



IRAQ *and* AFGHANISTAN VETERANS *of* AMERICA

Women Warriors

Supporting She 'Who Has Borne the Battle'

October 2009

While new positions and doors of opportunity have been opened for women in the services, they still face significant, unique challenges including slower career progression, inadequate military health care and staggering rates of sexual assault and harassment. When they come home, female veterans are confronted with new obstacles, including inadequate female health care at VA medical centers, barriers when entering the civilian workforce, and rising homeless rates among female veterans.

- **In Iraq and Afghanistan especially, the health of our force relies heavily on a sustained and strong female population.**
 - More than 212,000 female servicemembers have been deployed during Operation Iraqi Freedom and Operation Enduring Freedom, making up 11 percent of our force there.¹
 - Over 120 of those women have given their lives, and more than 600 have been wounded in action.²
- **The military would not be able to perform its mission without the continued contributions of female troops. Although a growing number of women are serving in the military today, females are leaving the military at higher rates than males,³ and proportionately fewer women plan to serve until retirement.⁴**
 - Only 36 percent of female enlisted soldiers agreed or strongly agreed with the statement, “(I will) get assignments needed for promotion,” compared to 44 percent of male soldiers.⁵
 - Only 55 percent of female enlisted soldiers (versus 61 percent of their male counterparts) agreed or strongly agreed with the statement, “(I am) confident I will be promoted as high as warranted.”⁶
 - Female soldiers, both officers and enlisted, consistently rate their superiors more negatively than their male peers on categories like “quality of leadership at place of duty” and “amount of respect received from superiors.”⁷
- **In addition to career concerns, both male and female servicemembers can experience challenges balancing military and family life. For female servicemembers, who like their civilian counterparts often assume the role of primary caretaker for their children, balancing a**

military career and family can be especially challenging.

- More than 40 percent of women on active-duty have children.⁸
- Female servicemembers are much more likely to be a single parent than male troops, and more than 30,000 single mothers have deployed to Iraq and Afghanistan as of March 2009.⁹
- According to the GAO, “about 10 percent of women in the military become pregnant each year, and 75,000 military offspring are younger than one,” as of 2002.¹⁰
- Disparities currently exist between the service branches regarding their post-birth deferment-from-deployment policies. For instance, the Army, which has the longest tours of duty at 12 months, gives women just 4 months to stay stateside with their newborns before deploying. Marines offer 6 month deferments and their tours average 7 months.¹¹
- Marriages of female troops are failing at almost three times the rate of male servicemembers.¹²
- **The military’s health care system, TRICARE, provides a full range of health care benefits to female servicemembers. However, TRICARE’s capacity to deliver has been challenged by the growing number of active-duty and reserve women in a system that has in the past primarily served male troops.**
 - Younger males generally rate their doctors more highly than their female counterparts, and females are “substantially less satisfied with their ability to find a personal doctor than are male personnel, a difference that is pronounced in all age groups.”¹³
 - Due to limited space, some women have raised concerns over privacy, and adequate access to feminine hygiene products or gender-specific prescriptions such as birth control pills while deployed.¹⁴ Female servicemembers also express dissatisfaction over a lack of access to a preferred provider, for example a female doctor that specializes in women’s health issues.¹⁵
- **In the military, women have been coping with significant and underreported sexual assault and harassment for decades.**
 - In FY2008, there were 2,908 reports of sexual assault involving servicemembers.¹⁶ Overall, reports of sexual assaults were up 9 percent from the year before.¹⁷
 - Even in the warzone, troops cannot escape the threat of sexual assault; in Iraq and Afghanistan, 163 sexual assaults were reported in 2008.¹⁸
 - Experts estimate that half of all sexual assaults go unreported.¹⁹
 - Almost one-third of female servicemembers, and six percent of male servicemembers, have experienced sexual harassment while serving.²⁰
 - As of May 2007, almost 15 percent of female Iraq and Afghanistan veterans who have gone to the VA for care have screened positive for MST.²¹
- **The VA has been challenged in recent years to care for female veterans, who make up 12 percent of Iraq and Afghanistan veterans seeking VA health care.**²²
 - Already, 44.2 percent of eligible women veterans from Iraq and Afghanistan have turned to the VA for health care, utilizing VA services at a much higher rate than other

- veterans, including their male counterparts and older generations of women veterans.²³
 - They are remaining in the system; almost 85 percent of these women have visited the VA more than once for outpatient treatment.²⁴
 - Women veterans are the fastest growing segment of the veteran population, and their enrollment in VA health care is expected to more than double in the next 15 years.²⁵
 - 74 percent of women veterans who use the VA suffer from at least one chronic medical condition.²⁶
- **Even the VA acknowledges that women veterans have been chronically underserved.²⁷ The key barrier that women face at the VA is the fragmentation of women’s services.**
 - In 2003, the VA made it mandatory for all VA hospitals and clinics to provide a minimum level of women’s health services, but only “where feasible.”²⁸ Onsite offering of gender-specific care has actually *declined* since 2003.²⁹
 - Only 14 percent of VA facilities offer specialized, comprehensive women’s health clinics that serve as one-stop shops for primary care, gender-specific care, mental health services, and surgical services.³⁰
 - In general, women’s clinics typically operate half-time, and more than 40 percent offer only gender-specific exams.³¹
 - 51 percent of women VA users are splitting their care between the VA and an outside health care system.³²
- **After they leave the military, women veterans have dramatically different employment experiences than men. Female veterans on average earn almost \$10,000 less a year than male veterans,³³ and they often struggle to find jobs that pay what their military career did.³⁴**
- **These lower incomes may be a factor in why women veterans are more likely to experience a severe housing cost burden than male veterans,³⁵ placing them at significant risk for homelessness.**
 - As of September 2009, the VA estimated that there are 13,100 homeless female veterans.³⁶
 - Women veterans are up to four times more likely to be homeless than nonveteran women.³⁷
 - As of September 2009, more than 3,700 Iraq and Afghanistan veterans have already been seen in the Department of Veterans’ Affairs homeless outreach program.³⁸ More than 10 percent are women.³⁹
 - 23 percent of female veterans in the VA’s homelessness programs have children under 18 years old.⁴⁰
 - Within the VA’s homeless shelter system, only 60 percent of shelters can accept women, and less than 5 percent have programs that target female veterans specifically or offer separate housing from men.⁴¹

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¹ Department of Defense, Contingency Tracking System Deployment File for Operations Enduring Freedom and Iraqi Freedom, as of January 31, 2009.

² Statistical Information Analysis Division, "DOD Personnel and Military Casualty Statistics," As of June 6, 2009: <http://siadapp.dmdc.osd.mil/personnel/CASUALTY/castop.htm>.

³ Defense Department Advisory Committee on Women in the Services (DACOWITS), 2008 Report, Second Draft, November 14, 2008, p. 4-5.

⁴ According to the fall 2007 Sample Survey of Military Personnel (SSMP) 66 percent of males, compared to 49 percent of females, reported that they "plan to stay until retirement." DACOWITS, p. 5.

⁵ Department Advisory Committee on Women in the Services (DACOWITS), 2008 Report, Second Draft, November 14, 2008, p. 10.

⁶ *Ibid.*, at 11

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ Ann Scott Tyson, "Short Maternity Leaves, Long Deployments," *The Washington Post*, February 18, 2008: <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2008/02/17/AR2008021702324.html>.

⁹ Department of Defense, "Marital and Child Status of Active Duty Women," Defense Manpower Data Center, December 2006 and Department of Defense, "Profile of the Military: 2005 Demographic Report." Defense Manpower Data Center, CTS Deployments "Deployed Demographics of Single Servicemembers," March 2009.

¹⁰ Ann Scott Tyson, "Short Maternity Leaves, Long Deployments," *The Washington Post*, February 18, 2008: <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2008/02/17/AR2008021702324.html>.

¹¹ Ann Scott Tyson, "Short Maternity Leaves, Long Deployments," *The Washington Post*, February 18, 2008: <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2008/02/17/AR2008021702324.html>.

¹² Pauline Jelinek, "Divorce rate increases In Marine Corps, Army," *Associated Press*, December 2, 2008: http://news.yahoo.com/s/ap/20081203/ap_on_go_ca_st_pe/military_divorces.

¹³ Kristin Andrews et al., "2008 Health Care Survey of DOD Beneficiaries Annual Report," August 2008, p. 15: http://www.tricare.mil/survey/hcsurvey/downloads/hcsdb_2008_final.pdf.

¹⁴ GAO-02-602, p. 7.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, at 13.

¹⁶ Department of Defense, "FY08 Report on Sexual Assault in the Military," March 2009: <http://www.sapr.mil/contents/references/2007%20Annual%20Report.pdf>.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ Kimberly Hefling, "Female soldiers raise alarms on sexual assaults," *Associated Press*, July 21, 2008: <http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/25784465/>.

¹⁹ Between 22 to 41.6% of the sexual assaults that occur in the U.S. are reported to police. U.S. Department of Justice (2008). *Criminal Victimization, 2007*. Washington, DC: Rand, Michael and U.S. Department of Justice. (2002). *Rape and Sexual Assault: Reporting to Police and Medical Attention, 1992-2000*. Washington, DC: Rennison, Callie Marie.

²⁰ The Department of Defense defines sexual harassment as “a form of sex discrimination that involves unwelcome sexual advances.” Department of Defense, “2006 Gender Relations Survey of Active Duty Members,” Defense Manpower Data Center, p. viii: http://www.sapr.mil/contents/references/WGRA_OverviewReport.pdf.

²¹ Kimberly Hefling, “Military assault victims face tough recovery,” Associated Press, July 23, 2008.

²² Paula P. Schnurr, Ph.D., VA National Center for PTSD, VA Medical Center, White River Junction, Vermont, “Posttraumatic Stress Disorder in Women Veterans,” VA Office of Research & Development, November 2008, p. 5: <http://www.hsrd.research.va.gov/publications/forum/nov08/Nov08-1.cfm>.

²³ Earlier generations of women veterans enrolled in VA health care at a 15 percent average rate. Through 3rd Quarter 2008. Email Conversation with Laura Herrera, MD, MPH, Director, Comprehensive Women’s Health, WVHSHG, Department of Veterans Affairs, on July 6, 2009. See also: Joy J. Ilem, Deputy National Legislative Director, Disabled American Veterans, Testimony before the Senate Committee on Veterans Affairs, “Women Veterans, Bridging the Gaps in Care,” July 14, 2009: http://veterans.senate.gov/hearings.cfm?action=release.display&release_id=aa74a8ba-c163-4d80-a349-1ed85d46f211.

²⁴ Department of Veterans Affairs, Environmental Epidemiology Service, “VA Healthcare Utilization Among 97,658 Female OIF/OEF veterans Through 2nd Quarter FY 2008,” June 27, 2008.

²⁵ Women are projected to account for one in every seven enrollees within the next fifteen years, compared to the one in every sixteen enrollees today.” Joy J. Ilem, Deputy National Legislative Director, Disabled American Veterans, Testimony before the Senate Committee on Veterans Affairs, “Women Veterans, Bridging the Gaps in Care,” July 14, 2009: http://veterans.senate.gov/hearings.cfm?action=release.display&release_id=aa74a8ba-c163-4d80-a349-1ed85d46f211.

²⁶ Susan M. Frayne, M.D., M.P.H., Center for Health Care Evaluation, VA Palo Alto Health Care System, “Needs of Women Veterans Must be Carefully Considered in Building Tomorrow’s VHA,” VA Office of Research & Development, November 2008: <http://www.hsrd.research.va.gov/publications/forum/nov08/Nov08-1.cfm>.

²⁷ “The market penetration for women from 2003 to 2007 increased only from 11 percent to 14.6 percent, while the market penetration for male veterans during the same period was consistently at 22 percent.” Hayes, <http://www.hsrd.research.va.gov/publications/forum/nov08/Nov08-1.cfm>. In its 2008 “Hospital Report Card,” the VA found that health care for women veterans lags behind care for males. Department of Veterans Affairs, “Health Care ‘Report Card’ Give VA High Marks,” June 13, 2008: <http://www1.va.gov/opa/pressrel/pressrelease.cfm?id=1515>.

²⁸ FY2010 Independent Budget, p. 112: www.independentbudget.org.

²⁹ Hayes, <http://www.hsrd.research.va.gov/publications/forum/nov08/Nov08-1.cfm>.

³⁰ FY2010 Independent Budget, p. 112: www.independentbudget.org.

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³³ United States Census Bureau, "Census Study Shows Women Veterans Earn More and Work Longer Hours," June 17, 2008: <http://www.census.gov/Press-Release/www/releases/archives/women/012062.html>.

³⁴ American Legion, "Women Veterans: Identifying Risks, Services and Prevention," p. 3: <http://www.legion.org/documents/pdf/womensguide.pdf>.

³⁵ Mary Rooney, Program Specialist, Homeless Veterans Programs, and Deborah Lee, VISN 6 Network Homeless Coordinator, U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, presentation at the National Summit on Women Veterans Annual Conference, June 20-22, 2008, p. 14.

³⁶ Thom Patterson, "U.S. seeing more female homeless veterans," CNN, September 25, 2009: <http://www.cnn.com/2009/LIVING/09/25/homeless.veterans/index.html>.

³⁷ Male veterans are twice as likely to be home- less as their nonveteran peers. Gail Gamache, PhD, Robert Rosenheck, MD, and Richard Tessler, PhD, "Overrepresentation of Women Veterans Among Homeless Women," *American Journal of Public Health* 93 (7), July 2003, p. 1132-1136.

³⁸ Thom Patterson, "U.S. seeing more female homeless veterans," CNN, September 25, 2009: <http://www.cnn.com/2009/LIVING/09/25/home- less.veterans/index.html>.

³⁹ This number is almost 2.5 times the rate of homeless women veterans of all generations. Email conversation with Pete Dougherty, Director, Homeless Veterans Programs, Department of Veterans Affairs, February 19, 2009.

⁴⁰ Rooney and Lee, p. 23. See also: National Alliance to End Homelessness, "Vital Mission: Ending Homelessness Among Veterans," p. 27. American Legion, p. 3.

⁴¹ James Hannah, "New Housing Serves Homeless Female Veterans," Associated Press, October 20, 2008: www.portclintonnewsherald.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20081020/ UPDATES01/81020008.