

Challenges for female services in the male dominated military



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The United States military comprises of both genders and various racial and ethnic groups, but it still mainly consists of White males. In today's military, racial minorities make up about 30% of the 2.1 million Department of Defense (DoD) employees and out of that 2.1 million, females make up about 18% of the employees (Department of Defense, 2018). Despite being small in number, minority servicemembers have fought alongside their dominant-group peers and performed the same rigorous mission. Even though the military places a strong emphasis on cohesiveness, teamwork, and sacrifice for each other and the country, the minority status of either gender or racial and ethnic background plays a role in the job duty. The hypothesis is that military's significantly large number of the dominant group impacts the minority group's career, mental health, and physical performance. Adding on to this hypothesis, servicemembers who are both gender and racial minorities are going to experience more negative symptoms both mentally and physically than those who are minorities in one category. This literature review looks at four articles and two supplementary articles to examine the differences in gender and racial minorities in the military. In this case, gender minorities are female servicemembers and racial minorities are those who are non-White.

In a research conducted by Perez and Strizhko (2018), minority groups who were considered to be tokens were measured and compared to the dominant group to see how well they dealt with life stressors, how they handled the stressor, and how much they trusted the organization utilizing Global Assessment Tool data (GAT). There were 27 identified effects. The theory of tokenism states that when there is less than 15% of the minority group

inside the dominant group, they are subject to various disadvantages such as more visibility, indirect isolation, and role encapsulation (Perez & Strizhko, 2018). In a sample of 198, 855 Army Soldiers, gender minority, racial minority, and both gender and racial minorities were determined which became the three comparison groups to the majority group of each category. The racial minority in this study only included Black Soldiers since the study stated that there were not enough racial group other than Black and White Soldiers. When 4425 female Soldiers, 5040 Black Soldiers, and 279 Black female Soldiers that were considered to be tokens were assessed, the study did not find a significant difference between them and the dominant group in the measures they were looking at (Perez & Strizhko, 2018). However, their study showed that there was a significant difference in two areas, where female token Soldiers reported higher level of pain than men and Black female Soldiers (double token) reported more negative coping strategy than female Soldiers who were not considered tokens. The implication this study made was that Army's emphasis on unit cohesion and mission-first mentality make Soldiers worry less about the individual physical difference.

The limitation to this study is not being able to look at the diverse racial makeup of the Army due to lack of samples. The study made an inference based on one group of minorities. Another fact is that Black Soldiers make up the largest minority in the military at 16. 8% compared to 4. 4% Asians or other racial groups with smaller percentages (Department of Defense, 2018). Even though Black's minority status may be a great tool of looking at racial disparities in the military, it cannot speak for all the racial minorities' experiences. The study also utilized GAT, which is the only self-report

measurement that the research used. GAT is also not voluntary for Soldiers since they are required to take it annually and sometimes more than once depending on the update it rolls out (Leipold, 2011). This may make it harder for Soldiers to take the assessment with a cooperative mindset. Another challenge would be Soldier's complete honesty with the answers since they may believe the result may negatively affect their career and see themselves as unfit to perform duty. Even though research found that GAT was a good psychometric tool for measuring factors such as resiliency and coping skills, it still required refinements to strengthen reliability (Vie, Schler, Lester & Seligman, 2016). There has not been much study done to test the validity and reliability of the GAT other than the mentioned study. The tokenism study requires more in-depth research and possibly a qualitative research to see if there was truly a no significant difference between the minority and dominant group.

Another study on female veterans found that they were more prone to posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) compared to both male veterans and civilian female population (Lehavot, Goldberg, Chen, Katon, Fortney, Simpson, & Schnurr, 2018). This cross-sectional study utilized National Epidemiologic Survey on Alcohol and Related Conditions-III (NESARC-III) from 2012-2013 to randomly pick out the sample of studied population and determine the three group's exposure to trauma(s), recent trauma within the past year, and life stressors. The selected samples went through in-person interviews to determine if they had prior exposure to trauma and if they met the PTSD criteria for the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-5). They were also assessed on the amount of life stressors

within the past year to see if higher scores contributed to more stress. Out of the 23, 126 samples studied, the 379 female veterans reported higher level of both military-related trauma and other trauma as well as greater number of stressful events in their lives (Lehavot et al., 2018). Furthermore, Lehavot's study revealed that compared to the civilian females that reported about 6% and male veterans at about 5% of recent PTSD, female veterans reported a little over 11%, which is twice as much than the male veterans. This research indicated that female veterans' high rate of PTSD was attributable to their combined exposure to previous trauma, both preceding and during military service, as well as life stressors.

Compared to Perez and Strizhko's tokenism findings, Lehavot's veteran study was able to address more in-depth on the significant difference between genders in the military population. Lehavot's study utilized online data, NESARC-III, as an initial screening tool to find participants and focused on in-person interviews to extensively survey the target participants. The research not only focused on how military contributed to female veteran's higher rate of PTSD, but also studied their preceding traumas such as childhood and interpersonal trauma and life stressors related to the susceptibility of military-induced PTSD. Even when the research controlled all the studied factors such as number and type of traumas, the result still showed female veterans had a higher rate of PTSD. This is consistent with the hypothesis that minority group in the military experiences more impact on their mental health and gender difference exists. One limitation of this study would be the lack of diversity representation, as it mentioned that most of the female veterans were White with higher SES (Lehavot et al.,

2018). The study also looked at one cohort of individuals from specific year group and non-institutionalized adult population, which may not be a representation of years of traumas and severity of traumas some veterans are experiencing. It may be beneficial to conduct a longitudinal study that follows more diverse group of female veteran population to see how the long-term effect of PTSD contributes to the difference between gender and racial minorities.

A third study conducted qualitatively found that the reasons why female servicemembers left their military career earlier than they anticipated were due to demands of multiple roles as a female and trauma or negative events experiences while serving (Dichter & True, 2015). Their study interviewed 35 female veterans from all the service branches and covered the time from Vietnam War to Operation Enduring Freedom/Operation Iraqi Freedom (OEF/OIF). More than half (57%) of the females were Blacks while the rest of the racial makeup varied amongst Whites, Hispanics, and others. The interviews were transcribed and divided into themes of why they entered the military, how their experience was during service, and the reasons for leaving.

Female servicemembers who joined stated common themes during the interview: desire to travel and see the world; escape from the current negative conditions; more career/economic mobility or educational support; and exposure and gradual alignment to the military culture from an early age. When female veterans in Dichter's study were asked of the reason for leaving, the first reason was competing demands outside of their military careers. Many of them stated they had life stressors such as being a <https://assignbuster.com/challenges-for-female-services-in-the-male-dominated-military/>

caregiver, interpersonal violence, and/or mental health condition. The second reason was trauma and negative experiences during service, such as leaving their children behind during deployment or sexual assault from coworkers or supervisors (Dichter & True, 2015). The lack of support that they had caused some of the interviewees to develop PTSD and other mental health symptoms. Out of the study, only three reported leaving the service at the desired time.

The overarching theme from Lehavot's study and Dichter's study was the structured disadvantage female servicemembers experienced due to the harassment, trauma, and life stressors while in service. Perez's tokenism finding that females have more negative symptoms physically and bad coping skills while serving can be explained as well, based on the negative experiences female veterans had while in service. The limit of this qualitative research was that it looked at a very small sample of female veterans from one Veterans Affairs (VA) center in one state. However, with the lack of research on motivation and reason for female veteran's early career termination, this literature provides additional knowledge and foundation to utilize the measures to a larger, diverse group of female veterans. One interesting finding was that female veterans' motivation for joining the service aligned similarly with that of their male counterparts, such as wanting to escape negative conditions and looking for new experiences (Woodruff, Kelty, & Segal, 2006). The findings in the following studies continue to point that the experience and outcome for female servicemembers differ significantly despite the similar starting points in their desire to serve the military.

In another study, researchers tested Soldiers in a light infantry division for physical strength, balance, flexibility, and number of physical measures to show that females and males performed differently (Allison et al., 2015). During the test, 348 male and 58 female Soldiers went through physical performance and were measured on tools that have been proven to be reliable, such as ergometer cycles to test the anaerobic strength and inclinometer to measure the flexibility or range of motion. The test result showed that females performed better on the flexibility and balance portion while males performed better on the strength, aerobic, and anaerobic portion. From these findings, research suggest that physiological and musculoskeletal difference in gender needs to be reflected on the physical training to allow every Soldier to perform the physically demanding jobs in the military. Addressing the difference also allows the military to recognize what injuries are more prevalent for female Soldiers, which may help with finding prevention measures from early on.

Allison's study brings a significant responsibility on the military because it has repealed the Direct Ground Combat and Assignment Rule as of 2013 and allowed female servicemembers to serve in all military occupational specialties (MOS) as of 2016 (Navy Life, 2013).

The study's suggestion for developing more thorough physical training in preparation of the gender-neutral jobs has led the Army to design new physical test known as the Army Combat Fitness Test (ACFT) that no longer grades by gender and age-specific standards, but by job categories (Military One Source, 2019). The disconnect between Allison's study and ACFT is that gender-neutral jobs do not necessarily equate to gender-blind scoring <https://assignbuster.com/challenges-for-female-services-in-the-male-dominated-military/>

standards. Dividing the ACFT into Moderate, Significant, and Heavy job categories, each Soldier regardless of gender and age now has to meet the minimum on the Moderate category which start at three repetitions of 140 pound-deadlift and five other rigorous tests that must be completed under 50 minutes (Military One Source, 2019). Unofficial results have shown that initial trials had 30% failure rate in males and 84% failure rate for the ACFT (Buckner, 2019). Despite the push towards less injury and more integration of servicemembers, the test has pushed females to achieve higher standards than what they are already struggling to achieve. This ties in with Perez and Strizhko's 2018 research stating that as minorities, female servicemembers are already put on a pressure to perform better because of their higher visibility in the organization.

Based on the studies, it was evident that females experience more difficulties, negative job satisfaction, and informal isolation through the standards created by the military and by who they serve with. Study indicated that despite military's recognition of gender differences, the training implementation did not close the gap to assist female servicemembers to achieve equal standards. Rather, everyone is now put on a higher standard to create a blindness to the deficiencies faced by women. This logic is similar to White people's comment that they do not see "color" when they are interacting with racial minorities, which in turn invalidates the minorities and deprives them of their identities. Throughout the literature reviews, the common gap was addressing the intersectionality of racial and gender minorities of the military population. The articles focused on the difference found in one group of minorities (i. e. Black) to the dominant

group. The only intersectionality in the research was Black female Soldiers in Perez and Strizhko's study. The future research may need to address the minority female experiences with less emphasis on one specific minorities since every minority group's experience cannot be lumped together as a common experience.

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