



# Barbie turned G.I. Joe

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One of the main issues that take the central place in the contemporary debates over the national security refers to the women's participation in the military service and conflicts. It creates tension in the society which can hardly decide whether women should have equal rights with men in the military service, or whether it is better to prohibit the entrance of women in men-dominated military area for the sake of their safety and protection. On the one hand, females should enjoy equal rights with males regarding an opportunity to protect the borders of the Motherland and serve in any combat group according to their preferences. On the other hand, male-dominated sphere of activity can hardly accept women with their sensitivity and vulnerability that prevent women from handling stress and violence penetrating the front line during military conflicts. In particular, the women's role in the military service remains doubtful due to the natural predisposition to giving birth and breastfeeding, which makes them more vulnerable than men who have better physiological indicators. Nevertheless, the history offers a myriad of examples when women courageously fought for the national freedom along with men in a secret way, which became crucial to the success of the military conflict. The supporting point for such bravery is that there are exceptional women who are not inferior in terms of skills, character traits, physical characteristics, and readiness to serve in tough conditions together with men. However, the negative influence on the female health conditions plays a determining role in opposing to the idea of creating equal opportunities for men and women to enter military service along with

passing through the same training. The history does not forget the courageous behavior of women during the times when their country needed them to protect national security and recognizes female secret participation as a legendary respectable decision. Women's participation in the military activity is one of the most alarming questions aimed at finding an appropriate solution to the evaluation of the historical facts, public opinion, and physiological and psychological predisposition of women to participate in battles under the same conditions as men.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

The mission of women has always been to bring a new life to the world as well as to take care of family, its welfare, and supportive family relations. In spite of this, military service has shifted the common boundaries concerning women's role and function in the world. The cases of female military service became more frequent across the world and the USA in particular. It raised multiple doubts in the society and military sphere, where a consensus on the topic whether women should have equal opportunities to enter the Army cannot be reached. It is worth considering historical aspects and public opinion regarding women's need to join armed forces along with health risks and injuries associated with the military services in order to understand the significance of allowing women to participate in combat services.

## **Historical Facts on Women's Role in Combat Units**

America is not the only country in the world that considers the roles of women in the Army and argues on the topic whether women should be engaged in the military service. The history holds many examples of female participation in the military conflicts from many countries. Russia is a legendary country that became well-known for its ability to protect its borders. Regardless of the patriarchal influence on the development of the nation, the history of the country has many legends of female participation in the World War II. As soon as Bolshevik movement came into force, women gained more freedom and equality in their rights, which encouraged them to fight for national security and freedom together with their husbands, brothers, and grandfathers (Alfonso, 2008). After Hitler attacks, the country was not aware that many women had secretly participated in the war by formulating so called “veterans regiments” (Alfonso, 2008). Islamic women also participate in protecting customs, traditions, and cultural traditions of their ethnicity from the Western world. In the U.S., despite the prohibition to include women in the front-line serving role, many women courageously fought together with men in Iraq and Afghanistan. The inability of American community to decide whether women should serve in the Army or not continues to dominate in the topics of political debates. There are many opinions regarding women’s participation in the military conflict according to the U.S. society.

## Public Opinion on Female Military Service

The public opinion on the women’s role in the military conflict did not change over the previous decade. At the beginning of 2001 and at the end of 2010, the 77% of respondents of CNN/USA Today/Gallup supported

women in combat aircraft (McNulty, 2012). In addition, over a half of respondents also agreed that women could be involved in operations of Special Forces, submarine service, and ground troops. USAFA and West Point cadets also believe that women should engage in the military conflict together with men. However, the suggestions of McNulty (2012) focus on providing women with a right to participate in the military conflict rather than making it an obligation. Women should be allowed to make their own choices and join the Army according to their intentions, willingness, and desire to dedicate their life to the security of the nation. Any military activity has a significant impact on women, which means that women are susceptible to stress and violence in any manifestation regardless of their strong will.

## Health Risk Factors

The Defense Women's Health Research Program (DWHRP) paper created by the Department of Defense and the Department of Veteran Affairs is centered on the health issues faced by women involved in the military service. The paper addresses the questions of the influence of the military service on the reproductive system, substance abuse, and mental health as well as the impact of the environment on women's health (Tepe et al., 2016). The research became the key explanation of the threatening military environment, which makes it difficult for women to accomplish the same tasks as men. In particular, women risk to develop illnesses related to gynecological, genitourinary, and reproductive systems, which may prevent females from fulfilling their main life role – being a mother (Perlin et al., 2005). In spite of all these facts, many women successfully served without highly damaging injuries and continued their lives without



health impairments. In fact, they have all chances to gain the same strength as men have, which allows to assume that women are free to make their life choice in favor of the military service without fear to harm their major calling.

## **Physiological and Psychological Aspects of Female Military Service**

Notwithstanding the claims supporting female participation in the military conflicts and service in general, there are physiological peculiarities of women that make their beneficial participation doubtful. According to Simons (2000), women lack stamina, strength, and speed that men already have as their natural characteristics helping them to survive. Nevertheless, there are exceptional women who can perform with the same intensity as men without the need to receive extra comfortable conditions (Brownson, 2014). Brownson (2014) claimed that it is worth engaging women in the military service by creating an equivalent of training, where natural characteristic features of women will be carefully considered. Not only will it increase their professionalism but also help develop skills, which will make them more or less equal to the male warriors. In addition, women will be ready to face challenges and difficulties together with their male counterparts due to the training sessions devoted to building their physical strength. However, a multiple number of the previously analyzed studies still indicate that female natural predisposition to pregnancy, breast-feeding, and menstrual periods make women automatically weaker than men. As stated by Simons (2000), the only way to make military service equal for men and women is to establish training standards equal for both genders in order



to reduce the risk of weak protection of the national borders.

## **Injuries Faced by Women in the Military Service**

The study dedicated to combat-related injuries in Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF) and Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) examined 835 women in the period from January 2003 to May 2014 (Dye et al., 2016). Head and back injuries became the most common consequences of the military service experienced by female warriors. Due to the continuous explosions, the study also revealed a significant amount of injuries of external character. According to Dye et al (2016), approximately 65% of women faced suffered from more than one injury, which indicates a highly dangerous environment in the front-line military service. In addition, the research showed that females usually suffer from multisensory impairments, including vestibular, visual, and auditory ones.

## **| CONCLUSION**

Women's health risks and military-associated injuries are the subject of the literature review that emphasizes the threatening influence of military conflicts on female part of the society. It is a matter of dignity and courage for women to be willing to fight the external threats faced by the nation together with men. While some researchers support the need to involve women, others strongly recommend preventing women from participating in armed conflicts. In general, the question regarding women's role and function in the military sphere will remain open for

discussion for the next years due to the rising issues in the political sphere and transformation of human rights.

