GENDER INEQUALITY IN NIGERIAN ARMY

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Abstract: This paper tends to find out the reason behind women's inequality in the Nigerian Military, their challenges, impact and the benefits of a just and equal rights extended to the women in service. Recent research has evidenced that women still represent a growing minority in most Western militaries. Women’s integration deserves equal opportunities across all branches and levels of responsibility in the military; however, their expansion to ground combat roles is still a challenge to the military and policy-makers. Scholars have also reported about the decision to increase the number of women in combat roles, as it may potentiate adverse experiences, due to closer proximity to men in circumstances with little or no privacy. Conversely, recent research has shown that more egalitarian women reported significantly less sexual harassment victimization. Furthermore, our insights suggest that it might be fruitful to integrate women in ground combat roles as Special Forces’ operators, with a view to induce a reduction of marginalization and sexual harassment, by gaining respect in a male-dominant culture. When seen as an equal to the men, women tends to exact strength and power especially in the line of battle and this also increases the morale of the men as they tend to feel intimidated and do more.

Key Words: Female Soldiers, Nigerian Army, Gender Inequality, Ground Combat and Military Enforcement.

1. INTRODUCTION:

The expansion of roles for women in the armed forces has evolved over decades. By law, in most Western countries women are not precluded from service in any military unit. After the terrorist attacks of 9/11, in the wake of what has been called “a renaissance of ground combat in military operational thinking” the topic of women’s access to military positions and especially combat roles has (again) been moving up the agenda, reinvigorating a debate which has never faded. Although men have always been in the majority in wars, women have been in militias in many cultures dating back at least four thousand years into antiquity, whether wielding weapons, helping the soldiers, or just throwing stones, like the Iberians for example or the female warriors in the Peloponnesian War. War has been a source of concern and positioning for women throughout history, both individually and collectively. And many women have taken part in open combat using a male name, for example the US soldier Deborah Sampson who enlisted in the Continental Army during the War of Independence under the name Robert Shurtliff. Earlier before now, there was a law in the United States Military where the US Defense Secretary Leon E. Panetta and Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff General Martin Dempsey announced the decision to rescind the Department of Defense regulation that excluded women from being assigned to units “whose primary mission is to engage in direct combat on the ground” (Aspen, 1994, p.1). With respect to the Army, this regulation prohibited women from serving in infantry, armor, and field artillery units. However, because of specific differences due to gender and the way women may experience being in the military, their needs for counseling and treatment will be different. This chapter will outline the basic demographics of women in the military, their changing role in the Department of Defense (DOD) and conclude with a description of the women Veteran population. The purpose of the chapter is to give the reader a brief overview of the women who serve in the military and the challenges they face to better understand their needs when providing psychological services. All branches of the armed forces have been directed to conduct a review of the current positions closed to women and provide a detailed plan to implement full gender inclusion. The target date for execution of full integration of all military specialties is January 1, 2016. Now that the decision has been made to remove gender-based exclusion for military specializations, it is an ideal time to explore the ways in which women add value to the military both as a baseline in advance of the large changes to come, and as a means to provide insight into how these changes may affect the military as it moves forward.

During this transformative period, research has documented a significant increase in support for women’s participation across military specialties – non-combat as well as combat positions. Despite these advances, significant differences remain between support for full female integration in the military between males affiliated with the military and male civilians. Nigerian Women show consistently strong support for full gender integration regardless of military affiliation status, and their attitudes are significantly more positive than those of their male peers. It is important to be reminded here is the fact that this is the first role to be institutionalised and internalised by western military institutions.
to be played specifically by women. There is in fact a difference with respect to other activities, mainly bureaucratic services, assigned also to women as part of the civilian personnel working in the administrative sectors of defence departments. The role of military nurse is considered as a true female activity within military activities, not directly involved in the battlefield but often severely touched by combat risk.

Thus, a first opinion, aiming to explain the quest for female participation to military operations at various extents, relies on the fact that this participation becomes a necessity when a society is in war, particularly in the case of total wars like the two world conflicts, when civilian population is inevitably involved and modern military institution manifests its greater structural complexity: the practical reason is a question of optimisation of scarce resources for combat. Women are then a substitutive human resource for all those support and service tasks which, being not directly linked to combat functions, “can be performed also by women”, thus saving men for combat.

The adoption of United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 in October 2000, calling for an end to the traditional inequality between men and women in peace building, was an important milestone in recognising the disproportionate effect of wars and conflicts on women and children. This also led to reflection on the role of women as mediators and negotiators in conflict resolutions, not only as a right recognised under international law, but also because women's values, opinions and actions are essential for the success of the solutions adopted. This is the case because women represent nearly half of the population in current theatres of operations (particularly Nigeria) and because traditionally, whether because of maternity or socialisation processes, they have prioritised the values of dialogue and conflict resolution, putting human security before violence.

This has led to the emergence of Gender Advisors in Operations, who are responsible for preparing specific gender action plans for each NATO operation and for the Female Engagement Teams (FET). FETs consist of female soldiers who have received specialist training to work with female communities in parts of Africa that are not accessible by conventional means. They collect and spread information that may be applied in any part of the counterinsurgency (COIN): for example, influencing the local population in developing awareness and acceptance of the force. In addition to contributing to peace building, this also helps to protect allied troops and facilitates their actions. The experiences of the USA and the UK have demonstrated that the Nigerian women soldiers have greater opportunities to get involved with women and their families.

The degree to which a person has goals that are aligned with the organization’s, is identified with an organization, and enacts pro-organizational types of behavior has a strong impact on that person's value to the organization. One way to examine the value of women in the military is to examine the effects of gender on these factors and their antecedents. In other words, does gender play a role in why people enter the military, their identification with the military, and the enactment of pro-organizational behavior? This research addresses this set of questions through two related theoretical lenses: organizational identification theory, which is a form of social identification, and goal theory.

According to Mady Segal, the main factors affecting women’s role change in the armed forces can be grouped into three sets of variables, each of them defining a specific dimension: a military dimension, a socio-structural dimension and a cultural dimension.

a) **Military variables** are considered in a wide sense, and include national security situation, kind and level of military technology, the combat to support function ratio, the structure of forces and the policies driving accession to the military.

b) **Social structure variables** include country’s demographic pattern, characteristics of the labor force (women’s participation to the labor force and occupational gender segregation), the state of civilian economy (expansion or depression), the structure of the family (average age of marriage and maternity, role responsibilities sharing).

c) **Cultural variables** such as the social construction of the notions of gender and family, social values underlining the above definitions, public discourse about gender and gender equality, values concerning the inscriptive definition of social roles and the question of equity.

### 2. In which ways do women enter and remain in the military professional career?

A first answer to this question is very sharp: women enter in the armed forces on a voluntary basis. Under a general perspective, and leaving aside the role of military nurse, which is considered the typical military female role and it is everywhere the first way to access armed forces for women, military roles where women are normally employed have two main characteristics:

First roles opened to women in the armed forces are in the administrative sectors, where tasks are mainly bureaucratic; then women are allowed to serve in technical roles in logistic services, and subsequently in combat-support technical roles. If we put all military roles along a continuum from the furthest to the nearest the true combat role in
terms of task content and relative risk, we can see that women enter the armed forces from those roles which are more detached from the combat situation, and they approach progressively the combat sector until arriving to the current situation where even this last restriction is totally removed or is going to be removed. For reasons linked also to the nature of the above mentioned roles, entry at first is allowed for medium and medium-high levels of military hierarchy, that is as officers and non-commissioned officers, and only as second step female personnel is recruited also as private soldiers. Both processes are linked to the reasons why military organizations become accessible for women: the most civilian-like roles (that is, the least true military roles) are an offspring of the process of civilization, and they can be easily filled with women because of the growing availability of women with medium and high educational standards in the civil society. Furthermore, technical and administrative roles have intrinsically a lower combat content, are normally performed in areas not directly touched by real war fighting (even though this situation presents many exceptions and it is not always clearly defined to this respect), and requested expertise are usually achieved and not easily ascribable to gender.

3. Changing Role of Women in the Forces:

Women have increasingly engaged in military activities that were previously off-limits to them. Over 80% of military occupations are now available to women, an increase from an estimated 60% of Active Duty military positions that were open to women in the late 1980s. Prior to 1994, and under the Risk Rule, Department of Defense policy barred women from the battlefield to avoid risk of exposure to direct combat, hostile fire, or capture. In January 1994, the DOD lifted the Risk Rule and replaced it with the direct ground combat exclusion assignment rule, stating that the department of defense can assign personnel to all positions for which they are qualified in support units, except that women shall be excluded from assignment to combat units whose primary mission is to engage in direct combat on the ground. This essentially prevented women from positions in infantry, artillery, armor, combat engineering, and special operations units of battalion size or smaller. As a result, women began serving on combatant ships in the Navy and, in 1998 U.S. women aviators flew combat aircraft on combat missions for the first time. They drafted the direct ground combat exclusion assignment rule at a time when the concept of the battlefield was more clearly delineated, characterized both by a front line, where direct contact with the enemy occurred, and relatively safe areas in the rear. However, as the first major military engagements necessitating a large number of ground troops since the change in policy. Military were characterized by battlefield lines that were substantially less distinct and increasingly non-linear and fluid, with poorly defined forward and rear battlefield areas resulting in the exposure of women in support units to direct combat.

4. Why recruit more women and diversify their roles in the armed forces?

Beyond the obvious considerations of equality and questions of principle for opening up the armed forces to women, the military today must address a large number of new challenges. The sudden Professionalization of armies in countries that have ended compulsory military service for men, the deployment of military personnel in internal operations in the context of combating terrorism, the fact that Armed forces now find themselves increasingly competing with other employers to recruit the best possible candidates, which could raise longer-term questions about the viability of the armed forces, are all reasons why the military have been induced to cease ignoring the competences of women and members of ethnic minorities. Moreover, whether the increasing employment of women by the armed forces is something imposed on them or that they actively seek, the roles assigned to women are becoming increasingly diversified. Greater participation in peacekeeping operations is bringing the armed forces more into contact with civilian populations, a situation in which the presence of women military personnel could significantly improve relations between the civilian population and the army. In the United Nations, it has been observed, for example, that “women peacekeepers broaden the range of skills and capacities among all categories of personnel, enhance the operational effectiveness of all tasks, and improve the mission’s image, accessibility and credibility vis-à-vis the local population.

5. Harassment and violence against women in the armed forces:

The pre-existing internal culture, lasting stereotypes and the fact that for some, the increasing presence of women in the army is something imposed on them rather than something they have chosen, create an Environment that is conducive to harassment. Many women in the military report that they are constantly bullied. In some cases, and in particular in situations where there is a substantial lack of privacy, showing the slightest sign of femininity is treated by men as a provocation. According to a survey conducted in Nigeria, although 90% of female conscripts claimed to be satisfied with their military service, 17% said that they had suffered sexual harassment, mainly in the form of inappropriate looks, comments and gestures, and 5% reported serious incidents of harassment. These figures again raise
the issue of the prevailing mindset in the armed forces: might it be a matter for some women of “internalizing” the existing culture, resigning themselves to the idea that “this is how things are here”?

The problems of harassment and violence against women in the armed forces can pose a very serious, and even fatal, risk to women. One particularly alarming case occurred during the deployment of coalition troops in Iraq, when several women suffered from dehydration and two of them died as a result. The inquiry into their deaths revealed that, despite the harsh climatic conditions, the women in question had stopped drinking liquids in the course of the afternoon in order to avoid having to go to the toilet at night. Their male colleagues had harassed a number of them and some of them had even been raped.

6. Solutions to Women Inequality in the Nigerian Army:

6.1 Recruitment

To increase the number of women in the military, it is obviously necessary to recruit more women. One interesting aspect raised by a number of people with whom I spoke in Norway is the public’s image of the armed forces, and especially the image projected by the armed forces themselves in their recruitment drives. Until recently, the messages and images used for these drives were bound up with physical fitness and masculinity (racing through mud, guns, and bullets). In other words, by their very nature, recruitment drives based on outdated stereotypes far removed from the current needs of the armed forces have until recently tended to encourage male applicants more than female ones. Accordingly, one very promising initiative, in my opinion, is the development of a new recruitment campaign that more closely reflects the current reality of the armed services, focusing more on technical skills and the values that the armed forces represent.

6.2 Adapting structures to the presence of larger numbers of women

Again on a very practical level, one initiative that should be mentioned is the introduction of mixed dormitories. Such dormitories have existed in Sweden since the 1990s, but no research seems to have been done in that country on their impact. In Nigeria, such arrangements have been introduced only on certain military bases, particularly where existing barracks were very cramped and could not otherwise accommodate the mixed units stationed there. Contrary to what was feared by some, mixed dormitories do not seem to have fuelled tensions between women and men. Instead, Nigerian researchers have found that they have had the effect of desexualizing relations, which are marked mainly by friendship and team spirit. Women have also stressed that, as a result of this arrangement, they are no longer excluded from information-sharing networks and there is less rivalry and scheming between them. As regards the conditions that must be met in order for mixed dormitories to work effectively, researchers underline that leadership is vital: commanding officers must have a genuine open-door policy and clearly lay down and enforce a policy of prohibiting sexual relations between conscripts (any couples that form must be separated) and banning alcohol.

While our study does not pinpoint the source of gender differences on sacrificing behavior, one potential explanation is the greater importance female soldiers placed on pay. In our study, economic reasons for enlisting, which had a higher latent mean among females, had a negative effect on pro-social behavior. Social forces should also be considered, as for much of its history Nigerian Military has been a relatively low gender-egalitarian culture, where men were expected to protect the family, the community, and the nation. Consequently, sacrifice among women may be manifested in ways that are less tied to physical risk. For example, women may for cultural reasons be more willing to sacrifice for families than for their work organization. Another explanation could be that because women are excluded from certain specialties and generally underrepresented, they may simply be less willing to sacrifice for the Army. If so, we would expect to see this change disappear with the lifting of the combat exclusion. Given the importance of sacrificing behaviors, lower willingness to sacrifice among female soldiers should be examined further in subsequent studies. Despite the observed gender differences, females’ willingness to sacrifice is still relatively high. Furthermore, the practical impact is likely not so high that it would justify any changes to removing the combat exclusion, nor is it likely to reach a threshold that is problematic for the Army. This argument is buoyed by the amount of variation in sacrificing behavior explained by gender. While significant, gender is much less important than the reason a person joins or the quality of their relationship with the Army in terms of explaining or predicting sacrifice.

7. CONCLUSION:

In a changing world of multiple challenges, armed forces have everything to gain from including women on an equal footing with men. This strengthens their operational capacities and effectiveness and meets the expectations of societies, which want the armed forces also to reflect the composition of the population. For armed forces, however, integrating women is not always self-evident. Adapting recruitment, structures and career paths are all challenges, which must be addressed, while adopting a holistic approach to the gender dimension. Gender inequalities persist in military
service in most Western democracies. References to social and cultural differences are observed in the existing literature, as the countries where combat experience is common, are still facing difficulties integrating women in their branches. Thus, it is fair to argue that women deserve equal opportunities across all branches and levels of responsibilities in Western militaries. We have concluded that challenges, such as: sexual assault and harassment, femininity and egalitarianism, and posttraumatic stress disorder, which are identified as the major sources of tensions in the military institution, deserve to be studied. For instance, although several research papers have highlighted that the military has somewhat been successful in attempts to lower actual incidence of sexual harassment, the percentage remains high. Given that even fewer differences are observed to exist between females and their structurally equivalent group of non-combat specialty males, it is quite possible that as females are fully integrated in combat roles, gender differences may disappear altogether.

8. RECOMMENDATION:

The inclusion of women in key ground combat roles will result in a substantial increase in female representation in the Army and, if well executed, distribute this representation evenly across combat and non-combat specialties. Moreover, this should lead to more females in strategic level leadership positions, though this outcome will almost certainly be lagged based on the time needed for junior level female officers in combat specialties to progress in rank and responsibility. These changes could reasonably be expected to enhance positive perceptions of the Army and relationship quality with the Army among its female members. Full inclusion of women may also have positive impacts on the (gendered) social construction of what it means to be a soldier through removing institutional barriers that foster hegemonic masculinity as the ideal type for military identities and military practice.

Our initial analysis indicated that being female moderates the positive effects of self-enhancement goals on social satisfaction and altruism goals on perceptions of organizational distinctiveness. In both cases, we observe a less positive effect for females than for males. Interestingly, this is not observed when female soldiers are compared to men in the non-combat specialties. In other words, women serving in non-combat specialties do not differ statistically from men who are also serving in such specialties. Given that these differences disappear when comparing females to males serving in similar positions, it raises the possibility that the difference between males in combat specialties and females may not be a product of gender, but rather one of organizational structure and/or socialization into role expectations within the organization. I also believe that it is time to abandon approaches based on differences between male and female soldiers. Instead, we should concentrate on taking fuller advantage of every team member and their individual qualities to meet the specific requirements of each mission.

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