

**How the COVID-19 crisis affecting military women and the corresponding effects on
National Security**



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14. ABSTRACT COVID-19 has exposed the dramatic effect childcare access has on National Security. Women serving in the American Armed forces have become an integral part of U.S. National Security. As the pool of available military recruits shrinks, American women must be recruited and retained in military service. However, the COVID-19 pandemic is reshaping the American security landscape, primarily because of the societal pressures placed on women, which are also reflected in the Department of Defense's policies.					
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Background: Why women matter to the U.S. military

Women serving in the American Armed forces have become an integral part of U.S. National Security. American women operate and deploy on submarines, aircraft, infantry, and tanks. Today, women represent twenty percent of the Armed Forces.^{1,2,3} These numbers become even more important when considering the current status of Americans eligible to serve in the Armed Forces today. More than seventy percent of high school graduates are considered ineligible for military service due to conditions like obesity, drug use, or education level.⁴ For officer recruitment, more than half of college graduates are women.⁵ As the pool of available military recruits shrinks, American women must be recruited and retained in military service. Women directly contribute to national security by working in the Department of Defense, government think tanks, or the military itself. However, the COVID-19 pandemic is reshaping the American security landscape, primarily because of the societal pressures placed on women, which are also reflected in the Department of Defense's policies.

¹ Defense Manpower Data Center, Report, "Table of Active Duty Females by Rank/Grade and Service," November 2020, https://www.dmdc.osd.mil/appj/dwp/dwp_reports.jsp#.

² Amanda Barroso, "The changing profile of the U.S. Military: Smaller in size, more diverse, more women in leadership," Pew Research Center, 10 September 2019.

³ Defense Manpower Data Center, Report, "Table of Active Duty Females."

⁴ Kim Strong, "71% of young people are ineligible for the military," York Daily Record, www.USAToday.com, 14 May, 2019.

⁵ For the 2018-2019 graduation year, the most recent year statistics were available, women made up 57 percent of undergraduate degrees and 54 percent of doctoral degrees. National Center for Education Statistics. Table 318.30: Bachelor's, master's, and doctor's degrees conferred by postsecondary institutions, by sex of student and discipline division: 2017-18. National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) Home Page, a part of the U.S. Department of Education, <https://nces.ed.gov>, Accessed 11 January 2020.

Childcare is directly linked to America's Strategic Foundation

America is at a strategic disadvantage if it cannot fully utilize all of its citizens. COVID-19 is overwhelmingly impacting women more than men. Women already earn less than their male counterparts, and are responsible for more household chores, including childcare. The COVID-19 pandemic is exacerbating these discrepancies. An analysis of the effects of COVID-19 on childcare, and childcare's follow-on impacts to women's employment, particularly at the intersection of female service members and their families, reveals lasting risk to America's strategic foundation.

Pandemic and Childcare

Lack of childcare is a serious issue for working parents and the economy. Parents unable to find or afford care for their children cannot fully return to the workforce and participate in building the economy. For the U.S. economy to rebound, businesses need access to a steady, reliable workforce. The workforce needs access to reliable childcare. American policies need to recognize this interdependency and prioritize funding and access to quality childcare for American families. A strong economy is a pillar of America's national security. The economy cannot rebound and continue to maintain strength without access to childcare.

Women with children in the workplace

The COVID-19 pandemic's reduction in childcare availability and affordability has affected American women proportionally greater than men for two main reasons. First, women are the primary parent dropping out of the workplace to care for children when childcare is unavailable. Secondly, women are losing jobs at a rate greater than men due to the pandemic.

These two factors combine to create a crisis for women's security specifically, and America generally. The American economy needs the involvement of all available workers to maintain its strength. If a significant proportion of the workforce is unable to work, there will be lasting consequences in unrealized innovation, potential earning decreases, and overall production in the economy. Furthermore, a strong economy is the bedrock of American security.

In America, women disproportionately oversee childcare responsibilities, creating a vast disparity in American caregiving duties.^{6,7} Policies that promote childcare also promote women's security, and therefore national security. Studies show that stay at home orders affected working moms but had no immediate impact on men or women without children.⁸ America is undergoing a severe reversal in earning power and potential for a substantial portion of its workforce: mothers.⁹ Women forced out of the workplace due to a lack of available childcare will face lasting economic consequences. The nation will suffer a decrease in potential national productivity as these individuals leave the workforce.

In addition to women leaving the workforce to care for their children, the pandemic has resulted in more overall COVID-related job losses for women.¹⁰ Women generally earn less than their male counterparts, adding to overall financial insecurity. This loss of salary will create

⁶ According to the U.S. census, working mothers were eighty percent more likely to take leave from their jobs due to stay at home orders than working mothers in states where COVID closures had not yet taken effect. Misty L Heggeness and Jason M. Fields, "Working moms bear brunt of home schooling while working during COVID-19," US Census Bureau, 18 August, 2020, <https://www.census.gov/library/stories/2020/08/parents-juggle-work-and-child-care-during-pandemic.html>.

⁷ Thirty-two percent of women versus twelve percent of men say they are not working due to childcare demands. Heggeness, "Working Moms."

⁸ Heggeness, "Working Moms."

⁹ Amanda Taub, "Pandemic Will 'Take Our Women 10 Years Back' in the Workplace," New York Times, 26 September 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/09/26/world/covid-women-childcare-equality.html>: 39% decrease after one year break from work and 65% decrease with a break of 4 years or more.

¹⁰ While the pandemic has caused job losses across the board, women account for fifty-four percent of all COVID job losses, even though they make up only forty-three percent of the workforce. Taub, "Pandemic."

an additional barrier to reenter the workforce due to childcare's prohibitive costs.¹¹ It becomes a chicken and egg situation. Childcare is unaffordable without a job, and a job is unattainable without childcare. External aid is required to overcome this dilemma.

Sweden and Israel provide a comparison to American women's job losses. Sweden offers universal childcare, and kept childcare open during COVID restrictions. In Sweden, pandemic related job losses have been greater for men than for women.¹² Israel also offers close to universal early childcare. Pre-pandemic seventy-four percent of women participated in the workforce. The main difference between Sweden and Israel is that Israel shut down their childcare centers. With childcare shutdown, Israeli women lost jobs at a rate greater than men.¹³ Both countries had widely available childcare before the pandemic and higher participation of women in the economy. In America, childcare was expensive and scarce even before the pandemic. The pandemic has highlighted the importance of childcare in bringing women into and keeping them in the workplace.

COVID -19 provides an opportunity to correct the structural economic bias against women, but only if the problem is recognized.¹⁴ A strong economy is an essential element of national security. Women form half of our society, and their vital contributions to the economy must be recognized and supported.

Women, Childcare and the military

¹¹ Childcare costs average \$26,000 a year in the Northeast, \$20,000 a year elsewhere; ChildCare Aware of America, "Picking up the Pieces: Building a Better Child Care System Post COVID-19," 15.

¹² Taub, "Pandemic."

¹³ Taub, "Pandemic."

¹⁴ Christine Ro states: "The real danger at the moment is that people are starting to associate women with childcare more strongly than before." Ro, "Why this recession disproportionately affects women."

In addition to generally being detrimental to all American women, the pandemic has particularly hurt women serving in the military for three reasons: demographics, military jobs themselves, and military childcare availability.

In June 2019 the National Security Council (NSC) adopted the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) Act to ensure women continue to play essential leadership roles in national security. WPS also supports U.N. Security Council resolutions to promote the inclusion of women in national security affairs internationally, recognizing "who is seated at the table and the security perspectives and beliefs they share fundamentally shape national security."¹⁵ While the NSC acknowledges the critical requirement women play in national security, women in the DOD are more vulnerable than men to the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on women in America are magnified for women in the military. The U.S. military is the largest employer in America.¹⁶ Dual-military parents and single parents make up nearly twenty percent of active-duty families. Almost fifty percent of married women in the military are married to another military member, a much larger proportion than men.¹⁷ A larger portion of single parents in the military are mothers as well.¹⁸ As women in America are more likely the primary caregivers, an event affecting working mothers, whether married or single, will disproportionately affect military women.

Military women's ability to work from home is lower than American women in society-at-large. During the pandemic shutdowns, many white-collar workers were able to begin working

¹⁵ Jeannette Haynie and Kyleanne Hunter, et al., "Caregiving in the Military," *Center for a New American Security: Athena Leadership Project*, podcast audio, 1 December 2020, <https://www.cnas.org/events/virtual-panel-discussion-caregiving-in-the-military-athena-leadership-project>.

¹⁶ Phil Stewart. "Exclusive: Long-withheld Pentagon survey shows widespread racial discriminations, harassment." U.S. News, Reuters. 14 January 2020.

¹⁷ Defense Advisory Committee on Women in the Services (DACOWITS), "2017 Annual Report," Report, Alexandria, Virginia, 13, https://dacowits.defense.gov/Portals/48/Documents/Reports/2017/Annual%20Report/DACOWITS%202202%20Annual%20Report_FINAL.PDF?ver=2018-02-28-222504-937.

¹⁸ DACOWITS, "2019 Annual Report," 62.

from home. The DOD supported these policies when able. However, a vast number of military jobs are not suited to teleworking. Many jobs require classified materials access, which is not available at home. Training to operate complex systems, such as ships, tanks, or airplanes, cannot be done at home. Women's gains over the past 40 years in military service could be lost if military women do not have the support structures in place to enable them to keep working in person during the pandemic.

Childcare support for military women is even more critical due to the current military culture. While women can serve in any capacity in the U.S. military, women still typically follow traditional gender norms at home.¹⁹ The military must address childcare access to defend access to capabilities provided by military women.

Compounding the difficulties of finding childcare, military jobs require shifting schedules and do not consistently offer a standard nine-to-five schedule that many civilian childcare providers support. While the military runs childcare facilities to meet the non-standard work shift requirements, childcare was still difficult for military families to acquire even before the pandemic. Childcare in fleet concentration areas reported average waits of one to two years for placement into their infant programs pre- pandemic.²⁰ The impact of COVID-19 has only increased this capacity issue. In December 2020, San Diego's Child Development Center only had one of six infant rooms open, a capacity reduction of eighty-three percent. Over twenty-five

¹⁹ The Defense Advisory Committee on Women in the Services states: "Progress made by the military toward gender equality in some senses has outpaced gender equality in families. That the military allows women to do most of the things that men do, while society (and the military) still expect women to play the major role in childrearing, make it difficult for women on active military duty to meet the demands at the intersection of the roles." DACOWITS, "2017 Annual Report." 17.

²⁰ MilitaryChildcare.Com website, Accessed 11 December 2020, <https://public.militarychildcare.csd.disa.mil/mccu/ui/#/>.

percent of working military mothers lost their childcare access early in the pandemic.²¹ This lack of childcare access may prove catastrophic for both retaining military women and their future career successes.

Before the pandemic, female retention was already an identified problem in the military. A study found that women were thirty percent more likely to leave the service than their male counterparts. One of the main reasons given was childcare access. These numbers are even more striking when comparing women without children to women with children or men with children. Men with children are less likely to separate from the military, yet women with children are more likely to separate. Women with children are up to thirty percent more likely to leave the service than women without children.²² The effects of the pandemic on childcare will have drastic consequences on retaining women with children in the armed forces. The military cannot afford to lose vast numbers of qualified servicemembers without a corresponding dent to military readiness.

Other nations' militaries handle childcare differently, and therefore will not experience similar readiness issues as the American military. In Norway, local communities provide childcare for all citizens, including naval personnel.²³ France recognized the need for extended childcare when women begin serving on ships.²⁴ The Netherlands provides childcare for its service members.²⁵ While specific data on the effects of Covid on these nation's militaries are not

²¹ COVID-19 Military support initiative, "Pain Points Poll Deep Dive: The Impact of Child Care and School Closure Challenges on military personnel and readiness," <https://bluestarfam.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/BSF-COVID-PPPDeepDive-ChildCare.pdf>.

²² All of these numbers were based on data from 2008-2018: United States Government Accountability Office, Report to Congressional Committees, "Female Active Duty Personnel: Guidance and Plans Needed for Recruitment and Retention efforts," GAO-20-61, May 2020, 10-17.

²³ Lakshmi Fjord and Genevieve Ames, "Reproductive Health in Eight Navies: A Comparative Report on Education, Prevention Services, and Policies on Pregnancy, Maternity/Paternity Leaves, and Childcare," *Military Medicine* 174, no. 3 (2009), 280.

²⁴ Haynie, "Caregiving in the Military."

²⁵ Fjord, "Reproductive Health," 287.

available yet, childcare as a whole was not shutdown in Europe during the pandemic. Childcare was still available for essential workers in both France and the Netherlands.²⁶ It can be inferred, though, based on the data presented in this paper, that women parents in these militaries can support their country because childcare is still readily available. The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted a key weakness in American military readiness. Without readily available childcare, military women will not be able to continue to serve. These absences will leave many important combat and non-combat billets empty, resulting in an overall weaker U.S. military.

Counter Argument: COVID was a one-off event

Many critics point out that the childcare issues are temporary. The pandemic will end. Childcare centers and schools are beginning to reopen. Vaccines for COVID-19 are approved, and military members across the globe are getting vaccinated. Childcare centers will reopen, and military women will regain the childcare they were using before the pandemic. Additionally, many American critics argue that childcare is a personal responsibility, and therefore the servicemember's job to obtain. It should not be the military's responsibility to provide childcare.

Rebuttal: Childcare's enduring effect on military readiness

These points ignore that childcare affects readiness, particularly during a pandemic. The burden of providing childcare must be shared by the U.S. military for three reasons. First, the military expects service members to move every two to three years, disrupting childcare provisions. Parents start at the bottom of waitlists when they move. Second, in the private sector, gaps in childcare are often covered by local friends and family. In the military, service members

²⁶ Anya Kamenetz, "Lessons from Europe, where cases are rising but schools are open," National Public Radio, 13 November 2020, www.npr.org.

are ordered to move away from their support networks, and it takes time for service members to rebuild the "village" of support at the new location. However, the military still requires the member to work, and so childcare is a requirement, not a luxury, at the new location. Finally, military hours do not align with many civilian childcare centers. Military working hours vary greatly. Second or third shift or a twenty-four hour watch do not align with most traditional centers.²⁷ To support women, the military needs to prioritize childcare centers that meet all working hour schedules at each different military location.

Arguments for the personal responsibility to acquire childcare point to the requirement for single parents or dual-military parents to have a family care plan.²⁸ According to the Department of Defense Instruction Number 1342.19 ("Family Care Plans"), "Service members who fail to produce a family care plan may be subject to disciplinary or administrative action that may result in separation from the Service."²⁹ However, a family care plan takes care of a military member's children when they deploy. Many military families stated that they were unable to use their family care plans during the pandemic.³⁰ Family care plans often rely on travel to friends' or families' homes, with older adults such as grandparents playing a large part in providing care. During the pandemic military travel was not allowed or discouraged. The risk to older parents left many service members unable to use their family care plans. A family care plan is not the answer to service women's childcare needs during the pandemic.

²⁷ Generally, second shift is from 1600-2359, third shift is from 0000-0600.

²⁸ A family care plan is a document, signed by the unit Commanding Officer, detailing how the children will be cared for long term if both parents are deployed. The document includes emergency contact information, bank and payment support information, and required power of attorney documents.

Department of Defense instruction: Family Care Plans, DOD Instruction Number 1342.19, 7 May 2010, Change 1, 30 November 2017, Washington, DC: Department of the Navy, 2017.

²⁹ Blue star family, 2.

³⁰ Blue star family, 2.

Way Forward

The DOD needs to understand and prioritize the *availability of quality* childcare for all service members to increase strategic resiliency in the face of national crises, such as a pandemic or a national war mobilization. Twenty years ago, a RAND study recognized the need for expanded childcare access across the DOD. "High-quality child care is both a readiness and retention issue. Lack of child care creates conflicts between parental and mission responsibilities."³¹ Since then, more facilities have been built, but not enough. The construction and funding of childcare centers are currently left up to base commanders. Childcare competes with other requirements without acknowledging childcare's critical role in creating capability across all tenant commands on a base.³² Additionally, base commanders may not be analyzing the impact on female retention or job performance. Military families unable to access quality childcare are very likely to leave the service. Furthermore, a large portion of single parents and dual-military families report missing work due to childcare issues.³³ Women make up a tiny percentage of senior officers, so people making the decisions on whether to spend money on more childcare facilities may not have experienced, or entirely grasp, the full readiness and retention ramifications. Unless senior military and civilian leaders raise the priority for funding more childcare facilities, including increased 24/7 childcare centers, bases will prioritize funding with more apparent links to military readiness.

Common-sense solutions employed today will better prepare America for great power competition in the 21st century. America must utilize ALL able bodies to keep America strong. Childcare is the basis for supporting working women. Achieving the U.N. and DOD recognized

³¹ Gail L. Zellman, Susan M. Gates, Joy S. Moini, and Marika Suttorp, "Meeting Family and Military Needs through Military Child Care," *Armed Forces & Society* 35, no. 3 (April 2009): 438.

³² Zellman, "Meeting Family," 455.

³³ Zellman, "Meeting Family," 455.

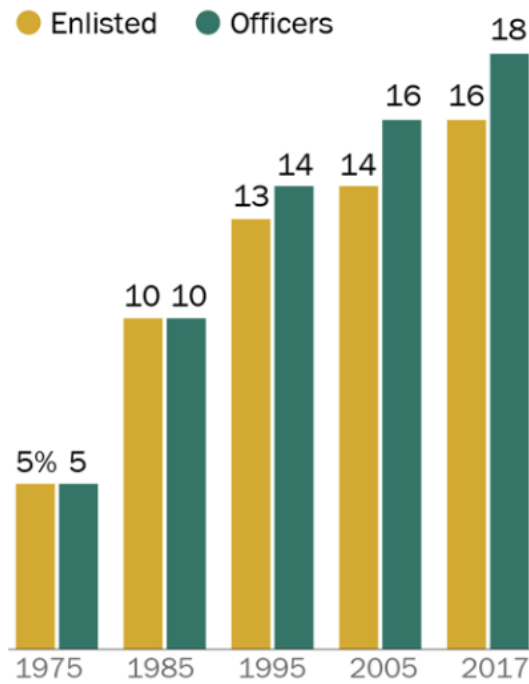
benefits from female participation across the security spectrum requires quality childcare. COVID-19 further highlights these issues by making scarce resources scarcer. Not addressing childcare will lead to lasting damage in America's strategic position. The Department of Defense needs to prioritize childcare funding at all fleet concentration areas as a matter of military readiness³⁴.

³⁴ Point of clarification: paper focused mainly on women parents serving in the military. Further research is required on single male parents, non-traditional families, LGBT families, and dual-working families where one spouse is not in the military.

APPENDIX A: Women in the military over time

In 2017, nearly one-in-five commissioned officers in U.S. military were women

% of enlisted, commissioned U.S. active duty military forces that are women



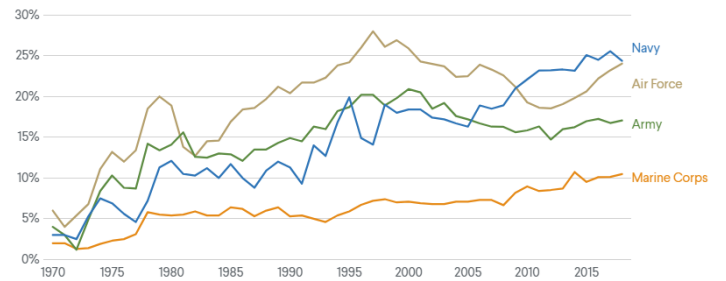
Note: Includes only the four military branches of the Department of Defense. "Officers" includes only commissioned officers.

Source: U.S. Department of Defense 2017 Population Representation in the Military Services published data.

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Figure 2: This figure also shows the increase of women in the military over time once the 2% cap on women was removed. Source: Amanda Barroso. "The changing profile of the U.S. Military."

Percentage of Female Enlisted Recruits, 1970–2018



Note: Coast Guard data not available.

Source: Office of the Undersecretary of Defense.

COUNCIL ON FOREIGN RELATIONS

Figure 1: This figure shows the increase of women in the military over time once the 2% cap on women was removed. Source: Reynolds, George M., and Amanda Shendruk. "Demographics of the U.S. Military." Council on Foreign Relations. April 2018.

APPENDIX B: Military Childcare Problems

Family, Installation, and Policy Characteristics That Affect Child Care Outcomes

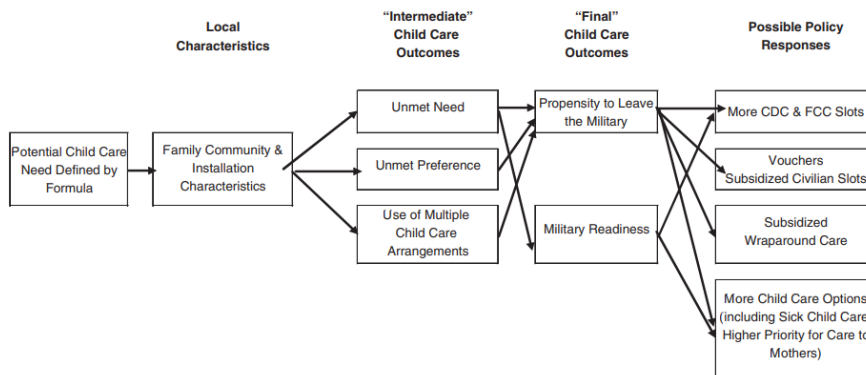


Figure 3: "Note: CDC = child development center; FCC = family child care. The Department of Defense (DoD) child care demand formula is used to estimate the number of children of military families who potentially need child care in some form. The formula uses DMDC DEERS data on the number of dependent children of military members as the starting point for its calculation of potential child care need. It then makes assumptions using historical information from DEERS about how many of those dependent children are part of different family "types," including singleparent, dual-military, and military-married-to-civilian families, and how many of these dependent children are living with their parents. It also makes assumptions about how many have a civilian parent working, based on information from the services. The formula translates these basic demographic data on military families into potential child care need. For example, the formula assumes that in families with a civilian spouse and a child aged zero to five, 43 percent of spouses work outside the home and 60 percent of these working spouses are working full-time. The formula for children aged six to twelve is similar but assumes that a higher fraction of civilian spouses are working (58 percent) and that a higher percentage of working spouses are engaged in full time work (65 percent)."

Source: Zellman. "Meeting Family." pg 455.

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