

Military pregnancy

[Health & Medicine](#), [Pregnancy](#)



As the United States military moves towards a more bi-gender dependant force, it will be necessary for leaders and managers to combat the growing increasing of junior enlisted pregnancies. Through leadership skills, communication, and understanding the causes of the problems, leaders will be able to lower the rate of pregnancy, henceforth, increasing fleet readiness.

To even consider any type of resolution or solution to the problem of pregnancy amongst junior enlisted members, we must first analyze the concept of fleet readiness and the units that comprise it in todays military. As the post-Cold War military is downsized to fit the new world order and the decreasing defense budgets, there is increasing concern about the readiness of the military. If the military is called upon to achieve our national objectives, will they be where they are needed, when they are needed, and prepared to perform their missions? Since no one wants another episode of the ill-equipped, poorly trained hollow force that existed in late 1970s, both President Clinton and former Secretary of Defense Perry cited readiness as the top defense priority. 1

The joint forces Publication 1-02 defines readiness as the ability of forces, units, weapon-systems, or equipment, to deliver the outputs for which they were designed (this includes the ability to deploy and employ without unacceptable delays). 2 In other words, deployability of servicemen/women and equipment to accomplish tasks around the globe is paramount. With this broad definition of fleet readiness, we can determine that the deployability of junior servicemen and women is a major factor to accomplishing fleet readiness within any force. While junior enlisted personnel comprise the

majority of service people deployed throughout the world, this paper will explore the impact of the junior enlisted servicewoman and how different factors within command climate cause pregnancy to be a fleet readiness problem.

Since readiness of the military is a high priority issue, Public Law 103-337, Section 533 requires the Department of Defense to submit an annual report on readiness factors by race and gender, beginning in FY96. As part of this report, deployability trends must be tracked. To ensure the data is reported correctly, a contract was issued to Logistics Management Institute to provide a comprehensive analysis of the impact of non-deployable personnel on readiness. This study will also look at the degree to which individuals in active component units, who are non-deployable, are adversely affecting readiness. 1 With all the attention being given to readiness, it is important to understand some of the factors that may impact readiness

Female pregnancy within the military has been found to be a growing issue within the armed forces and a detrimental factor to fleet readiness. While in early 1995, the Pentagon reported there had been no impact on fleet readiness due to pregnancy but to contradict this claim; Ms. Elaine Donnelly, Center for Military Readiness, went on to say, we know that women are not as deployable as men. This is a readiness issue because short handed units are not as deployable as those without shortages, and pregnancies causes shortages.

An example of the impact of pregnancy was seen in a 1994 survey conducted within the U. S. Marine Corp. 64% percent of commanders and

senior enlisted members believed pregnant women lead to other members having to work longer and harder. There is also a belief among the male troops that some women even use pregnancy as a means to separate early, which leads to the belief that a bias exists in the separation system. This bias then leads to the belief that they (men) are being discriminated against. So men begin to view women as detrimental to the unit. If these attitudes are allowed to exist, the unit cohesion, integrity, and teamwork factor, will be compromised. At the same time, the commander of the unit or team will be forced to deal with a great deal of unnecessary problems. 1

While the growing number of women entering the military has risen from 2.5% in 1973 to 15% of today's present day forces, commands and military leaders have been forced to develop pregnancy assistance programs for enlisted personnel that will help those individuals who become pregnant while on active duty. Leaders are also developing ways and methods to try and reduce the growing number of pregnancies amongst the junior enlisted in the military. Commanders and senior leadership can take actions to address the affect of pregnancy and the detriment it may have on readiness and deployability. First, all service members, especially senior leadership; need to understand the actual impact pregnancy has on readiness.

Communication must be established between leaders and the junior enlisted on the effects of pregnancy as well as the passage of information in the form of annual sexual harassment training. Junior enlisted personnel should be informed of pregnancy prevention and family planning by commanders and leaders while at the same time, the junior enlisted should be made to understand the impact of pregnancy to themselves as well as their unit. For

many of these young adults, it is their first time away from home. This sometimes can result in personnel having to learn to be independent and responsible adults at a very early age.

Secondly, a revision in the separation policy should be considered in order to eliminate the possibility of junior personnel getting pregnant simply to exit the military. Today, if a young woman decides she made a mistake by joining the military and is desperate to get out, she could possibly seek pregnancy as a means to do so. She is not thinking of the long-term effects and difficulties in raising a child. This type of scenario is more common than often in today's military. By eliminating this factor, young enlisted women may choose a different path that will have less long-term effects on that person's life. One possible way of combating this possibility would be to implement a freeze policy¹ of some sort. This policy would apply to all members in deployable units. Each member assigned to deployable units would sign a contract for a specified term. The term of the contract would apply to the time an individual is available for sea service. If a member became non-deployable his/her clock would stop until they are again able to deploy. For example, if a ski injury requires knee surgery and six months of physical therapy, the individual's commitment would be on hold until he/she was again able to deploy. In this instance, the individual's time in the unit would be extended for six months. The same should be true for pregnant women.

Another alternative would be the rotation of members from deployable units for periods of time. The question of cost versus benefits would be the biggest

question here but this policy would most likely add considerable personnel stability to units. This could possibly improve morale and unit cohesion as well as the drawbacks of pregnancy.

Women being members of the armed services are a relatively new experience for the country, the military service and for women. The integration of women into the services is an ongoing process. It is most recent diversification to take place in the military service since 1948, when President Truman desegregated the military. There are many forces, both internal and external, working against the readiness of the military. Only through constant vigilance and adaptability will the military be prepared when called upon. The main concern for leaders is that pregnancy amongst the junior enlisted will have a negative impact on readiness and deployability. While there is no solid statistical data to support that pregnancy affects readiness, it is a perceptual problem that exists in all-unisex commands.

Many people believe women are a detriment; many others, however, recognize that women have increased the readiness status of the military. By opening combat support careers to women, the services have broadened the pool of qualified individuals to fill the jobs. With the changing situations of war and public relations over the years since the Cold War, it has been shown that today's military must be more versatile than ever. For this reason, fleet readiness is the primary concern of the military, leaders, and commanders alike.