



Short Communication

Inclusion of Women in Military Issues and Concerns

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Abstract

In the present era, gender equality has become a buzz word and the issue of equality of opportunity to the women in all fields of social and professional life is the need of the hour. Contrary to this, it is a universally accepted fact that militaries are not created to generate employment and hence have nothing to do with gender equality. They are tasked to ensure national defence. They need only the fittest – men or women. In this regard this paper endeavours to explore an important issue of inclusion of women in military. The paper highlights various issues related to entry and service of women in military, especially the combat forces.

Keywords: Combat, gender, military, transparency, women.

Introduction

In the present era of 21st century, gender equality and gender mainstreaming are considered immensely important issues which need prudent concerns and actions. Military is a fundamental site for the construction of gender, that is, the defining of the boundaries of behavior – indeed, of life possibilities – for people we call *men* and *women*. The military has been the quintessential masculine institution, where boys become men^{1,2}. Here the questions arise that why the same saying is not applicable to girls and why this institution is considered as primarily masculine.

Objective: This study deals with an important issue of inclusion of women in military. Women struggle to enter into military is never about women seeking special privileges or double standards. It is about being allowed to compete based on ability and not gender. It is never about proving that women can do anything a man can do, but about being judged as individuals by the same standards as men in any job for which they can qualify.

Research Methodology

This research is mainly descriptive and analytical in nature which attempts to describe the status of women in military and analyse the issues concerned with their participation in military

History is replete with stories of women in battle. The ancient Greeks, for example, told of Amazons so dedicated to warfare that each cut off one breast to improve her ability to shoot and throw spears. The Americans can point to colonist Margaret Corbin who, during the British attack on Fort Washington in the revolutionary war, operated cannon until she was seriously wounded. For the most part, however, the history of women in

battle is a combination of myth and exaggeration, mixed in with a few true accounts of unique women. Indeed, throughout history, most societies have banned women from military service. Those women who did fight were often forced by circumstances into positions of military leadership or were conscripted only when men were in short supply, as was the case in Soviet Union during World War II. In the absence of these extreme circumstances, most societies have restricted women from serving in the military to the same extent that they have restricted women from other male-dominated occupations³.

Considering the current scenario, women are serving in defense services of many countries of the world like U.S.A, Israel, Canada, Britain, Bulgaria, Germany, India and many more. But Women are generally not allotted active battle field duties. They either serve in many technical and administrative posts (mostly in medical and educational areas) or sometimes on voluntary basis to the battle fields. Women remain a peripheral presence rather than an integral part of the military's image⁴.

Issues related to Participation of Women in Military: The role of women in the military has become a burning topic for debate in all Armed Forces and the governments all across the globe. With equality and parity being the norm of the day, women's combat exclusion is tagged as gender discrimination.

The Canadians have found that in battle women can be just as tough as men and the public accepts it easily when women soldiers die in Afghanistan. The only real barrier to women's participation in combat has been male attitudes towards women in combat.

Biological Myths and Stereotypes- The most common reason for opposing women in combat is that they largely lack the physical strength, especially of the upper body to perform

effectively in a combat environment. Studies conducted in the United States have observed that on an average men are 40 percent stronger than women. Contrary to what some seem to believe, technology has not overcome the importance of physical strength in the Army. The line soldiers still engage the enemy eyeball-to-eyeball, belly-to-belly. In this setting, women are definitely at a disadvantage⁵. Women were (and are) kept out of the armed forces because of the myth of biology, which is not seen as the social construction that it is. In this argument women are supposed to be genetically programmed to nurture life and are physically and emotionally not strong enough for combat. Those who subscribe to this line of thought argue that this division of labour is biologically based. Countless historical studies have shown this to be untrue. The stereotype blames the woman for her problems, thus avoiding a critique of the system which creates many of the circumstances she finds herself in⁶.

Davis' in-depth interviews with women in the combat arms showed that they were confronted by preconceived perceptions of their ability and motivation, informed by masculine cultural assumptions about gender roles and the social and sexual behavior of women who chose traditional male employment⁷.

Perception of Women in Military- Women find it difficult to maintain femininity while simultaneously being perceived as competent. Herbert poses the question, can one truly be a soldier and a woman and not be viewed as deviating either from what it means to be a soldier or from what it means to be a woman?. The question is pertinent, because as she exemplifies the military continues to see femininity as something to be denied or, at the very least, controlled⁸.

Socio-Psychological Factors- Women in military are confronted with social, behavioural and psychological problems at all levels. Some of the major issues concerning women in all defence forces are pregnancy, fraternisation, marriage and family, rape of the women prisoners of wars, sexual harassment, low acceptance and doubts about role definition. Marriage and subsequent arrival of children are major turning points in the careers of service women. In contrast, the men who also experience these very events while in service remain quite unaffected by these occurrences. Other aspects of service life that bother women are enforced separation from their families, traditional inflexibility of working hours, excessive regimentation of social life (particularly the evening functions at the messes which are more treated like a parade with emphasis on dress time, ban on children, scant regard to late nights etc.)

Pregnancy is a perennial problem in the military. This is evidenced by the data available on the United States military. Between 10 to 15 percent of the service women wear maternity uniforms during a normal year⁹.

Results and Discussion

There are two points that must be analyzed before we can properly address the question of whether or not women should

be permitted to enter the army. Firstly, the nature of the army as an institution and secondly, the nature of combat itself. If the army was just a job, and if justice and equal opportunity was all that was at stake, there would be no opposition to opening up all occupational specialities irrespective of gender. Women, after all have demonstrated their competence in all areas of society from medicine and law to business and groves of 'academia'. They have benefited from capitalism and technology. The lifting of legal barriers against women in the civilian workplace has merely ratified the technological advances that have rendered physical strength less important than intellect, an area in which women are equal to men. Thus today a woman, who is willing to bear the equal burden that men have traditionally borne, can achieve whatever goals she desires.

Opponents of the combat exclusion rule point out that modern combat is technological and 'push-button' and that it does not require the brute strength of the combat soldier of old. There is a lot of truth in the contention. However the fact remains that physical strength and endurance are still the hallmarks of the effective combat soldier on ground indeed such qualities may be more important in the current situation of low intensity conflict and in the future when, rapid deployment forces are used, whose members must carry most of their equipment on their backs.

Much of the problems encountered in integrating women into a male-dominated organization are caused by men as much as they are by women. The key issue is transparency. It is imperative that the military clearly articulates the rationale for policies especially that applied to women in the defence services. The military needs to clearly articulate the purpose for the recruitment of women into the army despite the potential challenges.

There is also growing recognition of the operational effectiveness of women, particularly in peace operations. Bridges and Horsfall state that an increased percentage of female military personnel on UN operations are beneficial to operational effectiveness. A more balanced sex ratio among peacekeepers would reduce the sexual harassment of local women¹⁰. It has been proven scientifically that women handle stress better and are also mentally tougher.

Conclusion

Men were leaders and women nurturers and followers. That was the way things were, but nothing stays forever. The significant difference, of greater male strength that tipped the scales in the past, is no longer that significant in the nuclear age. The fact remains that physical strength is still essential when it comes to the armed forces in general and the combat arms in particular. The new generation woman is willing to put aside her natural impulses if not abandon them in favour of her zeal to explore new frontiers professionally.

In conclusion the proper role of women in the army especially the Combat arms will, of course, continue to be a volatile issue,

not only in the army but also in the society at large. It is a universally accepted fact that militaries are not created to generate employment and hence have nothing to do with gender equality. They are tasked to ensure national defense. They need only the fittest – men or women. Armed forces require personnel who are physically strong and brave. But one thing is to be borne in mind:

A woman's guess is much more accurate than a man's certainty' and last but certainly not the least...For the female of the species is more deadly than the male.-The Female of the Species.

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