

THE JOINT ECONOMIC COMMITTEE

**Senator Charles E. Schumer, Chairman
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**HELPING MILITARY
MOMS BALANCE FAMILY
AND LONGER
DEPLOYMENTS**

MAY 11, 2007

Introduction

This Mother's Day marks the fourth year of the U.S. military's presence in Iraq and the sixth year of the U.S. military presence in Afghanistan. Women make up a significant percentage of the current active duty force, representing one in seven U.S. military personnel in Iraq.¹ Mothers in the military, those in the active duty force and the spouses of male service members, make up a substantial portion of women in the military.

Like mothers in the civilian world, mothers in the military face challenges in balancing work with family, such as meeting monthly expenses, finding and accessing high quality child care, and accessing quality health care services for their families and themselves. Yet, military moms often face the added burden of lengthy and more frequent deployments and separation from their children and spouses. While the military has taken steps to address the needs of mothers within its ranks, the added strain on the military caused by the long mission in Iraq is putting even more stress on military mothers.

Key challenges facing military mothers include the following:

- Child care services are not meeting current needs, or increased demands due to deployment;
- Short family leave periods after child birth and adoption impact the retention of mothers in the military; and
- Limited resources dedicated to mental health services to help military mothers and their children

Women in the Military: By the Numbers

Today, women are a substantial part of the active duty force. Women make up approximately 14.3 percent of the active duty military.² Approximately, 40 percent of women in the active duty force have children, compared to 44 percent of active duty men (See Figure 1, Page 3).³

Minority women have a high rate of representation in the military. Approximately 50 percent of women in the active duty force are white; nearly 30 percent are African-American; 6 percent are Hispanic; and nearly 5 percent are Asian and Pacific Islanders. The remaining women are distributed across other categories, including Native American, Multi-racial and Unknown (See Table 2, Page 4). In contrast, in the civilian sector approximately 13 percent of women are African American, 12 percent are Hispanic and 5 percent are Asian and Pacific Islanders.⁴

Nearly Half of All Women in Active Duty Force Have Been Deployed to Iraq or Afghanistan

Since 2001, nearly half of all women in the active duty force (including reservists) have been deployed to Iraq or Afghanistan. According to data from the Department of Defense in February 2007, 24,475 women are deployed to Iraq or Afghanistan.⁵ As of April 14, 2007, 85 women have lost their lives during U.S. military operations in Iraq and Afghanistan. In addition, 474 women have been wounded in Iraq since the beginning of 2007.⁶

Women Have Opportunities for Career Advancement in the Military

While there remain restrictions to women's participation in combat zones, the military has offered avenues for women's upward mobility and career advancement. For example, the ratio of women officers to enlisted women is approximately the same for women as for men. In 2006, the overall ratio of women officers to women enlisted is one woman officer for every 4.8 enlisted members, compared to one male officer for every 5.16 enlisted members.⁷ Long-term commitment and good service generally guarantee career advancement in the military.

Despite the opportunities for advancement, nearly half of women in the active duty force are in the lower pay grades, earning between \$14,436 and \$24,744 as their base salary, not including any additional bonuses or stipends they may receive.⁸ This is in contrast to 61 percent of men in the same earnings bracket.⁹

Table 1: Women in the U.S. Military and Deployment

U.S. Military and Deployment	Number	Percent of Total
Total Active Duty and Reserves	342,000 ¹	14.3% of the DoD Active Duty Force
Deployed to Iraq or Afghanistan Since 2001	165,683 ²	48.4% of all Women in the U.S. Military
Deployed to Iraq or Afghanistan (February 2007)	24,475 ²	7% of All Women in the U.S. Military

¹Joint Economic Committee estimate based on Department of Defense "Active Duty (without Reserve) Race and Pay," December 2006, Defense Data Manpower Center plus estimation of growth rate of the Reserve force between 2005 and 2006.

²Department of Defense, "Women Ever Deployed" and "Women Currently Deployed," Defense Manpower Data Center, February 2007.

Who are Our Military Mothers?

Thirty Eight Percent of Women in the Active Duty Force Are Mothers

Nearly 38 percent of women in the active duty force have children, compared to 44 percent of active duty men.¹⁰ Women are more likely than men to be single parents or to be married to another member of the military.¹¹ Approximately 11 percent of women in the military are single mothers compared to 4 percent of single fathers.¹² Women are five times more likely to be in dual military marriages, where both partners are eligible for deployment (10 percent versus 2 percent).¹³

A Majority of First-Time Military Parents are Young and Low-to-Moderate Income

Over half of the all active duty members were between the ages of 20 and 25 when they had their first child and the majority of these first time parents are lower to middle rank. This suggests the majority of first time parents are young and of low-to-moderate income.¹⁴ For all military parents, the largest category of minor dependents of active duty members are newborn to five years of age (39.8 percent), followed by children 6 to 11 years of age. Almost one quarter (24.4 percent) of minor dependents are 12 to 18 years of age.¹⁵

Military spouses and their children make up a significant percentage of the larger military community and 93 percent of military spouses are women. According to 2005 data, there are 1.34 spouses or dependents for every military service member, similar to previous years.¹⁶

Figure 1: Marital and Child Status of Active Duty Men and Women

Figure 1.2 Marital and Child Status of Active Duty Men

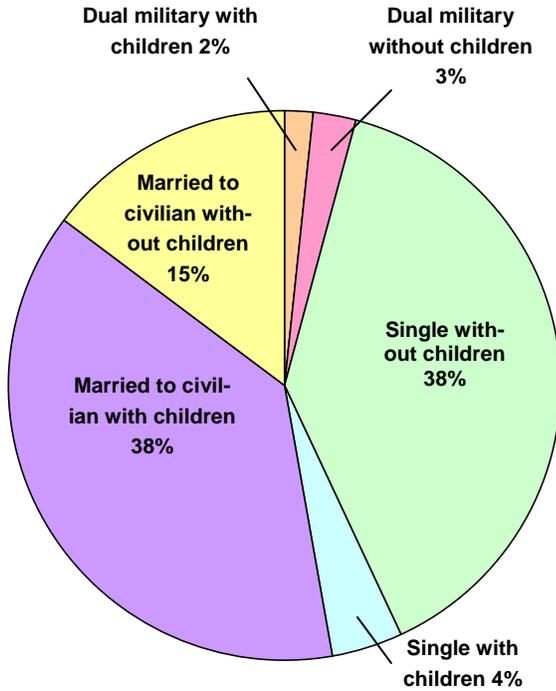
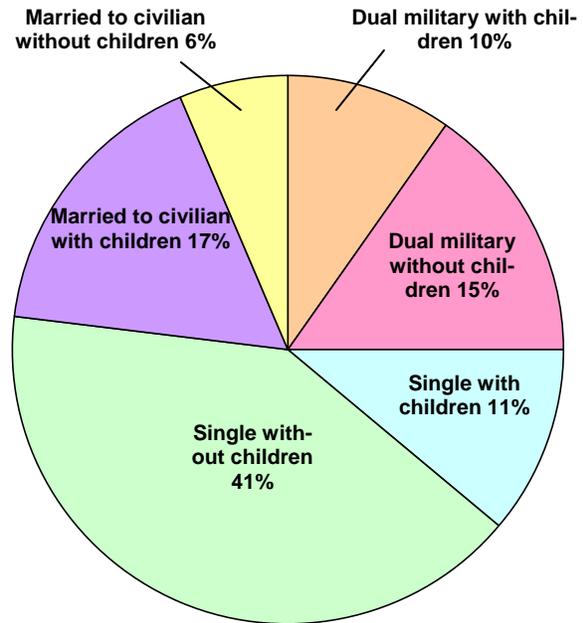


Figure 1.1 Marital and Child Status of Active Duty Women



Source: Department of Defense, "Marital and Child Status of Active Duty Women," Defense Manpower Data Center, December 2006 and Department of Defense, "Profile of the Military: 2005 Demographic Report."

Percentages for married men and women with and without children for 2006 were determined by measuring the rate of change for those categories from 2001 to 2005 and assuming this rate of change for 2006.

Longer Deployments and Rising Redeployments Present Unique Challenges for Military Mothers

During the war in Iraq, average deployment tenures have increased from 12 to 15 months, with an increased likelihood that a military member will be deployed on multiple tours. Longer and more dangerous deployment periods raise unique challenges for mothers in the military. Women in the military are more likely to be a single parent or married to another member of the military and thus face the possibility of dual deployment. Issues such as child care access, adequacy of medical leave and access to appropriate health care services are often heightened in importance during periods of deployment and when faced with the uncertainty of being redeployed.

Child Care Services Not Keeping Up With Increased Demands

Child care access and costs are an additional concern during deployment. Since the U.S. military's presence in Iraq, hundreds of thousands of children have seen one or both parents leave for deployment. According to the Department of Defense, in September 2006, approximately 230,000 children had a parent in Iraq, Afghanistan or the Horn of Africa.¹⁷

Although the military has created an impressive infrastructure for high quality child care, deployment and frequent moves raise child care concerns. In 1992, the military standardized child care provision during deployment requiring single parents and dual-military couples with children to develop short and long term plans concerning the care of their dependents in the event of deployment.¹⁸ For single parent families, securing long-term care can be a challenge though on-base referral services help families come up with a plan.

In recent years, the military has taken significant steps to improve military families' access to quality child care services. The military has dramatically increased the number of available child care centers and spots available for children. Furthermore all center-based military child care centers have received some form of accreditation, a sharp contrast to the civilian sector where approximately 0.8% of family child care homes and 9.5% of day care centers are accredited.¹⁹ Similarly, few states have mandatory accreditation for child care centers and training for child care workers comparable to military standards.²⁰

The military has also established sliding-scale fees to help families afford this essential service. For example, in school year 2004-2005, families who made less than \$28,000 a year paid a maximum of \$59 a week for full time care in high-cost areas and paid as little as \$42 a week in lower-cost areas.²¹ Whereas lower-income civilian

Table 2: Pay Grade Distribution by Race for Active Duty Women

Grade	Rank Title In Army	Range of Base Salary In Pay Range	All Women	White (Non-Hispanic)	Hispanic (White)	Black	Asian / Pacific Islander	Other Groups ¹
E-0 — E-4	Private - Corporal	\$14,436 to \$24,744	88,850	45,999	7,938	22,636	4,425	7,852
E-5 — E6	Sergeant - Staff Sergeant	\$22,248 to \$36,768	60,718	25,604	3,040	22,211	2,521	7,342
E-7 — E-9	Sergeant 1st Class - Sergeant Major	\$28,069 to \$66,154	13,311	5,529	299	5,987	325	1,171
W-1 — W-5	Warrant Officer - Chief Warrant Officer	\$28,958 to \$77,400	1,276	505	23	537	32	179
O-1 — O-3	2nd Lieutenant - Captain	\$29,628 to \$64,271	21,698	13,926	498	3,471	1,112	2,691
O-4 — O-6	Major - Colonel	\$44,935 to \$108,428	10,725	7,636	236	1,773	405	675
O-7 — O-10	Brigadier General - General	\$84,287 to \$168,000	47	43	0	2	1	1
Total		-	196,625	99,242	12,034	56,617	8,821	19,911

¹ Sum of Alaskan Native/American Indian, Multi-Race, and Unknown.

Source: Department of Defense, "Racial and Pay Grade Distribution of Women in the Active Duty U.S. Military," December 2006.

families can spend as much as 25 percent of their income on child care, and even more if a family has infants, the military's sliding scale structure allows families to spend far less than their civilian counterparts.²²

Despite the substantial progress in expanding child care access and lowering cost, a substantial unmet need still exists. The Department of Defense has reported that even with new centers being constructed, due to the special issue of deployment, the military is approximately 35,000 spots short of expected need, and some military family advocates think this is a substantial underestimation.²³ At the same time, the number of new born babies and younger children in the military is expected to increase.²⁴

Unmet child care needs impacts military readiness. In a 2006 survey by the RAND Corporation, 9 percent of military families reported having unmet child care needs, while these families were more likely to have children between the ages of zero and five. These same families reported they were "much more likely" to leave the military.²⁵ In the same survey, researchers found that child care issues affect women at a higher rate than men. Thirty-seven percent of military mothers reported missing work due to a child care issue, compared to 7 percent of men.²⁶

Short Family Leave Periods After Child Birth And Adoption Impact The Retention of Military Mothers

Women in the military have a much higher attrition rate than men, and evidence indicates this rate is linked to women's child care and family responsibilities.²⁷ For example, a 2002 Government Accountability Office (GAO) study found that more than one-third of attrition for female enlistees in 1993 was triggered by pregnancy and child care concerns and approximately 10 percent of all active duty women become pregnant every year.²⁸

While the military currently provides some accommodations for women who give birth or adopt a child, these policies could be improved. New mothers may take six weeks of paid convalescent leave after the birth of a child. Both new mothers and new fathers may also use annual leave. New mothers on deployment receive a 4-to-6 month deferment from deployment duty away from the home station for the period immediately following the birth of child. Facilitating temporary separation from active duty to allow service members to address personal and family needs could help to increase retention.

The Limited Resources Dedicated To Mental Health Services to Help Military Mothers and Children Can Negatively Impact Family Life

A Department of Defense study released this month found that lengthier deployment periods in Iraq is adversely affecting service members' mental health.²⁹ Soldiers reported that the level of combat, deployment length and family separation affected their mental health and that they are often unable to access treatment once they return. Additional data indicate that female active duty service members with children have different health care demands than two-parent families and single male parents.

Lessons from Operation Desert Storm indicate that mothers and their children have readjustment needs after deployment. A study from the University of Texas Health Science Center at Houston reports that after Operation Desert Storm and Operation Desert Shield, women with children reported a higher rate of emotional health problems after deployment (64 percent) than women without children (39 percent), including anxiety and difficulty readjusting after deployment.³⁰ Women with children, more than single women and their male counterparts, reported a substantial decline in health and well-being after deployment. These mothers reported difficulty in accessing appropriate services, affecting their relationship with their children and emotional health. Children also reported an increase in emotional stress during their parents' absence.

In the current conflict, women report a high level of emotional trauma and report difficulty adjusting back to family life after deployment.³¹ In addition, women report limited access to specific services, including women's

health care services and post-deployment readjustment and counseling services suited to their deployment experience. Many women with children report the transition is particularly difficult for their children. Enhancing mental health services for these families will benefit military mothers and their children.

Conclusion

Longer deployments in Iraq and the unexpected frequency of multiple tours have put new strains on mothers in the military that policymakers should address. While the military has made important strides in taking into account the special needs of mothers in the military, policymakers should consider measures to expand child care services to meet current and future unexpected needs caused by deployments, extend family leave periods after child birth and adoption to help women balance raising a family and maintaining a military career, and dedicating more resources to mental health services to help military moms and their children cope with the difficult periods before, during and after deployment.

ENDNOTES

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