



Women Should Not Be Drafted into Selective Service

by Mary Beth Waddell, J.D.

Key Points

Registering women for Selective Service is unnecessary because we have sufficient males to fill draft requirements.

Draftees are most often placed in the harshest and most austere of combat conditions. The natural physical differences between men and women make it considerably more dangerous for women.

Co-ed units would require certain accommodations that are unnecessary in all male-units. This, and a variety of other factors, means that drafting women would be detrimental to military lethality, readiness, and unit cohesion.

Currently, all male U.S. citizens between the ages of 18 and 25 are required to register with the Selective Service System, a government agency that manages any potential military drafts. Women are exempt from registering with the Selective Service. However, in July 2021, the Senate Armed Services Committee (SASC) voted in favor of an amendment to the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) that would require both men and women to register.

Family Research Council honors and values the many women who have served and currently serve their country with great distinction. However, we find no convincing reason to require females to register for the Selective Service. We believe female conscription to be an ill-conceived and reckless policy.

Drafting Women into Selective Service Is Unnecessary

The United States has not employed the draft since 1973. But should a major conflict arise, we have sufficient males to fill draft requirements without resorting to drafting females. Currently, we have over two million service members, excluding the Coast Guard. If our armed services needed to be more than doubled to five million (and we maintained the current 16.5 percent of service members who are female), that would only require roughly 2.5 percent of the male population to serve. Since approximately 1.1 percent of the male population is currently serving, this means that only an additional 1.4 percent would be needed.¹

It Is Considerably More Dangerous for Women in Combat

The purpose of a draft is to replace the brave soldiers who have made the ultimate sacrifice on the front lines of war. There is a particular need for the most physically fit, those who can be placed in the most austere of circumstances. In its study, “Where is the Case for Co-Ed Ground Combat?” the Center for Military Readiness found that:²

- Only eight percent of best performers in the combat proxy tests were female, while 92 percent were male.
- Only 8.7 percent of females passed the “Clean and Press” exercise, compared to 80 percent of males.
- In the “Pull-up” exercise, male trainees averaged four times more pull-ups than female trainees (15.69 to 3.79).
- The purpose of these exercises is to simulate muscular strength and endurance that soldiers experience “in direct ground combat units that attack the enemy with deliberate offensive action.” The high rate of failure in these exercises by females shows that, as a population group, females are much less able to cope with the physical demands of the battlefield.
- The attrition and injury rates for women during entry-level training were twice those of men, and non-deployable rates were three times higher.

Beyond this study:

- Army Combat Fitness Test pass/fail records of 3,206 soldiers in 11 battalions show that 84 percent of the females failed their Physical Fitness tests.³
- Musculoskeletal injury rates are roughly double for females. Enlisted females were injured at more than six times the rate of their male counterparts.⁴

Although some women can and do meet these high standards and serve proudly, the draft is random, and the process for ensuring fitness is not as stringent. This leaves the system unable to adequately ensure that female draftees do, in fact, meet the required standards.

Drafting Women Would Be Detrimental to Military Lethality, Readiness, and Unit Cohesion

From April 2012 through August 2015, the U.S. Marine Corps established the Ground Combat Element Integrated Task Force (GCEITF) to test the hypothesis that men and women could perform equally well in all-male and co-ed units. Male participants in the tests were of average capabilities, but female participants were above-average graduates of infantry training. The collected data revealed that:⁵

- In tasks resembling requirements of infantry, armor, and artillery units, all-male teams outperformed co-ed units in 69 percent of ground combat tasks.
- Sex-related physical differences negatively affected co-ed units' speed and effectiveness in simulated battle tasks, including marching under heavy loads, casualty evacuations, and marksmanship.

Females in the draft age bracket (18-25) have menstrual cycles. On the battlefield, where a soldier would be living out of a rucksack for a month or more at a time, a female soldier would be susceptible to urinary tract infections due to a lack of sanitation. This lack of sanitation on the battlefield also increases the potential of yeast infections. "These issues can lead to a degradation of the medical health and effectiveness of service members, who are impacted, as well as the unit and the mission."⁶

Moreover, female servicemembers in co-ed units require certain accommodations that are unnecessary in all male-units. Co-ed units would either require special privacy concerns to be accommodated in the most austere of circumstances or sacrifice the privacy needs of servicemen and women. In addition, co-ed units can contribute to increased levels of sexual trauma⁷ and rape.⁸ These considerations hinder the singular focus that is needed on the battlefield to defeat the enemy.

Jude Eden, a Marine Corps veteran who served in Iraq, wrote about her experience:

Whether it's a consensual relationship, unwanted advances, or sexual assault, they all destroy unit cohesion. No one is talking about the physical and emotional stuff that goes along with men and women together. A good relationship can foment jealousy and the perception of favoritism. A relationship goes sour, and suddenly one loses faith in the very person who may need to drag one off the field of battle. A sexual assault happens, and a woman not only loses faith in her fellows, but may fear them. A vindictive man paints a woman as easy, and she loses the respect of her peers. A vindictive woman wants to destroy a man's career with a false accusation (yes, folks, this happens too); and it's poison to the unit. All this happens before the fighting even begins.⁹

Furthermore, it is inevitable that women of child-bearing age would be drafted and possibly become pregnant, which would have a substantial impact on military readiness:

The impact of pregnancy on U.S. Army readiness came to the forefront following the Persian Gulf War and the large-scale deployment of military servicewomen. Some deploying units reported that non-deployable rates for pregnancy among women were as much as 30% of those assigned.¹⁰

This could create a significant problem for readiness and lethality when the goal of the draft is to replace a depleting front line.

Social Experimentation Has No Place in the Military

The NDAA amendment passed by the SASC pushes a social agenda that seeks to remove all distinctions between the sexes. The military should be singularly focused on defeating enemies and ensuring the security of our nation. It should not be a guinea pig for social experimentation.

Women already serve honorably in the military and are free to volunteer should they so choose. But there is simply no military or national security reason to require women to register for the Selective Service. Randomly-selected women should not be required to enlist ahead of able-bodied men.

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¹ In 1941, the Army Air Corps had just 152,125 personnel. The AAF grew to a peak of over 2.4 million personnel and approximately 80,000 aircraft in 1944.

² “U.S. Marine Corps Research Findings: Where is the Case for Co-Ed Ground Combat?” Center For Military Readiness, October 2014, <https://bootcampmilitaryfitnessinstitute.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/US-Marine-Corps-Research-Findings-Where-is-the-Case-for-Co-Ed-Ground-Combat-CMR-2014.pdf>.

³ “New Army Combat Fitness Test: 84% of Women Fail,” Center For Military Readiness, November 3, 2019, accessed July 27, 2021, https://cmrlink.org/issues/full/new-army-combat-fitness-test-84-of-women-fail#_edn2.

⁴ “Donnelly Advocates for the ‘Home of the Brave and Land of the Free,’” Center For Military Readiness, November 28, 2018, accessed July 27, 2021, <https://www.cmrlink.org/issues/full/donnelly-advocates-for-the-home-of-the-brave-and-land-of-the-free>.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ “Military Sexual Trauma,” U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, May 2015, http://www.mentalhealth.va.gov/docs/mst_general_factsheet.pdf.

⁸ Wyatt Olson, “Sex Assault More Likely for Women in ‘Combat,’” *Stars and Stripes*, September 30, 2013, accessed July 27, 2021, <http://www.military.com/daily-news/2013/09/30/sex-assault-more-likely-for-women-in-combat.html>.

⁹ Jude Eden, "The Problem(s) of Women in Combat," Political Animal Blog, January 25, 2013, accessed July 27, 2021, <https://politicalanimalblog.com/2013/01/25/the-problem-of-women-in-combat/>.

¹⁰ Merideth A. Bucher, "The Impact of Pregnancy on U.S. Army Readiness," U.S. Army Air Command and Staff College - Air University, April 1999, <https://apps.dtic.mil/dtic/tr/fulltext/u2/a395136.pdf>.