

REPORT DETAILS EXTRA PROBLEMS WOMEN FACE IN MILITARY CAREERS

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<http://www.cnn.com/2009/LIVING/worklife/10/16/challenge.women.military/index.html>

Almost 15% of female vets of recent wars
screened positive for sexual trauma

Women serving in the U.S. military face unique personal and professional challenges that their male counterparts don't, a veterans' group report has found.

Their concerns centered on balancing family life with a military career, inadequate military health care specifically for women, high rates of sexual assault and harassment, and opportunities for career advancement, said the report from Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America.

The pull between family and career can be difficult for women in the armed forces, much like it is outside the military. Sixty-two percent of the employed mothers in a recent Pew Research Center survey said they would prefer to work part time.

Female soldiers cite "the amount of time separated from family" as the most important reason for leaving the military before retirement," the report from the veterans' group said.

Military life appears to take a greater toll on their marriages. Female troops suffer a much higher divorce rate than do the men in uniform. Their marriages failed at almost triple the rate in 2008 -- 9.2 percent, versus 3.3 percent for male troops.

While highly rated overall, the military health care system faces difficulty delivering services while women are deployed.

"Some women have raised concerns over privacy, and adequate access to feminine hygiene products or gender-specific prescriptions such as birth control pills while in theater," the report said.

The Pentagon has acknowledged that a problem exists. "Some line commanders, including officers and senior enlisted personnel, may not understand the importance of women's health care," the report says.

Separately, women in the military have been "coping with significant and under-reported sexual assault and harassment for decades," according to the report.

In 2008, reports of sexual assaults were up 9 percent from the year before, but the military believes that the numbers are under-reported and that many victims, fearing reprisals, wait until after leaving the armed forces to tell their stories.

As a result, the Department of Veterans Affairs screens for what it calls military sexual trauma, or MST, a term the agency uses for sexual harassment and assault. Through May 2007, almost 15 percent of female Iraq and Afghanistan veterans who have gone to the VA for care have screened positive for MST.

A lack of career advancement opportunities was a final area of concern, the report said.

The military's Advisory Committee on Women in the Services said women are under-represented in the higher ranks of the military and have lower promotion rates than their male counterparts.

And a RAND Corp. survey said the "Army's ban on women serving in direct ground combat may be one major factor affecting opportunities for promotions and selection for command."

Since the war in Afghanistan began in late 2001, more than 212,000 female service members have been deployed to Afghanistan and Iraq, making up 11 percent of U.S. forces there.

With women making up a growing component of the American military, the report challenged the Pentagon to address the areas of concern. Because despite their expanding numbers, women are also leaving the military at a faster rate.

Another resource: At "Feminism and Women Studies" website—article: Facts About Women in the Military, 1980-1990" <http://feminism.eserver.org/workplace/professions/women-in-the-military.txt>