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DACOWITS 2023

Focus Group Protocol C: Pregnancy and Gender Discrimination

Session Information

Location:

Date:

Time:

Facilitator:

Recorder:

Number of participants present:

Focus Group Kickoff: Key Points to Cover

1. Welcome attendees.

- ▶ I am **[INSERT FIRST NAME]**, and I am a member of the Defense Advisory Committee on Women in the Services, known as DACOWITS, and this is **[INTRODUCE PARTNER'S FIRST NAME]**, also a member of DACOWITS.
- ▶ We have **[INSERT FIRST NAME(S)]** here with us from the DACOWITS staff.
- ▶ Our research contractor, **[INSERT FIRST NAME]**, is with a research organization hired to transcribe these sessions, and they are part of the DACOWITS research team.

2. Introduce DACOWITS and its purpose.

- ▶ Again, DACOWITS stands for the Defense Advisory Committee on Women in the Services. DACOWITS was established in 1951 and is one of the oldest Department of Defense Federal Advisory Committees. The Committee is composed of women and men, some of whom have prior military service. We have been appointed by the Secretary of Defense to provide advice and recommendations on matters and policies related to the recruitment, retention, employment, integration, well-being, and treatment of servicewomen in the Armed Forces.

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- ▶ Every year, DACOWITS studies specific topics and prepares a report for the Secretary of Defense. Since 1951, the Committee has submitted more than 1,000 recommendations to the Secretary of Defense for consideration. As of 2022, approximately 97 percent have been either fully or partially adopted by the Department.

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- ▶ Each year, DACOWITS visits several military installations and talks to hundreds of Service members like you about their experiences in the military. Today, we will talk about pregnancy in the military and gender discrimination. We are meeting with groups of women and men, both officer and enlisted personnel. We would like to spend this time discussing these topics, but we will also set aside time at the end to discuss any other topics that you'd like to talk about related to women serving in the military.

3. Describe how the focus group session will work.

- ▶ A focus group is a guided, carefully planned discussion. As facilitators, we have a set of scripted questions that we'd like to cover today, but we encourage open conversation.
- ▶ The session will last approximately 90 minutes, and we will not take a formal break. Restrooms are located **[INSERT RESTROOM LOCATION]**. Please don't hesitate to step out at any time for whatever reason.
- ▶ Your opinions and attitudes are important to us. Although we would like to hear from everyone, feel free to answer as many or as few questions as you prefer.
- ▶ Our job today is to listen and collect information about your experiences and perceptions. Our job is not to provide information. That means we will not correct any inaccuracies or misperceptions that may be shared by an individual or the group, so you should not assume everything you hear today from other participants is accurate.

4. Explain the ground rules.

- ▶ Please speak clearly and one at a time to make sure our research contractor can capture the discussion. Please do not engage in side bar conversations during the focus group.
- ▶ Try to avoid the use of acronyms. If we notice that you are using acronyms, we may ask you to stop and explain the acronym.
- ▶ We want to hear your opinions. There may be times in the discussion when you feel differently from other people and we want to hear about that. Even though you may feel differently than people in this room, you represent others who aren't here today who may have similar feelings. Please be respectful of others' opinions that are shared today.
- ▶ We have a lot of questions to cover, so we may need to interrupt you to keep the conversation moving. Please don't take it personally; it's simply to ensure we cover all our questions today.
- ▶ Our team will make sure we're sticking to the schedule and will alert us if we need to move on to the next question.

5. Emphasize that participation is voluntary and that privacy and confidentiality will be maintained.

- ▶ Your participation in this session is completely voluntary. If you would prefer to excuse

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yourself from the focus group at any time, you are free to do so.

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- ▶ We treat the information you share as confidential. We do not record your names, and no information will be reported in our findings that can identify you. All members of the DACOWITS team have signed agreements pledging to safeguard the confidentiality of the information we gather during these sessions.
- ▶ Our notes and what we discuss today will not be shared with anyone in your chain of command or at this installation.
- ▶ It is important that each of you agree to respect and protect each other's privacy. We expect you to keep any information you hear today in the strictest of confidence. We also expect you not to share the identities of other participants with anyone outside this group.
- ▶ We are required to report some behaviors. If we learn that you are being hurt or plan on hurting yourself or others, or others are being hurt or plan on hurting themselves or others, the law requires that we share this information with someone who can help and with the appropriate authority.
- ▶ If you have questions following the focus group, we encourage you to speak with your installation's Equal Opportunity Advisor or your Command Managed Equal Opportunity Coordinator, or command representatives.
- ▶ In front of you are a few short forms.
 - The first is a participant rights form for you to read. You do not need to sign this form. If you stay for the group discussion, your participation will indicate your consent. If you do not agree to the terms in the form, you will not be able to participate in the group today.
 - The second is a short mini-survey for you to complete anonymously. Please do not write your name on the form. This mini-survey enables us to compile demographic data on the participants we speak with during our site visits. Because the mini-survey is anonymous, we will not be able to link any responses you make during the discussion today with your responses to the mini-survey. Please be sure to fill out the front and the back of the form.
- ▶ Once we have completed the focus groups for this year's selected installations, our team will compile the results into a report that we will use to write our annual report to the Secretary of Defense [**SHOW COPY OF 2020 REPORT**]. Copies of our annual reports are available online at dacowits.defense.gov. At the conclusion of our focus group, you will receive a DACOWITS brochure containing information about the Committee.

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Question Number	Topic	Notes
Warmup/Introductions		
<p>Before we get started with our discussion about reproductive health, pregnancy, and gender discrimination, let's do some introductions.</p>		
1	<p>(MODERATOR: Ensure each person answers all three questions before moving on to next person.)</p> <p>Let's go around the room and have each of you tell us—</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ How many years you've served in the military ■ Your job in the military ■ How long you've been with your current unit 	
Pregnancy in the Military		
<p>Let's begin by talking about pregnancy. The Committee is interested in learning more about pregnancy and postpartum experiences for women in the military, especially issues related to career progression.</p>		
<p>[FOR FEMALE GROUPS:] We realize that you may not have personal experience with this topic, but we want to hear from many different perspectives.</p>		
<p>[FOR MALE GROUPS:] We realize you do not have personal experience with being pregnant, but we want to hear from many different perspectives. Ultimately, these issues are relevant to both female and male Service members.</p>		
2	<p>[FOR FEMALE GROUPS:] By a show of hands, how many of you have been pregnant during your military service or have known someone who has become pregnant during their military service? [NOTE TAKERS: COUNT THE NUMBER OF HANDS ALOUD.]</p> <p>[FOR MALE GROUPS:] By a show of hands, how many of you know someone who has become pregnant during their military service? [NOTE TAKERS: COUNT THE NUMBER OF HANDS ALOUD.]</p>	
3	<p>In your opinion, what are the biggest challenges faced by pregnant servicewomen?</p> <p>[PROBE IF NEEDED:] For example, obtaining maternity uniforms, reassignment, discrimination, stigma of pregnancy, physical fitness requirements, maintaining qualifications, or caregiver leave?</p>	

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4	<p>Are pregnant servicewomen treated differently from other servicewomen who are not pregnant? If so, please describe.</p> <p>[IF YES:] Are pregnant servicewomen treated differently even if their ability to perform their normal job duties is not affected by their pregnancy?</p>	
5	<p>Thinking back to a time when a servicewoman in your unit became pregnant, how did that affect your unit?</p> <p>[If no one has experience in a unit in which a woman was pregnant:] How might a servicewoman becoming pregnant affect the unit, if at all?</p>	
6	<p>How, if at all, does pregnancy affect a servicewoman's career?</p> <p>[PROBE IF NEEDED:] How does pregnancy affect the retention and career progression of servicewomen?</p>	
7	<p>For someone in your career field, are there points in time when becoming pregnant is more advantageous or detrimental to a service member's career?</p> <p>[PROBE IF NEEDED:] For example, is it more impactful (positively or negatively) to become pregnant during a certain time in training or at a particular rank?</p>	
8	<p>Next, we want to talk about how, if at all, Service regulations, policies, or practices impact servicewomen's careers if they become pregnant.</p> <p>Are you aware of any regulations, policies, or practices that may support a servicewomen's career progression if she becomes pregnant?</p>	
9	<p>How, if at all, could your Service better support servicewomen who become pregnant?</p>	
10	<p>In 2023, the Department of Defense expanded its parental leave policy. What do you think about this change and your Service's implementation of the policy?</p>	

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11	<p>The Department of Defense recently changed its definition of prohibited discrimination to include pregnancy.</p> <p>By a show of hands, how many of you were aware of this policy change? [NOTE TAKERS: COUNT THE NUMBER OF HANDS ALOUD.]</p>	
<p>Gender Discrimination</p>		
<p>Next let's talk about gender discrimination. We're interested in understanding your perspectives on gender discrimination and its impact on unit cohesion, the workplace environment, and retention of military personnel in your Service. For the purposes of today's discussion, gender discrimination is defined as acting in a way that is biased toward a particular gender. Both women and men can experience gender discrimination. Discriminatory behavior can include overt behaviors, such as excluding someone from a leadership position or important meeting because of their gender, or covert behaviors like acting on stereotypes by only asking women to plan social activities or men to do a task requiring physical labor.</p>		
13	<p>Considering the definition we just mentioned, do you consider gender discrimination to be an issue within your Service? Why or why not?</p>	
14	<p>Are there behaviors you have observed during your time in the military that you would consider to be gender discrimination? If so, please describe.</p> <p>[IF NO, or if the group is hesitant:] Can you think of any behaviors that would be discriminatory?</p>	
15	<p>How can gender discrimination or discriminatory behaviors impact the climate of a unit?</p> <p>[PROBE IF NEEDED:] What impact does gender discrimination have on individuals experiencing discrimination? What impact does gender discrimination have on other members of the unit? Does it impact unit cohesion, readiness, or performance?</p>	
16	<p>In your opinion, is gender discrimination more or less likely to occur in certain occupational specialties? If so, please describe.</p>	
17	<p>How, if at all, does gender discrimination affect the career progression of women in your Service?</p>	
18	<p>How comfortable do you feel bringing up, or discussing issues of gender discrimination with leadership?</p>	

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19	How confident are you that issues of gender discrimination will be addressed by leaders?	
20	What recommendations do you have, if any, for ways your Service can prevent or address gender discrimination?	

General Questions

We’re also interested in hearing about other issues we haven’t yet discussed that may affect women in the military. Please note, we may use your ideas as future topics of DACOWITS research.

21	What do you feel is the biggest challenge to women serving in the military today?	
22	If you could send one recommendation back to the Secretary of Defense, what would it be?	
23	Is there anything else you’d like to share or discuss related to servicewomen that we haven’t talked about today?	

(MODERATOR: Reinforce confidentiality) This concludes our discussion. Thank you for taking the time to share your knowledge with us. Your thoughts are valuable to our efforts to inform the Secretary of Defense on these matters. We will keep your information confidential— please do so as well by not sharing what you heard with anyone else. As a reminder, you should not assume everything you heard today from other participants or the group is accurate, and we ask you to defer to your Services’ current regulations and policies for the most accurate and up-to-date information. Once again, thank you very much for participating.

