SEXUAL SAFETY OF WOMEN IN THE MILITARY RESERVE: PERCEPTIONS OF THREATS AND SUPPORT

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PROBLEM OF STUDY

• Sexual assault within military ranks
• Sexual assault/ harassment threatens mission readiness
  – Disproportionate reporting to number of occurrences
• Barriers to reporting
• Lack of qualitative research
PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

• Explore perceptions women in the military reserve have about threats to their sexual safety and the support they have should they choose to report a sexual assault.
RATIONALE FOR THE STUDY

• Women have been serving in the military since the Revolutionary War
• Majority of the research on sexual assault assault/harassment is with veterans
• Military women less likely to seek treatment at VA facilities
• Physical and psychological effects of violence
RESEARCH QUESTIONS

• What are the perceptions military reserve women have about threats to their sexual safety?
• What perceptions do military reserve women have about the support they have should they choose to report a sexual assault?
AMPLE

• Purposive sample of 16 military women
• Female, 18 years or older
• Member of an army reserve unit
• Participants had experiences with a variety of units, medical, band, transportation, nursing school
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age in years</th>
<th>% (n)</th>
<th>Race</th>
<th>% (n)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>20 to 30</td>
<td>19%   (3)</td>
<td>White non-Hispanic</td>
<td>69%   (11)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31 to 40</td>
<td>44%   (7)</td>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>13%   (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>41 to 50</td>
<td>31%   (5)</td>
<td>African American</td>
<td>19%   (3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>51 to 60</td>
<td>06%   (1)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>% (n)</th>
<th>Years of service</th>
<th>% (n)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>E-4 (Specialist)</td>
<td>19%   (3)</td>
<td>0 to 4</td>
<td>19%   (3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E-5 (Sergeant)</td>
<td>06%   (1)</td>
<td>5 to 10</td>
<td>44%   (7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E-6 (Staff Sergeant)</td>
<td>25%   (4)</td>
<td>11 to 15</td>
<td>19%   (3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E-7 (Sergeant First Class)</td>
<td>13%   (2)</td>
<td>16 to 20</td>
<td>19%   (3)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>% (n)</th>
<th>Deployment</th>
<th>% (n)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0-2 Second Lieutenant</td>
<td>06%   (1)</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>50%   (8)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0-3 Captain</td>
<td>25%   (4)</td>
<td>Iraq</td>
<td>44%   (7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0-4 Major</td>
<td>06%   (1)</td>
<td>Afghanistan</td>
<td>06%   (1)</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
PROTECTION OF HUMAN SUBJECTS

• Commanders letter of approval
• Formal approval from IRB
• Risks are identified
  – Emotional distress
  – Loss of confidentiality
  – Possible fatigue
• Consent
DATA COLLECTION

- Flyers were placed in the unit
- Potential participants called or emailed researcher and expressed interest in participating
- Interviews are scheduled
- Consent
- Interviews conducted
  - Audio recording
- Monetary gift
- Follow up phone call
- Certified medical transcriptionist
DATA ANALYSIS

• Colazzi’s method of data analysis 7 steps
  – All interviews were read repeatedly
  – Significant statements and phrases after the interviews were studied and extracted
  – Meanings were then formulated from the significant statements
  – Organize the formulated meanings into themes or clusters
  – Integrate results into a thick description that covers the lived experience of the phenomena that is being studied
  – Exhaustive description of the phenomena was formulated
  – Final validation of the findings by clinical experts
TRUSTWORTHINESS

• Lincoln and Guba (1985)
  – Credibility
  – Dependability
  – Transferability
  – Confirmability

• Husserl’s Bracketing
FINDINGS
Military environments differ from civilian environments, resulting in military women experiencing a greater sense of risk to their sexual safety and finding it more difficult to get support when they are assault or harassed

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1. Women in the military are vulnerable</th>
<th>2. Men may not follow civilian rules of behavior</th>
<th>3. Military handles complaints of harassment and sexual assault differently than the civilian work environment</th>
<th>4. Leaders at all levels may be barriers to women experiencing support</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| a. Females feel isolated and alone while in a combat zone  
b. Women are sensitive beings and want to fit into the larger group, sometimes at the expense of protecting themselves  
c. Maturity level of young females entering the military makes them targets for unwanted advances | a. Military men do not want women in ‘their’ warrior culture  
b. Male intimidation of females | a. While there are threats in both environments, women in the civilian work environment have more options available to them then military women | a. Current system of reporting does not create an atmosphere of trust  
b. Women in the military have mixed feelings regarding the ability of the military to make personal safety a priority |
CONCLUSIONS

• Different types of environments such as training environments, deployed settings, and situations where military women are isolated or outnumbered by males are threats to sexual safety.

• Some males in the military make it evident that women do not belong in their military

• Military women have fewer options available to them as victims compared to their civilian counterparts

• When reporting assault or harassment, women find the system cumbersome and some leaders are barriers to support which makes women feel that their safety is not a priority.
RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER STUDY

• Themes identified in this study should be applied in a quantitative descriptive study to determine if themes are the same as those perceptions of other members of the military of other services.

• Qualitative research on perceptions of threats in male military members to determine if any similarities exist.

• A comparative research design examining perceptions of other female soldiers active duty and reserve to determine generalizability to all of the Army. This study can also determine any significance with different units and threats they perceive.
LIMITATIONS

• In qualitative research it is the interpretations of the meanings of the statements of participants
• Bias of the researcher
• Participants may have felt they had to participate due to knowledge of the rank of the researcher
• Participants may not have remembered their experiences correctly
• Because participants were members of a medical unit, the results may not be generalizable to other military units
IMPLICATIONS

• Education needs to be part of every soldier's basic training or officer basic training.

• Training sessions on sexual assault and harassment should be separate for male and female rather than co-ed in order to allow the participants some privacy when asking questions.

• Training for males should include that females are to be respected and not seen as a threat.
IMPLICATIONS

• The DoD report that is published annually needs to be published in a timely manner. As it currently stands the report when it is published in already a year behind. Information must get disseminated down to the lowest level

• SAPRO must continue its work and support research for all victims, male and female making the current reporting system less threatening and give victims more options