



Women in Operations



A Qualitative Investigation

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Background



- ❖ National Conference on Women in Defence: 2006
 - Minister of Defence:
 - ▲ 30% women in senior positions
 - ▲ Minimum 30% women MSDS
 - ▲ Push to 52% or beyond
 - Implication for women's participation in military operations and combat

Women in Operations 2


Gender Mainstreaming



- ❖ "Gender issues, such as increased equality and observing gender-specific needs, become a natural element in all parts of the peacekeeping mission. Gender issues will not be handled by a special department alone but rather be a part of the work of the existing organisation, both in the field and at the headquarters."
(UN Development Fund for Women)

Women in Operations 3


Study Purpose



- ❖ To explore the experiences and perceptions of women's participation in SANDF operations.

Women in Operations 4


Study Questions



- ❖ What successful experiences have women had of their involvement in military operations?
- ❖ What are the unique contributions women make during military operations?
- ❖ What challenges do women experience in military operations?
- ❖ What specific support requirements do women have in order to participate more fully in military operations?

Women in Operations 5

Study Design



- ❖ Qualitative, exploratory design
- ❖ Open-ended questionnaire - 38 items
- ❖ Content analysis
- ❖ Population:
 - All uniformed women (11,194)
- ❖ Sampling:
 - Purposive
 - Operational experience in previous 24 months
 - Broadly representative of rank, race, mustering and service

Women in Operations 6

Sample



- ❖ 89 women
- ❖ Service:
 - 40% Army, 22% SAMHS & Air Force, 15% Navy
- ❖ Population Group:
 - 61% African, 24% White, 14% Coloured, 1% Asian
- ❖ Ranks: Privates to Lt Col
 - 22% Captains, 18% Corporals, 17% Privates

Key Findings

Scope



- ❖ Military career
- ❖ Woman role models
- ❖ Leadership abilities
- ❖ Liberation from patriarchy
- ❖ Mainstreaming women's needs
- ❖ Sexual harassment
- ❖ Training
- ❖ Gender discourses

Military Career



- ❖ Are women serious about a military career?

Military Career: Reasons for Joining



- ❖ Needed work, deprofessionalisation
There was no employment, so I decided to join the force. I liked the uniform.
(Cpl, SA Air Force)
- ❖ Career, dream, patriotism, defend & serve
I wanted to make a difference in my country as a woman in the SANDF.
(Cpl, SA Army)

Military Career: In-service career-mindedness



- ❖ Positive aspects of deployment were predominantly job-related
Going to sea as a bridge watch keeper, taking command. It taught me perseverance, confidence in myself. I learnt that nothing in life comes easy, you have to work hard to achieve your goals.
(Lt, SA Navy)

Military Career



- ❖ Are women serious about a military career?

Yes

Woman Role Models



- ❖ Does South Africa have military woman role models?

Woman Role Models



- ❖ Only two women reported being inspired to join the SANDF by a military woman
- ❖ Many did not know any uniformed women
- ❖ Lack of role models in deployment areas:
Women must get promotions cause since I attended this deployment I never seen a woman as a contingent commant or a leader of any deployment. We must be given equal opportunities [the same] as men.
(Cpl, SA Army)

Woman Role Models



- ❖ Does South Africa have military woman role models?

No

Leadership Abilities



- ❖ Are women capable of leading in a military operation?

Leadership Abilities: Interpersonal skills



- ❖ Listen, support, communicate and contain acting out, team work, relationships
They know how to calm a member who might be negative.
(Cpl, SA Army)

Women are able to solve conflicts better than men.
(Cpl, SA Army)

Leadership Abilities: Cognitive Skills



- ❖ Calm and rational, more focused and organised, less impulsive, think before they speak, take strategy into consideration when making tactical decisions

A woman is always organised and very rational in making decisions.
(Cpl, SA Army)

Women are sometimes able to keep a level head (remain calm) and see the bigger picture.
(Lt, SA Air Force)

Leadership Abilities: Authority over Men



- ❖ Difficulties in asserting authority over men
- ❖ Lack of respect for women leaders

If you are a leader and a woman they suppose to respect and listen to what you are going to say to them but is not like that. Sometime man took advantage of saying it is a woman you cant lead them.
(LS, SA Navy)

Leadership Abilities



- ❖ Are women capable of leading in a military operation?

Yes

Liberation from Patriarchy



- ❖ Has the SANDF been liberated from patriarchy?

Liberation from Patriarchy: Experiences of Exclusion



- ❖ Low profile of women soldiers in the public eye
- ❖ Low representation of women in management and leadership
- ❖ Relative exclusion of women from leadership in the core business of the SANDF, and their relegation to health and support
- ❖ Hostile environments that many women report, especially during deployments – vulgar jokes, pornography, sexual advances, lack of respect for women in authority, sexual harassment and overt statements that women have no place in the field
- ❖ Inadequate consideration of women's physiological needs, particularly related to menstruation.

Liberation from Patriarchy: Experiences of Exclusion



Deployments are still the men's world. They dominate always the NCC, 2IC, chaplain, CWO, FSE commanders and their 2IC are all males. All these managerial posts need to be changed. We as women needs to unleash our skills and potentials. We cannot unleash it whilst we are in these junior rank. They don't even want to nominate us for officers formative. As a junior you must always listen and do what you are told to do. No one wants to listen to you. Decisions must always be made for you. Its like you don't have brain.
(Sgt, SAMHS)

Liberation from Patriarchy: Women's Responses



- ❖ Most see it as a challenge
 - Prove themselves capable
 - ▲ To themselves
 - ▲ To men
 - Anger at women who do not perform

Liberation from Patriarchy: Women's Responses



We need to do things for ourselves, what I noticed during the exercise is that we always want men to do things for us, even small things such as cleaning. We want them (males) to dig trenches for us and I don't think it's correct. We want to be treated special. We are slow in doing things, however when it is time to demob, we are so fast because we are now going back to the base. True colours come out in the field. Ladies don't want to clean their weapons; they want men to clean for them, we are lazy even to carry our own weapons we want guys to carry weapons for us. (Lt, SA Army)

Liberation from Patriarchy: Most Men



- ❖ Most men welcome women's participation

The men I served with were my brothers and the ships company became my second family. We all participated alike, I was never treated like an outsider. (Lt Cdr, SA Navy)
- ❖ One sexist is too many

Liberation from Patriarchy



- ❖ Has the SANDF been liberated from patriarchy?

No

Mainstreaming Women's Needs



- ❖ Have the unique needs of women been mainstreamed into operational planning?

Mainstreaming Women's Needs



- ❖ Single biggest frustration:
 - Lack of ablutions
 - Having to share ablution facilities with men
 - Lack of sanitary bins for soiled sanitary pads
 - Lack of water for personal hygiene
 - Inability to access sanitary pads and medication to deal with menstruation
 - Unsafe ablution facilities and living quarters

Mainstreaming Women's Needs



There's nothing much you can do on the ship to accommodate women ie separate toilets. My ship is 48m and can accommodate up to 50 people. That is too much people to be accomodating such a small space so male and female bathrooms are out of the question. The bathrooms are lockable so I still have privacy. There are nirrors in the bathroom so I can still put on my make up. I have my own cabin which I can share with another female. There are sanitary bins, which is fine.
(Lt, SA Navy)

Mainstreaming Women's Needs



- ❖ Facilities not ensured in advance
- ❖ 'Nice to haves'
- ❖ Not routinised
- ❖ Women made to feel they are a nuisance

Mainstreaming Women's Needs



Commandars are making funny jokes about us eg. "Where are u going to throw your pads, I don't want to see liltes lying around, you are going to the field for 3 days where are you going to wash your smell." They never saw any pads lying around so we don't know the problem.
(Pte, SA Army)

Mainstreaming Women's Needs



- ❖ Have the unique needs of women been mainstreamed into operational planning?

No

Sexual Harassment



- ❖ Is sexual harassment prevalent in deployment areas?

Sexual Harassment



- ❖ Personal experiences of harassment:
 - Nine women, plus one secondary
 - One reported it, one confronted the man, one avoided him
- ❖ Eight denied harassment, but cited experiences that may be regarded as harassment:
 - Jokes, gestures, comments, remarks, approaches/proposals and subtle challenges
- ❖ **12% to 20%**

Sexual Harassment



- ❖ 35 of 89 women reported concern with sexual harassment: **39%**

Most of women are harrassed by senior ranks and they don't want to come forward about it, cause they scred of their future or their family.
(Sgt, SA Air Force)

Sexual Harassment



- ❖ Is sexual harassment prevalent in deployment areas?

Yes

Training



- ❖ Are women satisfied with military training?

Training: Three Responses



- ❖ Women must do exactly same training as men
- ❖ Women must get special treatment
- ❖ Training must require only job-related competencies

Training



As females in the SANDF we have to accept that we are here on our own accord, thus we have to act as soldiers, female soldiers 2nd and perform our duties as laid down to us. Higher authority must just cohere with medical institutions on specific training for woman and what we are capable of doing. Once a female wants to progress into a harsher environment eg. rekkies, paratrooping she must live up to their standard of operation and requirements.
(Lt, SA Air Force)

Training



- ❖ Are women satisfied with military training?

Yes & No

Gender Discourses



- ❖ Is there consensus among women regarding their participation in operations?

Gender Discourses: Liberal Feminist Position



- ❖ Women are the same as men
- ❖ No differential treatment
- ❖ No 'male' or 'female' – just 'soldiers'
- ❖ Challenges to items in the questionnaire
- ❖ Liberal feminist position – equal opportunities, equal treatment, no division of labour, any differences are socially determined

Gender Discourses: Liberal Feminist Position



The characteristics of a woman should be irrelevant in a deployment, as long as she does the job she is tasked to do well. The fact that women are caregivers, nurturers and general passivists as characteristics shouldn't be why they get depoloyed. Asking questions like 6a-6c [about the unique contribution of women to military operations] are unfair to women because it supposes that their work is not sufficient/equal to their male counterparts.
(2Lt, SA Air Force)

Gender Discourses: Traditional Position



- ❖ All women are naturally more sensitive, caring, relational and peaceable than men
- ❖ All men are more resilient, strong, tough and assertive than women
- ❖ Differences between men and women are reified and celebrated
- ❖ Thus women should participate, but in specific caring/supportive roles

Gender Discourses: Traditional Position



Women are generally calmer, more focussed and have better interpersonal skills. They are also generally more tidier (neat). Conflict is less onboard and the men tends to be neater as well. Men normally behave better [when women are around], have better manners and use foul language less. They like to have woman company onboard, so as to break the boredom of the deployment. If they are in a situation where a female gets hurt, they will be more concerned about the female than if it was a male that got injured.
(Cdr, SA Navy)

Gender Discourses: Radical Feminist Position



- ❖ Question women's participation in the military
- ❖ War is part of men's world – patriarchal & violent
- ❖ Women must undermine patriarchy, thus work for peace
- ❖ Thus women should not join the military, but should work for demilitarisation

Gender Discourses: Radical Feminist Position



- ❖ Not voiced by participants in this study
- ❖ In the wake of Marxist/socialist feminism?

Not a place for women!!
(Maj, SAMHS)

Gender Discourses



- ❖ Is there consensus among women regarding their participation in operations?

No

Eight Recommendations



In General



- ❖ Women are extremely positive about their participation in and experience of operations
- ❖ Women proactive in dealing with the challenges
- ❖ Women have keen sense of alignment with military's mission
- ❖ Women are fairly conscious of themselves as women in a traditionally male-dominated institution

However



- ❖ "For women serving in the SANDF, the issue is no longer whether they may serve in combat, but whether they will do so in a 'gender-friendly environment'. Legally and politically the mechanisms are in place to ensure that policies are implemented, but true equality cannot be achieved where the support structures are absent and attitudes that render women inferior and subordinate remain unchanged."

(Heinecken, 2002, p. 725)

1: Faces of Women



- ❖ Visibility of women in uniform
 - Inside the SANDF
 - In society
- ❖ Promote military woman role models
 - Strong women
 - Leaders
 - Making a difference in the world
- ❖ Deconstruct the military as a "man's world"

2: Recruitment of Women



- ❖ Must continue to increase recruitment of women
- ❖ Key attractions:
 - Deployment-experienced women to share their experiences
 - Deployments are opportunities to experience new cultures, languages, countries, etc
 - Disclose the challenges – undersell – informed choices

3: Overcoming Patriarchy



- ❖ Like racism, patriarchy is insidious and hidden
- ❖ ?Effectiveness of patriarchy workshops?
- ❖ Political-feminist conscientisation of women:
 - Recognise patriarchy at work
 - Recognise own participation in patriarchy
 - Develop micro mechanisms to challenge
 - Present irresistible contradictions to patriarchal discourses

4: Training



- ❖ Ensure demands placed on women (and men) are consonant with job demands
- ❖ Follow the Outcomes Based Education approach
 - Determine job requirements
 - Determine competencies
 - Determine learning outcomes
 - Determine learning programme

5: Nurturing the Military Career



- ❖ Women moving up the ranks into senior positions
 - Requires long-term commitment
 - Requires a military career orientation
- ❖ Actively identify young women with leadership potential
- ❖ Mentoring and grooming for promotion
- ❖ Exposure to a range of military experiences
- ❖ Incentivise women to remain for the long-haul

6: Ablutions



- ❖ Mainstream planning for ablation and accommodation for women
- ❖ Challenge the attitude of viewing it as 'over and above'

7: Sexual Harassment



- ❖ Update SH policy
- ❖ SH should enjoy focused attention from SANDF chiefs
- ❖ CDTM intensify efforts to eliminate SH:
 - Increased HR at Level 4
 - Legal advisory services
 - Psychosocial support services
 - Prevention training
 - Increased funding

8: Gender Discourses



- ❖ Establish a Gender Discourse Workgroup
- ❖ Articulate competing paradigms for women's participation in military operations and combat:
 - Gender
 - Being women in the military
 - Peacekeeping
- ❖ Become conscious collaborators with the military's mission



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