

Research Problem Review 78-22

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A SURVEY OF THE STATUS AND UTILIZATION OF WOMEN IN THE ARMY

Jack M. Hicks

PERSONNEL AND MANPOWER TECHNICAL AREA

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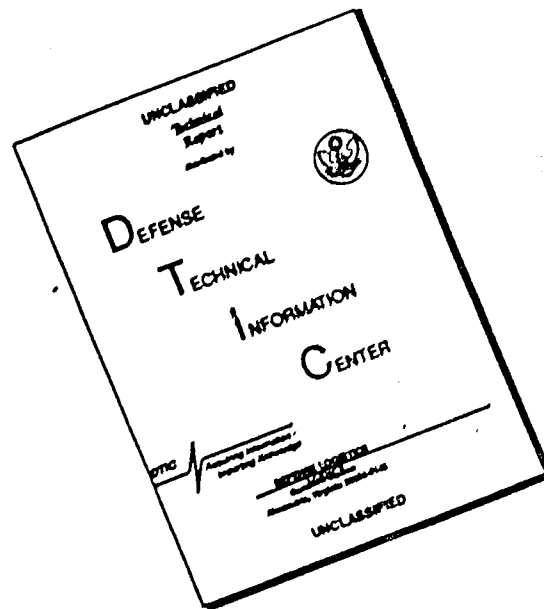
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PERSONNEL AND MANPOWER TECHNICAL AREA

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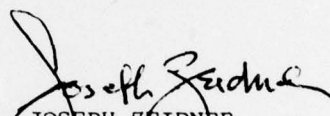
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FOREWORD

An important part of the research of the Personnel and Manpower Technical Area of the Army Research Institute for the Behavioral and Social Sciences (ARI) supports the overall effort to find methods of better integrating women into the Army. This report analyzes the results of a broad survey of the experiences, attitudes, and perceptions of enlisted women in comparison to enlisted men. The research was conducted under Army Project 2Q763731A755, FY 75, and Project 2Q763731A768, FY 76. The work is responsive to special requirements of the Deputy Chief of Staff for Personnel, particularly the Directorate of Military Personnel Management, Enlisted Division. Survey data were collected by Plog Research, Inc., under Contract DAHC 19-75-C-0033.


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A SURVEY OF THE STATUS AND UTILIZATION OF WOMEN IN THE ARMY

BRIEF

Requirement:

This research, derived from the Army's need to better understand the potential contributions of women in the service, specifically investigated the status and utilization of enlisted women.

Procedure:

Enlisted women (EW) and enlisted men (EM) were compared on a variety of personal, attitudinal, and perceptual dimensions, and data were gathered on the enlistment process, MOS, satisfaction with the Army, and attitudes of each sex toward the other. A self-administered questionnaire, generated from focused group and in-depth individual interviews, was administered in December 1975 to 1,718 EW and 835 EM at nine Army installations.

Findings:

Women reported a different pattern of reasons for enlisting than men, generally stating more concern with self-enhancement and long-term career planning. A smaller percentage of EW than EM reported working most of the time in their primary Military Occupational Specialty (MOS). A larger percentage of EW than EM reported satisfaction with the Army. Only about 20% of both the men and women reported feeling that combat occupations could be suitable for women as well as men.

Utilization of Findings:

The information gained from this research is important for proper utilization of the increasing numbers of enlisted women in nontraditional as well as traditional MOS.

A SURVEY OF THE STATUS AND UTILIZATION OF WOMEN IN THE ARMY

✓ The present investigation grew out of a need to better understand the potential contributions that women might make to the Army manpower system. Women constitute 50% of the general population, and thus potentially could double the Army's source of manpower. This consideration could be extremely important given the present all-volunteer mode, in keen competition with the civilian sector for quality manpower. Due to Army's essential role in national defense, it is crucial that Army not fare poorly in recruitment and retention of quality personnel. Such an eventuality would lead necessarily either to a return to selective service or to reduced combat effectiveness. Thus, primarily as a hedge against this "devil or deep blue sea" dilemma, it behooves the Army to explore supplemental manpower resources, meaning women. ↩

In initiating this overall project, a logical preliminary objective was to survey the present nature of the Army's utilization of women. The research was focused accordingly, and data were gathered under contract.¹ The effort was addressed specifically toward gaining a better understanding of the present status and utilization of enlisted women. This objective was implemented primarily by comparisons of enlisted women (EW) to enlisted men (EM) on a variety of personal, attitudinal, and perceptual dimensions. Valuable information was gathered concerning the (a) enlistment process, (b) MOS, (c) morale, and (d) sex attitudes.

METHOD

Phase 1: Questionnaire Development

Interviews. This phase was characterized by focused group and individual interviews, which were conducted by three interviewers assigned separate territories at Army posts. Twenty-two tape-recorded focused group interviews were conducted. Six of these groups consisted of new EW recruits at Fort Jackson, S.C. The remaining 16 groups were made up of 8 groups of EW with 18 to 24 months of service, 4 groups of EM supervised by women, and 4 groups of EM supervised by men. Each group consisted of 8 to 10 volunteers, obtained at Forts Bragg, Carson, Gordon, and Hood. An additional 30 individual depth interviews of men and women supervisors were also tape-recorded at these posts.

¹ Plog Research, Inc. A Study of Women in the Army. Plog Report No. 5025. Reseda, Calif.: July 1976.

Questionnaire Design. Based upon the results of the interviews and other hypotheses, a preliminary questionnaire was designed that included the following: (a) Army background and MOS information; (b) attitudes toward the Army; (c) stereotypes of the military and related concepts; (d) attitudes toward women in the Army; and (e) demographic information.

Pilot Study. The pilot study was conducted in November 1975 at Fort Ord, Calif., with 37 EW and 22 EM participating. Participants were selected on the basis of those categories of greatest interest in the final data collection phase. Respondents represented primarily E3 and E4 ranks, with 18 to 24 months of prior service, and were at least 9 months from expiration of term of service (ETS). The questionnaire was administered by collectives of 10 to 20 respondents per session, EM and EW separately. The sessions were followed by small group "debriefings" which revealed no major inadequacies in the questionnaire design. The mean completion time of the questionnaire was approximately 45 minutes.

Phase 2: Data Collection

Questionnaire. The final questionnaire required only minor modifications and consisted of separate, though similar, EM and EW versions.

Sampling. Nine Army installations with a high percentage of EW were selected for data collection--Forts Bliss, Bragg, Campbell, Gordon, Hood, Lewis, Ord, Riley, and Rucker. These posts yielded 2,553 respondents (1,718 EW and 835 EM). To the extent possible, participants were selected to meet the following specifications: (a) 18 to 24 months in the service (first term enlistment); (b) at least 9 months from ETS; (c) rank, primarily E3 and E4; (d) eligible for reenlistment; and (e) diverse in their MOS.

According to questionnaire responses, not all the criteria were fully satisfied. Approximately 60% of the EM and 40% of the EW fell outside the 18- to 24-month range, with many more EM exceeding 24 months than EW. Approximately one-third of the EM were not in their first term of service (as opposed to 9% for EW). Also, one-third of the EM and one-fifth of the EW did not fall within the E3, E4 range.

Another important consideration was assurance of maximum educational comparability of EW and EM groups. Though this goal was partially achieved--98% of the EW versus 74% of the EM had at least completed high school--the two samples could be regarded perhaps more accurately as "educationally typical" of the populations from which they were derived.

Procedure. The final questionnaire was administered to sex-segregated collectives of 25 to 100 respondents per session in December 1975. Procedure and instructions were constant, as follows: "We're doing a study of men and women in the Army--their attitudes toward each other and the Army itself--and we'd like to get your opinions." Confidentiality and anonymity were assured. The verbatim questionnaire instructions were read aloud, with the respondents following silently from the cover sheets of their booklets. A 1-hour period proved sufficient for all respondents to complete the questionnaire.

RESULTS

The Enlistment Process

Preenlistment Planning. Respondents were asked how long they had thought about joining the Army and with whom they had talked before seeing a recruiter. The results generally reflected a pattern of greater impulsivity for EM than for EW. Of the EM, 37% reported having joined more or less on impulse; only 29% of the EW gave this answer. Significantly greater percentages of EW indicated that they had thought about joining for several months to a year. The most popular choice of someone to talk with prior to joining was "a friend" with approximately 40% of both sexes making this designation. There was also a marked tendency for EW to report talking to generally more people prior to joining than did EM, particularly among same-sex family members, such as mothers and sisters. About a third of the EM and a fourth of the EW indicated that they had talked with "no one."

Enlistment Motivations. Respondents were instructed to select their reasons for joining the Army from a list. One of the most clear-cut findings was that EW generally chose more varied reasons than EM. The only choice that EM made significantly more often than EW was "to serve my country" (23% to 17%). Reasons most popular among women were "getting college benefits" (56%), and "getting training useful in civilian life" (47%). These reasons were also most popular, to a lesser degree, among the men (44% and 38%). Another category of reasons chosen by nearly half the EW pertained to adventure, excitement, and travel. These motives were reported by somewhat less than a third of the EM. Reasons such as not being able to find a job and getting away from the family also were selected significantly more often by the EW than by EM although these reasons generally were less popular than those above.

The general pattern suggested by these data was one of somewhat greater self-enhancement motivation to join the Army by the EW. This is not to suggest that the EM provide a contrast in altruism or humility. They too chose self-serving motives to a relatively high degree. Nonetheless, the EM appeared to show a moderately greater inclination toward the more traditionally patriotic orientation, with correspondingly less emphasis upon personal career strategy. When this pattern was combined

with differences in preenlistment planning, there appeared among EW a general enlistment configuration of more rational long-range planning, clarity of goals, goal direction, and higher personal aspirations than among EM. To some degree, these results may be interpreted as due to the fact that the EW were, by Army policy, of higher aptitude and educational levels than EM. The EW also may have felt at greater psychological liberty to cultivate their own interests because of cultural expectations that place the burden of national defense upon men.

The Military Occupational Specialty

Numerous questions in the survey concerned the MOS. One question of major interest asked how much time was spent working in the primary MOS. A markedly lower percentage of EW (49%) than EM (58%) reported spending the majority of their time in their primary MOS.

It was not surprising that the majority of those who reported their current job as being different from their primary MOS also reported that they were assigned to the different duties. It is interesting, however, that 76% of the EM reported having been so assigned, whereas only 62% of the EW responded accordingly. The EW, by comparison, were somewhat more inclined to say that they had requested the change (22%) than men (15%). It was also noteworthy that less than 1% of the EW reported that any such discrepancies in duties were due to sex bias. Such job discrepancies are not necessarily to be regarded negatively. When those individuals who reported spending the majority of their time outside their primary MOS were asked how they felt about it, considerably less than half of either sex indicated unhappiness. EW differed substantially from EM, however, on the positive side, with 43% of the EW but only 33% of the EM reporting they were happy with the discrepancy. The EM were also more inclined to express indifference, with 25% reporting that they didn't care one way or the other.

An additional interesting finding was that 49% of the EW in so-called "nontraditional" MOS (e.g., military police (MP), mechanics) reported general happiness with a change in duties from those for which they were trained; whereas only 36% of women in the "traditional" MOS (e.g., administrative, patient care) indicated similar positive feelings. In other words, women in traditional female job roles were less happy at being shifted out of their training MOS than were those women trained for duties not traditionally associated with women. There were no indications of the degree to which the job discrepancies represented a shift across traditional-nontraditional MOS boundaries.

Another area of interest concerned opinions about which jobs were best suited to which sex. In general, there was remarkably high agreement between the sexes in this regard. Where there was a large degree of agreement or disagreement between the sexes, there also tended to be

a corresponding agreement or disagreement within the male and female groups themselves.

The best illustration concerns those jobs which women are not presently permitted to hold. Respondents generally agreed among themselves (and with military tradition) that the fighting and heavy equipment MOS are best suited to men. This consensus was particularly striking with regard to combat, where only about a fifth of each group considered combat suitable for both sexes, and 67% agreed that combat was for men only. Also, only slightly over a third of both sexes felt that "men and women can fight side-by-side in the battlefield." These findings also seemed to be supported by responses to the question of "How much would you like to go into combat?" in case of another war. Men in general showed a greater inclination (40%) to go into combat than women (29%). It might be pointed out, however, that EM generally might be expected to be more positive toward combat than EW because more men are in combat-related MOS.

General agreement between and within sex groups also was reached concerning jobs in which women have traditionally functioned in the Army. In this area, the overwhelming consensus of both sexes was that these jobs were suitable for either sex. This outcome was strongly influenced by the fact that the MOS to which women traditionally have been limited have not been necessarily the exclusive domain of women. There has been a long history of men and women working together in administration, medical care, and similar fields. Very little sentiment was shown by either sex concerning the suitability of any of the MOS for "women only."

The area in which sharpest disagreement between the sexes was found also was the area of greatest division of opinion within the groups. This general area concerned jobs in which women traditionally have not been permitted entry but can now enter. It has been only since the summer of 1972 that Army policy has permitted women into such occupations as auto mechanic, truck driver, and MP. In these areas, there was a much greater tendency for EM than EW to feel that such jobs should be done by men only, in accordance with long standing tradition. Even so, men were sharply divided in most instances, with a slight tendency to regard these areas as appropriate for both sexes. This was particularly true of military police; 52% of the EM said this job was suitable for either sex, and 43% said this MOS should be for men only.

Satisfaction with the Army

In response to a direct question regarding satisfaction with the Army, EW reported slightly greater overall satisfaction than EM (75% to 70%). However, when asked how they compared working in the Army to working in the civilian job market, 83% of the EW said the Army was as good or better (18% said "excellent"), as compared to 69% for the EM. Though EM and EW both strongly endorsed their MOS training, 76% of the

EW rated their chances of learning civilian job skills in the Army generally as good, as opposed to 63% of the EM.

Thus, satisfactions that EW derived from the Army appeared related more strongly to the job and skill acquisition than was the case for the EM. For the women, satisfaction with the job and skill acquisition exceeded their overall satisfaction with the Army, whereas for the men the reverse tended to be true. This discrepancy may be partially related to enlistment motivations, because the EW placed greater emphasis upon training for use in civilian life than did the EM.

However, beyond such job and educational/training opportunities, the Army seemed to dampen the morale of the women. In regard to occupational advancement, for example, only 11% of EW felt that "women in the Army get promoted faster than men in the same positions." Such a small endorsement seemed inconsistent with the fact that the women in this research were, on the average, substantially better educated than the men and in all probability of higher aptitude as well.

Also, complaints that some women had about the Army tended to be extrinsic to the MOS. Most prominent was a perceived second-class citizenry in the eyes of the men, whereby the women were not attributed the same status and respectability enjoyed by men. Only 13% of the EW agreed that Army men treat Army women with the same respect as civilian women. Only 40% of the EM, as compared to 70% of the EW, agreed that "the moral standards of women in the Army are just as high as those of civilian women." Some EW complained of harassment, sexism, and verbal abuse, although the frequency and intensity of such comments could not be definitively estimated.

With regard to reenlistment and career interests as possible indicators of satisfaction with the Army, approximately 25% of the EW reported leaning in favor of reenlistment. An additional 25% indicated no particular leanings, with the remaining 50% leaning against reenlistment. It seems remarkable that the reenlistment interest level of the EM did not significantly exceed that of women, since only 67% of the men were first-term as compared to 90% of the women.

The picture is somewhat different, however, with respect to career intent. When asked how likely they were to make the Army their career, 16% of the women leaned in a positive direction, as compared to 22% of the men. There was also significantly greater sentiment against an Army career among the women, with 43% reporting that they definitely would not make a career of the Army, as compared to 36% for the men. These results probably reflect, in large measure, the greater percentages of second- and perhaps even third-termers among the men. Such men already had committed themselves toward an Army career by virtue of their previous reenlistments.

Male Versus Female Attitudes

With regard to attitudes toward the "overall quality of men in the Army," the EW tended to hold the EM in only modest esteem. A significant plurality (41%) of women rated the men as "average," with only 19% giving above average ratings. The women fared somewhat better in the eyes of the men, with 34% giving average ratings and 28% giving above-average ratings to women. The above average ratings were not appreciably different from those that the men gave to themselves.

The women were not as generous, however; they rated the women generally much higher than they rated the men. One factor that may have influenced such incomplete reciprocity relates again to the higher mean aptitude and educational levels of the EW. However, unwillingness of the men to rate women higher than themselves may relate to the perceptions of compensating attributes on the part of men, such as physical strength and outside skills. If so, it is evident that the EW did not fully share such perceptions. In fact, an overwhelming majority (82%) of the EW, as compared to 59% of the EM, agreed that "in some ways, women in the Army are sharper and better soldiers than a lot of men I know."

This is not to suggest that the EW identified themselves as soldiers more than the men. Upon being requested to choose those adjectives which best described various concepts, EW did not depict themselves as approximating the attributes of the "ideal soldier" to the extent that the men did. The EM attributed to the ideal soldier such primary designations as honest, level-headed, friendly, helpful, and straightforward--precisely the same set of adjectives they used to describe themselves. The women were in remarkable agreement with the men as to the primary attributes of the ideal soldier. However, the women deviated significantly from this pattern in describing themselves, tending toward a combination of the ideal soldier and the "ideal woman." Though the EW self-image retained much of the ideal soldier, there was also a tendency to share such attributes of the ideal woman as femininity, warmth, emotionality, and even stubbornness to a greater extent than they considered appropriate for the ideal soldier.

It is also interesting that both sexes tended toward clearly differentiated stereotypes of women in traditional as opposed to nontraditional job roles. The EM described the "traditional MOS woman" as warm, friendly, helpful, feminine, and soft; attributes resembling those the EM felt best described the ideal woman. By sharp contrast, the "non-traditional MOS woman" was described by the EM as pushy, masculine, troublesome, unattractive, and hard. The EW, as a group, described the nontraditional MOS woman in similar terms, except that "straightforward" replaced "troublesome." Although women actually in nontraditional MOS were somewhat more lenient in their own descriptions of the nontraditional MOS woman, even they were substantially divided and not as positive as might be expected. Also, only 60% of nontraditional MOS women indicated that they respected women who go into nontraditional MOS.

Another intriguing finding was that a greater percentage of men than women indicated that the sexes should be treated equally in the Army. Over 75% of the EM and only 62% of the EW seemed to agree with this point of view. There were indications that many men felt that there was partiality toward women in the Army, and that their strong endorsement of equality was actually a plea for equality for men. For example, 62% of the EM agreed that "a lot of women use their sex appeal to get promoted or get special favors and jobs." The fact that 55% of the EW also agreed with this statement suggests that it may have some validity. Also, 54% of the EM, as compared to 32% of the EW, agreed that "a woman in the Army will use her femininity to get away with as much as she can."

Returning to the area of combat attitudes, it will be recalled that both men and women attributed far lower combat credibility to women than men. It should be added, however, that 75% of both sexes also agreed that "women in the Army should be trained in handling weapons." Moreover, only a minority of both the EM (27%) and the EW (21%) felt that "a woman isn't capable of fighting in a war."

There was, however, some disagreement between the sexes regarding combat-related MOS and combat behavior. Of the EW, 61%, as compared to 47% of the EM, felt that "women should be allowed into combat-related MOS if they chose"; 31% of the EM and 18% of the EW agreed that "in the battlefield, a woman would panic and run under fire." Though these differences are real, those of both sexes who showed strong disrespect for the combat-related capabilities of women were clearly in the minority.

Thus, the overall sentiment about the female role in a combat environment was essentially compatible between the sexes across several levels of participation. Greatest agreement was reached with regard to the prospect of full participation of women in combat (which both sexes rejected) or merely training women in handling weapons (which both sexes endorsed). Somewhat less agreement was reached at the intermediate level, that is, the combat-related MOS. Both sexes, particularly EW, stopped short of suggesting that women are not capable of fighting, even if fired upon.

CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion it can be stated unequivocally that most of the EM participating in the investigation felt that women can and do make a substantial contribution to the Army. Only 19% of the EM felt that "the Army is a man's world and women can't really belong in it." However, although the women were generally viewed as making a contribution, they were also viewed as limited in the contributions they could make.

The men least appreciated the potential of women in combat, combat-related, and certain other nontraditional female job roles. Such incomplete endorsement of women in the Army also was manifested in a conflict as to how men should treat women. There emerged a pattern that women both should be protected from the rigors of heavy duty and be forced to carry their load. Of the men, 64% felt that men should help the women with heavy lifting, but 76% felt that the sexes should be treated "equally."

Of the women, 69% also felt that the men should help the women with heavy lifting. The majority of women agreed with the majority of the men to the effect that women should stay out of combat--at least alongside men. (It is not known how either sex would have responded to the possibility of segregated fighting units.) There was less agreement between the sexes regarding female participation in combat-related and nontraditional activities generally. This issue appeared to manifest itself as a perceived second-class citizenship, which may foster pessimism among women as to opportunities for advancement and an Army career.

Even though the women generally felt that they were getting the job training for which they joined the Army, they still felt that women could and should participate more pervasively (though not universally) in the military process.