benefits that longer primary and secondary caregiver leave, which participants referred to as maternity and paternity leave, would have for the caregiver(s) and child. This recommendation was more frequently offered by members of one Service versus the others.

"So, I think the maternity and paternity leave should be the same [length]. . . . The only other option is for the military person to be the primary caretaker [instead of their civilian spouse]."

—Male officer

"I got off maternity leave and had to take leave a few weeks later because my son was hospitalized. . . . I asked my command if I could continue my leave, and the command gave me [a hard time]. . . . The expectation is you go to work or figure it out."

—Enlisted woman

"My idea would be child leave for parents. . . . Do I really need to charge a day of leave to [bring my child to] get vaccines for a couple of hours? One thing that could help across the board is if I have 20 hours of leave for my child a year."

—Female officer

"You are not supposed to have your job taken away from you when you are turning in your form for maternity leave. I was in senior-level [positions]; both were taken away from me because I was on maternity leave, and that is a federal legal issue. . . . Paternity leave needs to be lengthened. My husband took 60 days of terminal leave, and it was healthy for bonding us as parents and for the care of our child."

—Female officer

"When [the military] went to 12 weeks [of leave], that was a slap in the face for women. It didn't support their intentions to try to retain women; it showed us that they don't care about how that policy affects people's perceptions of leadership in the military. . . . When my children [were] born early, there [was] not [an] extension to [my] maternity leave."

—Female officer

2. Participants in some of the groups suggested strategies for improving physical fitness assessments and standards

Participants made recommendations for improving the current physical fitness assessments in general and about one Service's plans for a gender- and age-neutral physical fitness assessment specifically. These recommendations were more frequently provided by men than women and by members of one Service versus the others. Although these findings echo those reported in Chapter 4 on the physical fitness assessment, these recommendations were also provided by participants outside of the physical fitness assessment focus groups.

a. Participants in nearly all the groups made suggestions to improve the current physical fitness assessments in general

Participants suggested modifications to the current military physical fitness assessments; these included the implementation of universal physical fitness standards as well as changes to the current female 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). Men were more likely than women to provide these recommendations.

"Fitness should be one standard: pass or fail. Putting a numerical score and getting a 100 with opposite genders is a problem. Physiologically we are different, but one set pass/fail standard would put that all to rest. You would eliminate that perception of [a woman] got to that position because she's female and had an easier test."

—Male officer

"I would prefer a team of guys than girls loading bombs. All the guys would lift easier, and it would be an easier load. We are built differently. [Women] can achieve the same level, but it takes different training. [We need a] test based on the needs of the occupation, not gender."

—Male officer

"I'd like us to look into the long-term impacts of the physical assessment, the impacts of the physical fitness test. . . . I'm at the point where I'm thinking of pushing back on my [physical fitness test] because I have been told that the long-term ramifications of pushups and situps is not good for [my] physical health."

—Male officer

"What [the Secretary of Defense] can do now is change the height-weight standard. . . . I ask for a female [to tape me] because it's embarrassing for me to stand in a room and be taped by a male based on some standard that is outdated and is making me think I'm fat."

—Female officer

b. Participants in some of the groups suggested recommendations to a gender- and age-neutral physical fitness assessment

Women were more likely than men to discuss their concerns about the implementation of and strategies to improve a gender- and age-neutral physical fitness assessment. In comparison with enlisted personnel, officers much more frequently emphasized the need to explore the impacts of a gender- and age-neutral physical fitness assessment before implementation, especially for injured Service members or those who had previously had a caesarian section. Participants also cited concerns about a decrease in morale from Service members if those who historically had performed well struggled with the new fitness standards.

"If you want to integrate genders and have a single [physical fitness] test, don't lower the standards. Maintain the standard requirements for the military to conduct operations worldwide. Doing one repetition of an [isolated abdominal exercise] is nonsense; that is pandering for political points across the U.S. That's not helping the [military] train [Service members] to fight."

—Enlisted man

"As a female, you are now setting me at a disadvantage [with a gender- and age-neutral physical fitness assessment]. Some women can [lift 140 pounds], but they are few and far between. The average woman cannot do that. Go through every event, and it is disadvantageous to women as a whole . . . , but we call it gender neutral."

—Female officer

"I took the [gender- and age-neutral physical fitness assessment] 180 days after having a baby with a [caesarian] section. I [could] not do the [isolated abdominal exercise]. . . . The [assessment] is a gender-neutral, age-neutral test. . . . Studies show that men naturally have more body strength, [and] women naturally have a better ability to bear weight. . . . I am a [high scorer on the current physical fitness assessment, and] have been my entire career. I can barely meet 60 points for each one of the [gender- and age-neutral physical fitness assessment] events. That is a blow to my ego. How does that make me feel? How will I measure up to my men? . . . [A gender- and age-neutral physical fitness assessment] puts me at a disadvantage . . . ; [it] created more problems than just acknowledging that we are different."

—Female officer

"I have two friends with permanent profiles against running. They are starting to run because the [Service] says [there won't be] alternate events [for a gender- and age-neutral physical fitness assessment]. They are violating doctor's orders to try not to get kicked out of the [Service]. . . . People are making life decisions, and we don't have good messaging. Decisions are being made based on what information is out there now."

—Female officer

"I don't think [a gender- and age-neutral physical fitness assessment] was well thought out when they proposed it. . . . Take into account guys like us on multiple deployments, [who have been] hurt multiple times. . . . Same thing for the females [who are] going through the same thing and much more if you include childbirth and possible [caesarian] section. [A gender- and age-neutral physical fitness assessment] will severely cripple and cull our numbers."

—Enlisted man

3. Other suggestions

Participants also offered the following suggestions for the Secretary of Defense:

- ▶ Increase access to and resources on women's health and fertility.
- ▶ Address the housing crisis.
- ▶ Provide financial classes for Service members.
- ▶ Increase communication and transparency.
- ▶ Reduce the number of online trainings and improve their effectiveness through hands-on methods.

Appendix A. Installations Visited

Site	Dates
Naval Submarine Base Kitsap	April 1–2, 2019
Naval Base Everett	April 4–5, 2019
Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson – Army	April 8–9, 2019
Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson – Air Force	April 11–12, 2019
Marine Corps Air Station Miramar	April 15–16, 2019
Marine Corps Air Station Yuma	April 25–26, 2019
Davis-Monthan Air Force Base	April 29–30, 2019
Fort Huachuca	May 2–3, 2019

Appendix B. Mini-Survey

1. What is your Service branch?

- Army
- Navy
- Marine Corps
- Air Force
- Coast Guard

2. Are you a member of a Reserve or National Guard unit?

- Yes
- No

3. What is your age?

- 18–20
- 21–24
- 25–29
- 30–34
- 35–39
- 40 or older

4. What is your gender?

- Female
- Male

5. What is your pay grade?

- E1–E3
- E4–E6
- E7–E9
- WO1–WO5
- O1–O3
- O4 or higher

6. Are you Spanish/Hispanic/Latino?

- Yes, Spanish/Hispanic/Latino
- No, not Spanish/Hispanic/Latino

7. 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)

8. What is your relationship status?

- Never married
- Married to a current Service member (Active Duty, Guard, or Reserve)
- Married to a civilian or veteran (not currently serving)
- Separated
- Divorced
- Widowed

TURN OVER →

9. How many years have you served in the military?
Please round to the nearest year.

_____ year(s)

10. If you have stayed or plan to stay beyond your current obligation of military service, which of the following best describes why? Check all that apply:

- Benefits (medical, education, commissary and exchange stores, and VA home loan)
- Enjoy military lifestyle
- Family's desire to stay in
- Lack of civilian job opportunities
- Pay and allowances (including military retirement, housing allowance, and tax-free pay)
- Pride in service
- Satisfaction with career experience, training, and professional development
- Other _____
- I have not or do not plan to stay beyond my obligation

11. Which of the following best describes your intentions for your military career?

- Staying until I am eligible for retirement (at 20 years) or longer
- Staying beyond my present obligation, but not necessarily until retirement (at 20 years)
- Probably leaving after my current obligation
- Definitely leaving after my current obligation
- Leaving the Active Component to join the Reserves or National Guard
- Undecided/Not sure
- I have served 20 or more years in the military and am eligible for retirement

12. How easy or difficult do you feel it is for the members of your Service to have a family and continue to advance their careers in the military?

- Very easy
- Somewhat easy
- Somewhat difficult
- Very difficult

13. How often are you required to participate in physical fitness training with your unit?

- At least once per day
- At least once per week
- Three to five times per week
- At least once per month
- Less than once a month
- Not required; optional participation

14. If a Service member came to you asking for resources and support related to domestic violence, how confident do you feel that you would know where to refer them for help?

- Very confident
- Somewhat confident
- Little confidence
- Not at all confident

Appendix B.1. Supplemental Mini-Survey Findings

	Percentage of Women (n = 232)	Percentage of Men (n = 242)	Percentage of All Participants (n = 475)
Motivations to stay beyond current obligation*			
Benefits (medical, education, commissary and exchange stores, and Veterans Administration home loan)	64	64	64
Enjoy military lifestyle	35	41	38
Family's desire to stay in	10	12	11
Lack of civilian job opportunities	3	4	3
Pay and allowances (including military retirement, housing allowance, and tax-free pay)	54	59	56
Pride in service	49	60	55
Satisfaction with career experience, training, and professional development	43	43	43
Other	6	3	5
I do not plan to stay beyond my obligation	19	14	16
Missing	0	1	0
Career intentions for those with fewer than 20 years served			
Definitely leaving after my current obligation	10	7	9
Leaving the Active Component to join the Reserve or National Guard (any Service)	3	2	3
Probably leaving after my current obligation	8	9	8
Staying beyond my present obligation but not necessarily until retirement (at 20 years)	13	9	11
Staying until I am eligible for retirement (at 20 years) or longer	47	63	55
Undecided/ not sure	15	9	12
Missing	3	2	2
Total	100	100	100
Perceived confidence in knowing of resources and support related to domestic violence			
Very confident	74	76	75
Somewhat confident	24	21	23
Little confidence	1	1	1
Not at all confident	0	0	0
Missing	1	1	1
Total	100	100	100

*Participants were asked to select all responses that apply, therefore the percentages do not sum to 100

Some percentages do not sum to 100 because of rounding

One participant did not select a gender. This participant is included in the "all participants" column.

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

Appendix C. Focus Group Protocols

C.1. Focus Group Protocol: Conscious and Unconscious Gender Bias

Session Information

Location:

Date:

Time:

Facilitator:

Recorder:

Number of participants present:

Focus Group Kickoff: Key Points to Cover

1. Welcome attendees

- ▶ I am [INSERT FIRST NAME], and I am a member of the Defense Advisory Committee on Women in the Services, known as DACOWITS, and this is [INTRODUCE PARTNER'S FIRST NAME], also a member of DACOWITS.
- ▶ We have [INSERT FIRST NAME] here with us from the DACOWITS staff.
- ▶ Our research contractor, [INSERT FIRST NAME], is with a research firm hired to transcribe these sessions, and s/he is part of the DACOWITS research team.

2. Introduce DACOWITS and its purpose

- ▶ Again, DACOWITS stands for the Defense Advisory Committee on Women in the Services. Established in 1951, DACOWITS is one of the oldest Department of Defense Federal Advisory Committees. The Committee is composed of civilian women and men appointed by the Secretary of Defense to provide advice and recommendations on matters and policies relating to the recruitment, retention, employment, integration, well-being, and treatment of servicewomen in the Armed Forces.
- ▶ Every year, DACOWITS studies specific topics and prepares a report for the Secretary of Defense. Since 1951, the Committee has submitted over 1,000 recommendations to the Secretary of Defense for consideration. As of 2018, approximately 99 percent have been either fully or partially adopted by the Department.
- ▶ Each year, DACOWITS visits several military installations and talks to hundreds of Service members like you about their experiences in the military. This year, the Committee is interested in hearing from Service members on several topics, including ways you may experience bias during different parts of your career. We are meeting with groups of women and men. We would like to spend some time discussing this topic, but we will also 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, carefully planned discussion. As facilitators, we have a set of scripted questions that we'd like to cover today, but we encourage open conversation. Our research contractor serves as a scribe. 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.
- ▶ 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.
- ▶ Our job today is to listen and collect information about your experiences and perceptions. Our job is not to provide information. That means we will not correct any inaccuracies or misperceptions that may be shared by an individual or the group, so you should not assume everything you hear today from other participants is accurate.

4. Explain ground rules

- ▶ Please speak clearly and one at a time to make sure our research contractor can capture everything that you say.
- ▶ Please avoid sidebar conversations.
- ▶ We want to hear your opinions.
- ▶ We want to hear the good and the bad.
- ▶ Avoid the use of acronyms. If we find that you are using acronyms, we may ask you to stop and explain the acronym.
- ▶ We respect and value differences of opinion. Please be respectful of others' opinions as well.
- ▶ We want to make sure we cover all our questions today. If we feel we've covered a topic, we'll move the group along.
- ▶ Our staff, [INSERT FIRST NAME], will make sure we're sticking to the schedule and will alert us 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. 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.
- ▶ If you have questions following the focus group, we encourage you to speak with your installation's Equal Opportunity Advisor or your Command Managed Equal Opportunity Coordinator, or command representatives.
- ▶ 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 identities of other participants with anyone outside of this group.
- ▶ In front of you are 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 stay for the group discussion, this will indicate your consent. If you do not agree to the terms in the form, we will not be able to include you in the group today.
 - 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 speak 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 report that we will use in writing our annual report to the Secretary of Defense [SHOW COPY OF 2018 REPORT]. Copies of our annual reports are available online at dacowits.defense.gov. At the conclusion of our focus group, you will be provided a DACOWITS pamphlet containing information about the Committee.

Question Number	Topic	Notes
Warmup/Introductions		
Before we get started with our discussion about different kinds of bias, let's do some introductions.		
1	<p><i>(MODERATOR: Ensure each person answers all three questions before moving on to next person.)</i></p> <p>Let's go around the room and have each of you tell us:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ How many years you've served in the military ▶ Your job in the military ▶ How long you've been with your current unit 	

Question Number	Topic	Notes
Recruitment		
Let's begin by talking about recruitment. When we say "recruitment," we are referring to any experiences you had prior to joining the military that influenced or informed your decision to join. This could include attending recruitment events; visiting a recruitment website; having conversations with recruiters or other military personnel; seeing brochures, posters, or commercials about the military; talking with family members or friends who are or were in the military; or other similar experiences.		
2	Thinking back to your decision to join the military, what were some of the influences that led you to this decision?	
	<i>[PROBE IF NEEDED:] When you were thinking about joining, who did you talk to about this decision?</i>	
3	Aside from reasons you've already mentioned, what are other reasons that someone might be encouraged to join the military?	
4	While you were deciding whether to join the military—let me get a show of hands—how many of you ever felt or were discouraged from joining? [COUNT THE NUMBER OF HANDS ALOUD]	
5	What are some of the reasons that you or someone like you might be discouraged from joining the military?	
	<i>[PROBE IF NEEDED:] Are there particular outside influences, such as the opinions of other people or the media, that may discourage someone from joining? Are there particular characteristics, either about the military or about a person, that might make someone decide not to join?</i>	
6	Thinking about the reasons people might be discouraged from joining, are those the same for men and women?	
Early Career Decisions		
Now we want to talk briefly about your decision to pursue a particular career path in your Service. We want to focus on the early experiences that affected your decision about what occupational specialty you wanted to pursue in the military. These experiences might have taken place during recruitment or initial training, or sometime early in your career.		
7	By a show of hands, how many of you had a choice in which occupational specialty you pursued? [COUNT THE NUMBER OF HANDS ALOUD]	
8	What factors might influence which occupational specialty someone pursues?	
	<i>[PROBE IF NEEDED:] What were some of the factors that influenced your decision? What are some of the reasons that you were drawn to the occupation you wanted to have?</i>	
9	During the recruitment process or in the beginning of your career, did you ever feel encouraged to pursue a particular occupational specialty?	
	<i>[IF YES:] Were you interested in that particular job or specialty? What interested you about in that particular job or specialty?</i>	
	<i>[IF NO:] What would have encouraged you to join a particular occupational specialty?</i>	

Question Number	Topic	Notes
10	During the recruitment process or in the beginning of your career, did you ever feel discouraged from pursuing your desired occupational specialty?	
	[IF YES:] In what ways did you feel discouraged from pursuing the job you wanted?	
	[IF NO:] Have you heard about others being discouraged from pursuing the job they wanted?	
11	By a show of hands, how many of you think men and women are drawn to the same occupational specialties? [COUNT THE NUMBER OF HANDS ALOUD] [AFTER HAND COUNT, ASK:] Why or why not?	
Bias in Recruitment		
Now that we've discussed some of the influences behind your decision to join the military and to pursue a particular career path, we want to discuss bias and the effects it could have on Service members' recruitment.		
12	First, let's talk broadly about bias. What does the term "bias" mean to you?	
	[PROBE IF NEEDED:] What is an example of bias?	
13	Building off that, what does the term "gender bias" mean to you?	
	[PROBE IF NEEDED:] What might be an example of gender bias?	
To make sure we are all on the same page:		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Bias is defined as prejudiced perceptions, attitudes, or beliefs about an individual or group. ▶ Gender bias, then, is any prejudiced perceptions, attitudes, or beliefs based on someone's gender. 		
14	With these definitions in mind, do you think that gender bias exists within the recruitment process?	
	[PROBE IF NEEDED:] Did you notice any gender bias during recruitment events or conversations with recruiters, in conversations with military personnel or family, or in recruiting posters or commercials?	
	[IF YES:] In what ways?	
15	Earlier we talked about the factors that influenced your decision to join the military. Based on your own experiences or what you have observed of others' experiences, how might gender bias influence someone's decision to join the military?	
	[PROBE IF NEEDED:] Do you think someone might be more or less encouraged to join because of his or her gender?	
Bias in Career Choices		
Now let's move from talking about bias in recruitment to talking about how bias might influence career choices.		
16	Do you think gender bias exists within the military?	
	[IF YES:] In what ways have you seen gender bias play a role either in your Service as a whole or in your unit?	

Question Number	Topic	Notes
17	Do you think gender bias is greater in some military occupations versus others?	
	[PROBE IF NEEDED:] <i>In what specialties do you think gender plays a role? Does gender make a difference for people in operational roles versus support roles?</i>	
	[IF YES:] How so?	
18	How might gender bias influence the kind of military occupation someone pursues in the military?	
	[PROBE IF NEEDED:] <i>Do you think some Service members might be encouraged to pursue certain occupations or discouraged from pursuing others based on gender?</i>	
19	How might gender bias affect mission readiness?	
Responses to Gender Bias		
Recently, some Services have begun to take steps toward being less gender biased. For example, some Services updated the wording of various manuals and documents to be gender neutral. For instance, instead of just saying “he,” the wording might now say, “he or she.”		
20	What are your thoughts about these kinds of changes?	
	[PROBE IF NEEDED:] <i>Do you agree with making documentation and job titles gender neutral, or do you think these things should remain as they are? Why?</i>	
21	What kind of an impact, if any, do you think changes to terminology (e.g., Seaman, Airman, Infantryman, etc.) would have on the recruitment of new Service members?	
	[PROBE IF NEEDED:] <i>Do you think these changes would help to recruit people in the Services? Do you think they would have no impact? Do you think they would keep people from joining?</i>	
22	What kind of an impact, if any, would these changes have in attracting women to occupations that are typically viewed as being male oriented?	
	[PROBE IF NEEDED:] <i>Would such changes attract or deter women from joining fields that are perceived as male-oriented?</i>	
23	What initiatives or trainings on gender bias, if any, are you aware of within your Service?	
	[PROBE IF NEEDED:] <i>Have you ever noticed the topic of gender bias being addressed within your unit or by your Service, such as in a training, an advertisement, or on social media?</i>	
24	What, if anything, has your unit or Service leadership ever mentioned about gender bias, stereotypes, or the equal treatment of men and women within your unit or Service?	
25	Do you think your Service’s leadership is doing enough to address gender bias? Why or why not?	
26	What recommendations do you have, if any, for ways your unit or Service can address gender bias?	

Question Number	Topic	Notes
General Questions		
We're also interested in hearing about other issues we haven't yet discussed that may affect women in the military. Of note, we may use your ideas as future topics of DACOWITS research.		
27	One issue DACOWITS has been studying for years is the efforts DoD and the Services are taking to integrate women into previously closed positions. What are your thoughts about how these efforts are progressing to date?	
28	What do you feel is the biggest challenge to women serving in the military today?	
29	If you could send one recommendation back to the Secretary of Defense, what would it be?	
30	Is there anything else you'd like to talk about with us?	
(MODERATOR: Reinforce confidentiality.) 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. We will keep your information confidential—please do so as well by not sharing what you heard with anyone else. As a reminder, you should not assume that everything you heard today from other participants or the group is accurate, and we ask that you please defer to your Services' current regulations and/or policies for the most accurate and up-to-date information. Once again, thank you very much for participating.		

C.2. Focus Group Protocol: Pregnancy and Parenthood

Session Information

Location:

Date:

Time:

Facilitator:

Recorder:

Number of participants present:

Focus Group Kickoff: Key Points to Cover

1. Welcome attendees

- ▶ 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 research contractor, **[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

- ▶ Again, DACOWITS stands for the Defense Advisory Committee on Women in the Services. Established in 1951, DACOWITS is one of the oldest Department of Defense Federal Advisory Committees. The Committee is composed of civilian women and men appointed by the Secretary of Defense to provide advice and recommendations on matters and policies relating to the recruitment, retention, employment, integration, well-being, and treatment of servicewomen in the Armed Forces.
- ▶ Every year, DACOWITS studies specific topics and prepares a report for the Secretary of Defense. Since 1951, the Committee has submitted over 1,000 recommendations to the Secretary of Defense for consideration. As of 2018, approximately 99 percent have been either fully or partially adopted by the Department.
- ▶ Each year, DACOWITS visits several military installations and talks to hundreds of Service members like you about their experiences in the military. This year, the Committee is interested in hearing from Service members on several topics, including experiences related to pregnancy and parenthood. We are meeting with groups of women and men. We would like to spend some time discussing these specific topics, but we will also 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, carefully planned discussion. As facilitators, we have a set of scripted questions that we'd like to cover today, but we encourage open conversation. Our research contractor serves as a scribe. 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.
- ▶ 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.
- ▶ Our job today is to listen, collect information about your experiences and perceptions. Our job is not to provide information. That means we will not correct any inaccuracies or misperceptions that may be shared by an individual or the group, so you should not assume everything you hear today from other participants is accurate.

4. Explain ground rules

- ▶ Please speak clearly and one at a time to make sure our research contractor can capture everything that you say.
- ▶ Please avoid sidebar conversations.
- ▶ We want to hear your opinions.
- ▶ We want to hear the good and the bad.
- ▶ Avoid the use of acronyms. If we find that you are using acronyms, we may ask you to stop and explain the acronyms.
- ▶ We respect and value differences of opinion. Please be respectful of others' opinions as well.
- ▶ We want to make sure we cover all our questions today. If we feel we've covered a topic, we'll move us along.
- ▶ Our staff, **[INSERT FIRST NAME]**, will make sure we're sticking to the schedule and will alert us 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. 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.
- ▶ If you have questions following the focus group, we encourage you to speak with your installation's Equal Opportunity Advisor or your Command Managed Equal Opportunity Coordinator, or command representatives.
- ▶ 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 identities of other participants with anyone outside of this group.
 - ▶ In front of you are 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 stay for this group discussion, this will indicate your consent. If you do not agree to the terms in the form, we will not be able to include you in the group today.
 - 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 speak 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 report that we will use in writing our annual report to the Secretary of Defense [**SHOW COPY OF 2018 REPORT**]. Copies of our annual reports are available online at dacowits.defense.gov. At the conclusion of our focus group, you will be provided a DACOWITS pamphlet containing information about the Committee.

Question Number	Topic	Notes
Warmup/Introductions		
Before we get started with our discussion about pregnancy and parenthood, let's do some introductions.		
1	<p><i>(MODERATOR: Ensure each person answers all three questions before moving on to next person.)</i></p> <p>Now, let's go around the room and have each of you tell us:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ How many years you've served in the military ▶ Your job in the military ▶ How long you've been with your current unit 	

Question Number	Topic	Notes
Pregnancy and Parenthood		
Let's begin by talking about pregnancy and parenthood. Before we start, I want to reiterate that even if you are not a parent or have never been pregnant, we still want to hear your opinion because these issues affect both parents and nonparents in the unit.		
[FOR MALE GROUPS:] The Committee is interested in learning more about pregnancy and postpartum experiences for women in the military, including those related to breastfeeding and lactation support, maternity uniforms, post-deployment reintegration, and child care for military parents. We realize that while these issues may be more directly related to women than men, we want to hear about the impact that these issues have on the unit as a whole from the perspective of each gender. Let's begin by talking about pregnancy for military women.		
[FOR FEMALE-ONLY GROUPS:] The Committee is interested in learning more about pregnancy and postpartum experiences for women in the military, including those related to maternity uniforms, breastfeeding and lactation support, post-deployment reintegration, and child care for military parents. We realize that you may not have personal experience with these topics, but we want to hear about the impact that these issues have on the unit as a whole from many different perspectives. Let's begin by talking about pregnancy for military women.		
2	<p>[FOR MALE GROUPS:] By a show of hands, how many of you have known someone who has become pregnant during their military service? [COUNT THE NUMBER OF HANDS ALOUD.]</p> <p>[FOR FEMALE GROUPS:] By a show of hands, how many of you have been or have known someone who has become pregnant during their military service? [COUNT THE NUMBER OF HANDS ALOUD.]</p>	
3	In your opinion, what are the biggest challenges faced by pregnant servicewomen?	
4	<p>Are you aware of any policies or resources that exist for pregnant servicewomen?</p> <p>[PROBE IF NEEDED:] <i>These could be resources related to health and medical care, social support, support from the military, outside organizations, or at the command/unit level.</i></p>	
5	<p>Thinking back to a time when a woman in your unit became pregnant, how did that affect your unit?</p> <p>If no one has experience in a unit in which a woman was pregnant: How might a woman in your unit becoming pregnant affect the unit? For example, how would it affect the readiness of your unit?</p>	
Maternity Uniforms		
Let's turn now to talking about maternity uniforms. Women who are pregnant while serving may wear maternity uniforms during the duration of their pregnancy and potentially during the postpartum period.		
6	<p>[MALE GROUPS:] By a show of hands, how many of you have known someone in the military who has worn maternity uniforms? This could be a peer, subordinate, spouse, etc. [COUNT THE NUMBER OF HANDS ALOUD.]</p> <p>[FEMALE-ONLY GROUPS:] By a show of hands, how many of you have worn or know someone in the military who has worn a maternity uniform? This could be a peer, subordinate, spouse, etc. [COUNT THE NUMBER OF HANDS ALOUD.]</p>	

Question Number	Topic	Notes
7	How available are maternity uniform items for those who need to obtain or purchase them?	
8	Are you aware of any challenges military women face in obtaining or purchasing maternity uniform items?	
9	Based on either your personal knowledge or feedback you have received, how functional are the maternity uniforms in your Service?	
10	What recommendations do you have for improving the appearance and/or function of your Service's maternity uniforms?	

Breastfeeding and Lactation Support

Now let's talk about breastfeeding and lactation support for women who have been pregnant during their military service. It is important to note that a woman who wants to breastfeed or provide her child breastmilk may need time to pump or express breastmilk during working hours.

First, we want to establish a few definitions to make sure we are all on the same page:

- ▶ We define **breastfeeding** as the act of feeding a child directly from the mother's breast.
- ▶ When we refer to **expressing or pumping milk**, this is the process by which a woman expels milk from her breast. The breastmilk is then stored for use at a later time.
- ▶ When we say **lactation**, we are referring to the overall activities of either breastfeeding or expressing milk. **Lactation rooms** are designated spaces that are not restrooms and are used for breastfeeding, expressing, or pumping milk.

Although you may not have personal experience with breastfeeding, we want to hear your thoughts on breastfeeding and lactation support in the military.

11	<p>[MALE GROUPS:] By a show of hands, how many of you have known someone in the military who has breastfed or pumped while at work? [COUNT THE NUMBER OF HANDS ALOUD.]</p> <p>[FEMALE-ONLY GROUPS:] By a show of hands, how many of you have breastfed or know someone in the military who has breastfed or pumped while at work? [COUNT THE NUMBER OF HANDS ALOUD.]</p>	
12	What Department of Defense or Service-specific policies are you aware of that apply to breastfeeding and/or expressing milk?	
13	What support or resources exist in your Service for women who want to breastfeed or need to express milk while at work?	
14	From your own observations or experience, what challenges do you think women who want to breastfeed or need to express milk during their military service face?	
15	<p>If a servicewoman wanted to breastfeed or needed to express milk while at work, where would she go?</p> <p>[PROBE IF NEEDED:] Are you aware of lactation rooms at your installation or near your work space?</p>	
16	What have you heard about the quality, cleanliness, or availability of lactation rooms at your installation?	
17	How can the military best support servicewomen who want to breastfeed or need to express milk during working hours?	

Question Number	Topic	Notes
Post-Deployment Reintegration		
Now we want to talk about an issue that affects all parents: the post-deployment reintegration period. Deployments and separations can be challenging for family life. Coming home from deployment and reintegrating back into the family is exciting but can also be difficult. We want to turn our attention to discussing the challenges and resources of the post-deployment reintegration period for parents.		
18	By a show of hands, how many of you have been deployed while you were a parent? [COUNT THE NUMBER OF HANDS ALOUD.] By a show of hands, how many of you have known someone who has deployed and has children? [COUNT THE NUMBER OF HANDS ALOUD.]	
19	What are some of the challenges parents face when they return home after deployment?	
20	What support or resources are made available to parents who are returning from deployment? [PROBE IF NEEDED:] What kind of information is provided for parents who are deploying or returning home from deployment?	
21	Do you perceive any differences in how military mothers experience post-deployment reintegration versus military fathers?	
22	Do you think there is a need for different support or resources for deployed mothers versus deployed fathers? [PROBE IF NEEDED:] What kind of additional support do deployed mothers need? What kind of additional support do deployed fathers need? Are there any differences for single parents?	
23	How could the military better support military parents who are returning home from deployment?	
Child Care Marketing and Awareness of Options		
Now we want to talk about a different but related topic: child care. For working parents inside and outside the military, finding child care can be challenging. Again, even if you do not have children, your knowledge and opinions are relevant to this discussion about child care options for Service members.		
24	If you or someone you know were moving to a new location, how would they go about finding child care options in the new location?	
25	What kinds of child care options does the military offer for Service members who have children?	
26	By a show of hands, how many of you have heard of militarychildcare.com? [COUNT THE NUMBER OF HANDS ALOUD.] If you visited militarychildcare.com, did you find the website useful?	
For those of you who have not visited the website, MilitaryChildCare.com is a secure Department of Defense website that provides a single gateway for military parents to find comprehensive information on military-operated or military-approved child care programs worldwide.		
27	How could the military better support Service members who have dependent children in need of child care?	

Question Number	Topic	Notes
General Questions		
We're also interested in hearing about other issues we haven't yet discussed that may affect women in the military. Of note, we may use your ideas as future topics of DACOWITS research.		
28	One issue DACOWITS has been studying for years is the efforts by DoD and the Services are taking to integrate women into previously closed positions. What are your thoughts on how these efforts are progressing to date?	
29	What do you feel is the biggest challenge to women serving in the military today?	
30	If you could send one recommendation back to the Secretary of Defense, what would it be?	
31	Is there anything else you'd like to talk about with us?	
(MODERATOR: Reinforce confidentiality.) 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. We will keep your information confidential—please do so as well by not sharing what you heard with anyone else. As a reminder, you should not assume that everything you hear today from other participants or the group is accurate, and we ask that you please defer to your Services' current regulations and/or policies for the most accurate and up-to-date information. Once again, thank you very much for your participation.		

C.3. Focus Group Protocol: Physical Fitness Assessments

Session Information

Location:

Date:

Time:

Facilitator:

Recorder:

Number of participants present:

Focus Group Kickoff: Key Points to Cover

1. Welcome attendees

- ▶ I am **[INSERT FIRST NAME]**, and I am a member of the Defense Advisory Committee on Women in the Services, known as DACOWITS, and this is **[INTRODUCE PARTNER'S FIRST NAME]**, also a member of DACOWITS.
- ▶ We have **[INSERT FIRST NAME]** here with us from the DACOWITS staff.
- ▶ Our research contractor, **[INSERT FIRST NAME]**, is with a research firm hired to transcribe these sessions, and s/he is part of the DACOWITS research team.

2. Introduce DACOWITS and its purpose

- ▶ Again, DACOWITS stands for the Defense Advisory Committee on Women in the Services. Established in 1951, DACOWITS is one of the oldest Department of Defense Federal Advisory Committees. The Committee is composed of civilian women and men appointed by the Secretary of Defense to provide advice and recommendations on matters and policies relating to the recruitment, retention, employment, integration, well-being, and treatment of servicewomen in the Armed Forces.
- ▶ Every year, DACOWITS studies specific topics and prepares a report for the Secretary of Defense. Since 1951, the Committee has submitted over 1,000 recommendations to the Secretary of Defense for consideration. As of 2018, approximately 99 percent have been either fully or partially adopted by the Department.
- ▶ Each year, DACOWITS visits several military installations and talks to hundreds of Service members like you about their experiences in the military. This year, the Committee is interested in hearing from Service members on several topics, including your experience with your Service's physical fitness program. We are meeting with groups of women and men. We would like to spend some time discussing this topic, but we will also 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, carefully planned discussion. As facilitators, we have a set of scripted questions that we'd like to cover today, but we encourage open conversation. Our research contractor serves as a scribe. 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.
- ▶ 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.
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4. Explain ground rules

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- ▶ Please avoid sidebar conversations.
- ▶ We want to hear your opinions.
- ▶ We want to hear the good and the bad.
- ▶ Avoid the use of acronyms. If we find that you are using acronyms, we may ask you to stop and explain the acronym.
- ▶ We respect and value differences of opinion. Please be respectful of others' opinions as well.
- ▶ We want to make sure we cover all our questions today. If we feel we've covered a topic, we'll move the group along.
- ▶ Our Staff, [INSERT FIRST NAME], will make sure we're sticking to the schedule and will alert us if we need to move on to the next question.

5. Emphasize that participation is voluntary and that privacy and confidentiality will be maintained

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- ▶ 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. 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.

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- ▶ 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 report that we will use in writing our annual report to the Secretary of Defense [**SHOW COPY OF 2018 REPORT**]. Copies of our annual reports are available online at dacowits.defense.gov. At the conclusion of our focus group, you will be provided a DACOWITS pamphlet containing information about the Committee.

Question Number	Topic	Notes
Warmup/Introductions		
Before we get started with our discussion about physical fitness testing, let's do some introductions.		
1	<p><i>(MODERATOR: Ensure each person answers all three questions before moving on to next person.)</i></p> <p>Let's go around the room and have each of you tell us:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ How many years you've served in the military ▶ Your job in the military ▶ How long you've been with your current unit 	
Experience With Physical Fitness Assessments		
Today we want to learn about your experiences with physical fitness assessments. Let's begin by talking about the requirements and frequency of these assessments.		

Question Number	Topic	Notes
2	How often does your Service require a physical fitness assessment?	
3	Does this vary for anyone in your unit—for example, those who are injured, are recovering from a medical condition, had previously failed an assessment, or were recently pregnant?	
4	What are the current components of the physical fitness assessment?	
5	Do the current components vary for men and women? If so, how?	
6	What happens when someone fails the physical fitness assessment?	
Purpose and Goals Now we will shift to talk about the purpose of the physical fitness assessment.		
7	In your opinion, what is the purpose of the physical fitness assessment?	
	<i>[PROBE IF NEEDED:] Why are you required to take a physical fitness assessment?</i>	
8	What is the difference, if any, between the physical fitness assessment and physical occupational standards assessment?	
	<i>[PROBE IF NEEDED:] Is there a difference in the purpose of these assessments and what they hope to achieve?</i>	
Goals of Physical Fitness and Occupational Standards To make sure we are all on the same page, the stated goal of the physical fitness assessment is to assess a Service member's fitness level as it relates to general health and wellness. The goal of an occupational standard, however, is to assess a Service member's ability to complete the physical requirements of job-related tasks. Occupational standards may not be required for all jobs. For the rest of this discussion, we will focus solely on the physical fitness assessment. Now I want to hear your opinions about how well physical fitness assessments meet their goals.		
9	In your opinion, does the physical fitness assessment properly measure how healthy you are? Why or why not?	
10	Does the effectiveness of this assessment in measuring overall health and wellness vary for men and women? If so, how?	
11	How, if at all, does your performance on the physical fitness assessment affect your career progression—for example, promotion criteria, evaluation criteria, school assignments, or results that are recorded in your personal record?	
12	Does your services' physical fitness assessment impact men and women differently?	
Available Resources Surrounding Fitness and Health Next let's focus on your physical training regimen, resources available to help you prepare for the physical fitness assessment, and support available to you surrounding health and nutrition.		
13	How do you train for the physical fitness assessment?	

Question Number	Topic	Notes
	<i>[PROBE IF NEEDED:] Describe whether this is completed individually or as a unit.</i>	
14	For the purposes of this discussion, physiological differences refer to the physical or anatomical differences between males and females. As far as you can tell, do women and men in your Service train for the physical fitness assessment differently based on their physiological differences? If yes, please describe any difference in training.	
15	Do you think women and men should train differently for the physical fitness assessment based on their physiological differences? Why or why not?	
16	Does command-led physical training have an effect on your morale, either positive or negative? <i>If so, describe the impact on morale.</i>	
17	What resources are available to help you prepare for the physical fitness assessment? <i>[PROBE IF NEEDED:] Does your command have a physical fitness program, or gym? If so, describe the program.</i>	
18	Does your unit have a trained physical fitness program leader? If so, what is that person's role?	
19	Has your Service provided training on nutrition or physical fitness since you joined the military? If so, describe this training and whether it varies for men and women.	
20	Are there any additional resources you wish your Service provided to you surrounding the physical fitness assessment or general health and nutrition?	
General Questions		
We're also interested in hearing about other issues we haven't yet discussed that may affect women in the military. Of note, we may use your ideas as future topics of DACOWITS research.		
21	One issue DACOWITS has been studying for years is the efforts DoD and the Services are taking to integrate women into previously closed positions. What are your thoughts about how these efforts are progressing to date?	
22	What do you feel is the biggest challenge to women serving in the military today?	
23	If you could send one recommendation back to the Secretary of Defense, what would it be?	
24	Is there anything else you'd like to talk about with us?	

Question Number	Topic	Notes
<i>(MODERATOR: Reinforce confidentiality.)</i>		
<p>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. We will keep your information confidential—please do so as well by not sharing what you heard with anyone else. As a reminder, you should not assume that everything you heard today from other participants or the group is accurate, and we ask that you please defer to your Services’ current regulations and/or policies for the most accurate and up-to-date information. Once again, thank you very much for participating.</p>		

Appendix D. Military Services Physical Fitness Assessments

Army		FM 7-22	
APFT	Army Physical Fitness Test (Current Test)	Bi-Annual Test* <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2-minute of push-ups • 2-minute of sit-ups • 2-mile run 	<i>*Height/weight assessment conducted concurrently</i>
ACFT	Army Combat Fitness Test (New Test; Tentative Oct. 2020)	Gender/Age Neutral Test <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 3 Repetition Max Deadlift • Standing Power Throw • Hand-Release Push-Up • Sprint Drag Carry • Leg Tuck • 2-mile run 	
Navy		OPNAVINST 6110.1J	
BCA	Body Composition Assessment	Height/weight assessment conducted concurrently	
PRT	Physical Readiness Test	Bi-Annual Test <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2-minutes of push-ups • 2-minutes of sit-ups • 1.5-mile run • Toe Touch 	
PFA	Physical Fitness Assessment	Combination of PRT and BCA, makes PFA	
Marine Corps		MCO 6100.13A	
PFT	Physical Fitness Test	Annual Test <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Push-Ups or Pull-Ups • Crunches • 3-mile run • Height/weight assessment conducted concurrently 	
CFT	Combat Fitness Test	Annual Test <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 880-yard sprint • 30-pound press • 300-yard shuttle run • Height/weight assessment conducted concurrently 	
BCP	Body Composition Program	Marines who score 285 and higher on both the PFT and CFT are exempt from weight and body fat limits, per MCO 6110.3.	
Air Force		AFI 36-2905	
PFT	Physical Fitness Test	Bi-Annual Test* <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1-minute of push-ups • 1-minute of sit-ups • 1.5-mile run • Abdominal Circumference <p>*However, if the member scores a 90 or higher, than they only have to take the PFT once a year</p>	