

Pentagon Reports: Female Attrition Rates Twice as High in Formerly All-Male Ground Combat Units

A recommendation in the Final Report of the **National Commission on Military, National, and Public Service** claims “*The time is right*” to include women in **Selective Service** registration and a possible future draft. The recommendation relies on generalities, egalitarian ideology, and media-generated human-interest stories, not documented evidence that women are or should be considered interchangeable with men in the combat arms.

From 2013 through 2015, the **U. S. Marine Corps** spent **\$36 million** conducting research and field tests comparing male and female physical strength, endurance, speed, and performance in load-bearing direct ground combat (infantry) units. The National Commission’s Final Report barely mentioned results of this scientific research. Nor did it explain why then-Commandant **General Joseph Dunford** filed a formal request asking that some close combat units remain all-male.

The National Commission also failed to consider specific problems that contradict egalitarian beliefs. These include disproportionate injuries and other female medical issues that reduce deployability, consistently low recruiting propensity rates, and *double* attrition rates for women who have volunteered to serve in formerly all-male units. These issues and more are highly relevant to the question of whether Selective Service obligations should be imposed on women as well as men.

Data Show Double Attrition Rates Among Women in the Combat Arms

In December 2019, various military branches and combat communities presented briefings to the Pentagon’s **Defense Advisory Committee on Women in the Services (DACOWITS)**. The briefings responded to the committee’s inquiry about the status of **Women in Combat Implementation Plans** since December 2015.

The military services used different formats to present their responses on briefing slides, but the numbers revealed a consistent, disturbing pattern. In close combat arms units such as the **infantry, armor, field artillery, and combat engineers**, attrition rates for volunteer women were twice as high as men’s.

Marine Corps Briefing (Slide #5)

The female attrition rate for “previously restricted” USMC combat arms military occupational specialties (MOSs) has been more than double that of men:

- Officers – Male: **13.5%** Female: **29.5%**
- Enlisted – Male: **11.2%** Female: **23.9%**

Army Briefing (Slides #4 - #6) Over a 3-year period (2016-2018) attrition also was twice as high:

- 69,234 Males started training; 61,150 completed training. Male Attrition Rate: **11.6%**
- 3,073 Females started training; 2,294 completed training: Female Attrition Rate: **25.3%**

Briefers for the [Navy Special Warfare Command](#) (NSWC) and [Air Force Special Warfare](#) also made presentations, which reported that female candidates for **Navy SEAL** and **Air Force Special Operations** occupations such as air liaison officer have been few and unsuccessful.

Reasons for Double Attrition Rates

The military briefers reported to the DACOWITS that there were **no limitations or barriers** stalling the services' timeline for full integration of women into formerly all-male combat arms units. Air Force Special Warfare presenters added, ***“There is no primary cause of failure/attrition. It has been a mix of performance eliminations (failure to meet standards), self-initiated eliminations, and medical/injury eliminations.”*** (Slide #3)

“Draft Our Daughters” Legislation Would Weaken Readiness

It is reasonable to assume that the women involved in the grand experiment with women in direct ground combat since 2015 considered themselves well-prepared to compete in the “man’s world” of combat arms MOSs. Pentagon officials adopted “gender-neutral standards” and did everything possible to help these mentally prepared and physically exceptional women to succeed.

Still, the Marine Corps and Army attrition data are clear and consistent. Attrition rates that are twice as high for both Marine and Army women destroys the notion that co-ed conscription would strengthen our military in a time of catastrophic national emergency.

Congress should consider recent research and the impact of imposing similar rates of attrition in future combat arms units conscripted to fight a future war. Under principles of “equity,” Selective Service would be required to call men and women for involuntary service, in roughly equal numbers. Only a few women out of thousands would be physically qualified, and if trained and deployed in the combat arms, more than double likely would fail.

Of course, tough training standards could be dropped so that fewer women would fail, but the ultimate attrition would occur on the battlefield, where attrition is for keeps.

Instead of rubber-stamping the National Commission’s ill-advised, unsupported recommendations, Congress should obtain more objective information on the results of a misguided social experiment initiated in 2015 by officials who chose to deny facts and science. Congress should conduct responsible oversight and restore sound priorities that put the needs of the military, and national security, first.

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