Women Representation in the Military: The Case of the South African National Defence Force, Limpopo Province

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Abstract

Promoting gender equality and women empowerment is a long standing item on the development agenda nationally and internationally. It is also item number five of the 2030 millennium development goals; gender equality, ending all discrimination against women and girls is not only a basic right but a human right. Research has proven that empowering women and girls helps economic growth and development. Empowering women is necessary for women's enhancement in society and the workplace, the military is no exception. This paper argues on the gender mainstreaming policies in the South African National Defence Force (SANDF) and whether they are adequately implemented to ensure equal representation of women in all military ranks including combat. The researchers used Liberal Feminist Theory (LFT), which advocates for women's right to be seen and acknowledged as human rights. The researchers employed a feminist qualitative research methodology and exploratory design. Snowballing sampling technique was used to select participants in the SANDF military air-force base in Hoedspruit, Limpopo and saturation was reached after the fifteenth participant for in-depth interviews. Data was analysed using Thematic Analysis (TA). Findings in the study revealed that women in the military are of the view that the military is making strides in ensuring an equal representation between men and women, however women view themselves as less represented than their male counterparts, regardless of the policies put in place. Results also revealed that that the lack of representation of women in the military is due to the SANDF not being meant for women. The paper therefore concludes that women are not equally represented to their male counterparts in the military and that there is need for improvement towards this in senior and management positions within the SANDF. The study recommends that the SANDF as a government institution could also create a sense of urgency to all the units in the quest to ensure equal representation of women. Creating a sense of urgency not only will ensure that more women can be part of the military, but will also create an awareness of the necessity for women to join the army.

Keywords: Women; Military; Combat; Gender Mainstreaming; Feminist Qualitative Methodology

Introduction

Promoting gender equality and women empowerment is a long-standing item on the development agenda nationally and internationally. According to the fifth Sustainable Development Goal (SDG), promoting gender equality and empowerment of women is necessary for women's enhancement in society and the workplace (Worldbank, 2015). Considering the proclamations made by goal number five of the Sustainable Development Goals, it is essential to take a look into how gender equality and women empowerment is being practised in military organizations in South Africa. One of the reasons for undertaking such as a task is because of its validity to the assessment of gender-mainstreaming in the SANDF and its advancements in ensuring that women are equally represented in terms of the 1996/1998 White paper of Defence. A way in which equality and women empowerment could be achieved in the military is to assess whether gender mainstreaming which refers to the integration of gender perspectives across all government action can be used as a strategy to assist government organizations to achieve gender equality as they relate to policy and financial decisions (OECD, 2021).

Gender Mainstreaming in the SANDF

Authority structures in the military are dominated by masculinity; the relationship between masculinity and militarism is portrayed in the literature as harmonious and mutually affirming (Boyce & Herd, 2003). Therefore, militaries have long been identified and recognised as important sites for the construction of masculinities (Woodward, 2000 & Browson, 2016; Woodward & Duncanson, 2017). Barrett (2006); Connell (1992); and Woodward (2000) argued that militaries were constructed as male dominant, this is not only resulting from the fact that the military is populated by men or that they constitute a major arena for the construction of masculine identities, but also because men play a primary role in shaping images of masculinity in the broader society. With the strides the SANDF is trying to make, a 4.78% improvement was witnessed in the last ten years. In the year 2011, the gender composition in the South African National Defence Force, was sitting at 73.4% males and 26.6% females, which implied that the incorporation of women in the SANDF was significantly lower than that of their male counterparts (Parliamentary Monitoring Group, 2011). Currently the gender composition in the military is now sitting at 31.38% females and 68.62% males, which reflects that integration of women in the military is an ongoing task (More,2021). Sadly, the institution in 2021 reported that the gender composition of women in combat is 7.045%. This could be due to what Donnelly (2016) considered as a result of the narrative that the risk for women deployed in combat environment was higher than for man mainly due to physical capabilities.

More (2021) in his presentation on gender and youth parity, acknowledged the accomplishments made by the SANDF thus far, but notes that "Gender equality remained a challenge at the senior management level, which would be addressed through empowerment programmes, mentoring and senior management leadership commitment" (More,2021: 8). Moreover, the lack of budget to implement activities such as women empowerment programmes, mentoring and senior leadership commitment was raised as an issue. This suggests that the SANDF is willing to ensure that there is an equal representation but finds itself falling short due to lack of financial support or greater budgets to the inclusion of women and the implementation of gender mainstreaming stated in the DOD policies.

Mainstreaming Gender into Defence Policies

The former Minister of Defence and Military Veterans, Ms. Lindiwe Sisulu, released the draft South African Defence Review on April 2012 which showed that the South African policy is premised on the 1996 *White Paper on Defence* which, according to Roux (2015), "were developed in very participative processes in the early post-apartheid years and were internationally acclaimed for their transparency and comprehensive coverage of the subject of defence policy". One of the goals for the Deference review, is to strive to be seen as representative, equitable and aligned national asset (Deference

Review 2015) Nonetheless, it became evident that some of the premises on which these documents were based were overly optimistic and had not yet fully materialised. One of the major issues found in these documents is the failure to mainstream gender into the South African defence policy in such a way that there is a much easier upward mobility for women as is for men towards leadership positions. For example, the draft states that the Defence Force will strive to be a representative and trusted non-partisan national asset", and there are references to women households, the feminization of poverty and gender based violence (White Paper on Defence, 1996).

The 1996 *White Paper on Defence* also affirms the democratic values of human dignity, equality and freedom and refers to the constitutional principle of non-racism and non-sexism. The White Paper, acknowledged the right of women to serve in all ranks and positions, including combat roles and mandated the Minister of Defence to oversee the design and implementation of the affirmative action and equal opportunity programme (*White Paper on Defence*, 1996). However, there are no references to the UN Security Council Resolution 1325, gender equality, gender representation, gender sensitivity or gender responsiveness in the draft therefore suggesting that the document is biased. Therefore, this contests the perception that the SANDF has adequately and sufficiently addressed gender-related issues within the organization, be it in recruitment, retention of jobs, gender-sensitive policies, training and combat (*White Paper on Defence*, 1996).

Sexism and Patriarchy Poses as a Challenge to the Integration of Women in the Military

Sexism is also continually highlighted as a challenge to ensuring that women are included in the military. As it stands the composition for women in combat is sitting at 7.045% as opposed to the male composition of 25.2% (More,2021). The Commission for Gender Equality (2000) declared that the increased rate of sexism in the SANDF, allows for the perception of women as the weaker sex, who need to be protected and defended by strong men. Sexism also poses a challenge for women during their identity formation as soldiers and the entire community (Clarke, 2008; Heinecken and van der Waag-Colig, 2009; and Simic, 2010). In other words, women who choose to join the military forces have to fight against patriarchal attitudes and actions that support or perpetuate the subordination of women, as well as condoning acts of abuse towards women by their male counterparts within the military itself. These ideologies and notions also need to be explicated in order to understand the position of women in the military and why these positions are mostly based on feminine qualities (for example, such as women being supportive, nurturers and home makers) (Scott, 2002).

There seems to be consensus that patriarchy and patriarchal attitudes, often negatively affect women soldiers in that they are excluded from combat positions because of their perceived physical inferiority and unsuitability for fighting (Memela-Motumi, 2011 and Sisulu, 2011). According to Memela-Motumi (2011) and Sisulu (2011), such statements are chauvinistic and sexist in nature, and lead to the undermining and misrecognition of the roles that women have played and continue to play in the military. The Army Research Institute of Environmental Medicine (2013) challenged the validity of these misogynous positions, by proving that with extra training, a large portion of women entering the military, could be brought up to the same physical standards as men. This could be achieved by ensuring that training equipment and fitness programmes are created to build the physical capacity of women wishing to join the combat environment.

The draft *White Paper on Defence* (1996) states that the lack of specific reference to the continued inclusion of women and mainstreaming of gender and the creation of a Defence Force that promotes gender equality raises the question of how the achievements to date are to be merged and regression avoided, especially as far as the inclusion or the incorporation of women into combat roles is concerned (Memela-Motumi, 2011). In South Africa, the utilisation of women in combat roles is still an issue which has not been widely canvassed. It remains topical and conversational. The Institute for

Defence Policy reported in 1995 on a survey conducted to ascertain the public's response to women in combat as well as in higher ranks within the military environment (Skaine, 2011). According to the survey findings, there was also a strong, opposition to it, but at the same time, respondents did not reflect which women were to be relegated to position of inferiority. Furthermore, although women are encouraged to join operations, the vast majority are still located within the administration and health services. According to Skaine (2011), South Africa, went through an intense period of militarization, mobilized the resources of war and made defence force central to the state decision-making. When it comes to women, South Africa demonstrated that women are active contributors to and are not marginalised from militarization (Skaine, 2011).

The armies of the South African Defence Force (SADF) and the ANC, increasingly included women, but excluded them from combat roles. This exclusion, may serve as an account for the representation of women in positions of leadership. According to Skaine (2011), men justified excluding women from combat on the basis that menstruation made women less able to serve. Moreover, the SADF assigned women to auxiliary roles in the World War I and World War II and to active combat duties after 1990. In the same year, South Africa made a transition to democracy during which questions such as whether women should serve in combat were asked. In 1995, the SANDF, incorporated women of all races and expanded roles for women largely because of the pressure from the campaign for equal opportunity for women in employment. Nonetheless, even though legislation had removed discrimination, culture did not.

Liberal Feminist Theory

Lober (2010:20) argues that "the feminism of the 1960s and 1970s was the beginning of the second wave of feminism". Similar, to the first wave of feminism, which sought after equal rights as citizens for women, in the western societies, Liberal Feminists developed the idea of individual rights (Woolf, 1929; and Wing, 2000). The question that Liberal Feminists ask is why women's rights are not part of these individual human rights. Since the beginning of the second wave, the goals and vision of gender reforms were mainly gender equality, which stood for legal treatment of women and men alike, even though they are biologically different (Warhol & Herndl, 1991). Moreover, these liberal theories were distinguished from previous political theories in part by their insistence that all reforms of social domination or authority need to be justified. Liberal theories, postulated the importance of equality for all men based on their allegedly equal potential for reason and promoted the social ideals of liberty and equality. Almost, as soon as the new liberal ideals of liberty and equality were developed and sustained, women also began to demand that they too should be free and equal. This, therefore, lead to the first western feminist theory by Mary Wollstonecraft's *Vindication of the rights of women*, inspired by the French Revolution to be published in 1792.In her book, Wollenstonescraft (1792) pointed the direction for later Liberal Feminism, by arguing that biological sex differences were entirely irrelevant to granting social rights. Wollenstonecraft (1792) argued that women's capacity to reason was equal with that of men. She continued to claim that the inferiority of the female intellect, was due to women's inferior education and should be interpreted as the results of women's social inequality rather than as a justification of it.

Wollenstoncraft's (1992) distinction, between biological facts and social norms, foreshadowed the distinction, made by early twentieth century Liberal Feminists. Twentieth century feminists distinguished gender and sex conceptually by arguing that sex is regarded as a socially invariant biological difference between male and females, and thus should be a property of nonhumans and human beings. Whilst, on the other hand, gender is to be perceived or defined as a historical variable set of social norms and expectations which prescribe appropriate behaviour for men and women, and thus should be attributed on to human beings. According to Lobner (2010), Liberal Feminists perceive women's subordination as a consequence of gendered norms rather than biological sex. In other words, women are

subordinated due to the socially prescribed roles and behaviours, such as women are caregivers, nurturers and home keepers. Thus, explaining why women are to some extent often excluded from playing roles that are contradictory to their socially prescribed roles. Such roles in the study are combat roles within the military. This, in itself, also serves as an explanation to an extent as to why women are often underrepresented in leadership roles, but often overrepresented in roles such as health care and administrative roles in military institutions in the SANDF. Therefore, the main tenets, of LFT are directed towards criticising the injustice of these norms and working towards changing them.

Liberal Feminism also is part of and rooted in the larger tradition of political philosophy, inspired by the works of Immanuel Kant, John Stuart Mills and John Rawls. This study adopts some features from John Stuarts Mill's accounts on Liberal Feminism. In his work, *The Subjection of Women*, Mill (1984) argues that "the principle which regulates the existing social relations between men and women, the legal subordination of one sex to the other, is wrong in itself and is now one of the chief hindrances to human improvement and ought to be replaced by the principle of perfect equality, admitting no power of privilege on the one side, nor disability on the other (Mill, 1984:261). For example, the representation of women on the basis of their physiology serves as one of the legal subordination that women seeking to serve in combat roles are subjected to. It further serves to impede on women's human rights and capabilities to further develop themselves as combat soldiers within military institutions and outside. The Liberal Feminist Theory can be used to give an account as to why South Africa and other countries worldwide, still struggle to ensure a full if not equal integration of women in previously male deemed positions.

Liberal Feminism and Gender Mainstreaming

"Gender mainstreaming is intended as a way of improving the affectivity of mainline policies, making visible the gendered nature of assumptions processes and outcomes" (Walby, 2003;2). As a form of theory, gender mainstreaming is a process of revision of key concepts in order to grasp more adequately a world that is gendered, rather than the establishment of separatist gender theory (Walby, 2003). It also captures many of the tensions and dilemmas in feminist theory and practice over the last decade and provides a new focus debate on how to proceed on issues pertaining to women (Walby, 2003). It is imperative to note the recurrent opposition to gender mainstreaming in order to comprehend the dualism between gender equality and mainstream programmes. Elgström (2000, Ables,2019 & Govender, Aaron, Sonie & Sonderjee (2019)) suggests that new or modern norms need to 'fight their way into institutional thinking' in competition with traditional norms. Other established goals may compete with the prioritising of gender equality even if they are not directly opposed, such as that of economic growth. This means that the process is contested and often involves 'negotiation' and 'translation' rather than simple adoption or 'imitation' of new policies.

Methodology

The researchers employed a feminist qualitative research method and an exploratory research design. The population of the study comprised of female military officers in the Limpopo Province. Snowballing sampling was used to identify the research participants. A total of fifteen female military officers within different ranks were selected to take part in in-depth interviews. Out of the fifteen participants for the in-depth interviews, two were ex-combatants in the SANDF. The researchers sought female military officers who were available and booked an appointment for the interviews.

Data Collection

Fifteen female military officers took part in the interviews which took approximately one hour thirty minutes each. An audio-recorder was used to record all the interviews. The interviews were English

as a preferred language by participants. The researchers used an in depth interview guide. These methods are often used by feminists because they give room for critical reflections and engagements on issues and concerns raised by participants. These methods complement feminist methodologies to the large extent that they are founded on interpretivist epistemology using sensitive, flexible and open-ended approaches to data generation. Additionally, there is a stronger focus on the meanings and interpretations of military participating in the research that enables the researchers to see the social world through their eyes. The feminist methodology was essential to this particular research process for women in the military, as its standpoint is of the view that research for women should be done… women, to encourage empowerment and rightly capture their experiences from a stance of equality.

Table 1: Description of the Sample

Gender	Age	Rank	Years of service
1	38	Major	15
2	40	Lieutenant	16
3	33	Lieutenant	7
4	37	Lieutenant	10
5	41	Lieutenant	14
6	33	Lieutenant	12
7	40	Warrant Officer Class 2	22
8	43	Warrant Officer Class 2	24
9	32	Lieutenant	11
10	39	Warrant Officer Class 1	21
11	36	Warrant Officer Class 1	14
12	44	Lieutenant	25
13	32	Ex combatant	1 year and 5months
14	35	Ex combatant	7
15	33	Operative Communications	5

Data Analysis

In this study, the researchers used Braun and Clarke's (2006) model of thematic analysis. Thematic Analysis is a data analysis technique commonly used in qualitative research. Furthermore, thematic analysis was used to analyse data collected through interviews with SANDF official, as well as women in combat units. For data derived from policy documents and annual reports on women's engagement, inclusion and participation in combat and military roles. During the study, the following steps were used:

o Step 1: Familiarisation with data and data transcript
o Step2: General of initial code
o Step 3: Searching of themes
o Step 4: Reviewing of themes
o Step 5: Defining and naming of themes
o Step 6: Discussion of findings

Table 2: Themes generated from study findings

Themes	Subthemes
Representation of women the SANDF	Fewer women in the military
Reasons for under representation of women	• Patriarchy • Institutional culture • Recruitment of women in the SANDF • Women's reluctance to join the SANDF • Lack of information about the military • Culture race, and ethnicity
Challenges faced by women in the military	Military training • Reconstruction of feminine identities • The incidence of command and control • Participation in decision making

Results and Discussion

Systems of Patriarchal Dominance Restricts Women's Visibility

The findings of this study show that there are still fewer women compared to men in the SANDF. Also, it has been established that the dominance of men in the SANDF is widespread from the lower to the highest ranks of the institution. The significance of the finding is that the fewer women who are represented in the military occupy very low ranks of less influence. One of the participants had this to say:

> …in terms of representation I feel the ladies are still few, its mostly men, so we can say it is male dominated, more so in the higher ranks, which I think in some way the defence is in the process of balancing. I'm not sure if it's theoretically, or in practice, but it's what we are hearing that they are trying to push ladies forward and currently women are still less in the whole Defence Force. In terms of management and leadership women are still less. Majority of the ladies are at the bottom doing the work, up there, there is only few, so there is no balance or representation in leadership and management.

[Participant 1 In-depth interviews, May 2019]

The participant in the military personnel in the SANDF revealed the challenges that they are facing as women in terms of representation. The narrative ofParticipant1 is in agreement with other two participants who revealed that:

> …women are not equally represented, no not completely, there is till that male dominance.

[Participant 9 In-depth, June 2019]

Another participant concurred with Participant 9 and had this to say:

> …there are not enough women in the Defence Force, there's not enough, especially when you look at the rank groups, at the senior ranks it's still men.

[Participant 8 In-depth, May 2019]

The narratives of the participants demonstrate that the concerns about representation go beyond just representation as army personnel to representation in leadership positions. This implies that the participants are impressed by the efforts put in place by the government in order to lure more women to join the military such that the major concern has now shifted to occupying positions of influence which are high military ranks such as those of major or colonel. One can argue that despite the fact that the SANDF has publicly declared its intentions/plans to include more women in the military, the issues of the representation of women is still immensely problematic (Heinecken, 2015). This is because there are still fewer women compared to men in military ranks. This dominance of men in the military can be attributed to the general belief that the military is a masculine terrain (Mkandawire, 2013).

The study has established that patriarchy is one of the major reasons why there is misrepresentation of women in the military. Patriarchy refers to "…male domination, to the power relationships by which men dominate women, and to characterise a system whereby women are kept subordinate in a number of ways" (Bhasin, 2006:3). This demonstrates that the dominance of men in the SANDF is a symbol of patriarchy that results from the power relationships that exist in families and in the military itself. The narratives of participants show that patriarchy is a major concern. Accordingly, feminists argue that gender representation has always been a problem in many countries, particularly countries that operate under patriarchal rules. Sultana, (2011) in a study on *"Patriarchy and Women's Subordination: A Theoretical Analysis"* argues that patriarchy is the prime obstacle to women's advancement and development.

Sultana (2011) continues to argue that, a patriarchal society gives absolute priority to men and to some extent limits women's human rights also. From this standpoint, one can argue that the military seems to operate from a patriarchal perspective, which seems to prefer male dominance over female dominance. With the above mentioned, women's views in the SANDF also support the notion that the institution is mostly dominated by men, which makes the absorption of women even more difficult. Participant 1 had this to say about this:

"…...the military is not for women. It is not made for women,"

[Participant 6 Focus Group, May 2019]

It is also visible from the above participant's view that to her women will remain underrepresented because the military is simply not made for women. In other words, it is not suitable for women. This is problematic because it shows that even women themselves see the military as not suited or rather made to accommodate their femininities. It is not designed to make the woman to feel comfortable or at ease. More so it is not designed in a way that women will feel as autonomous beings in the system. The problem of autonomy is emphasised by Liberal Feminists who argue for women to feel as integrated members of society they should be given the right and freedom to be who they want to be without their femininity as an overshadowing object to their representation. Liberal feminist therefore, argue that in order to eliminate or reduce the challenge of patriarchy, there is a need to ensure that women are given the equal opportunity when it comes to decision making, as well as equal part takers in military activities without considering or questioning their abilities as soldiers mainly because their women. It would suggest for an environment in which women can equally thrive the same way their male counterparts do.

Incidents of Command and Control

Furthermore, the current study has revealed that the incidence of command and control is a huge challenge that is faced by female army personnel in the Limpopo Province. This is largely, due to the fact that women in the military are found with no option but to comply and complain later. This, in itself, limits their ability to have and to own a voice about their own well-being in the military. The Liberal

Feminist argues for women's agency and voice as a sign of empowerment and equality in the workplace. A command and control environment renders women as voiceless and helpless. Voicelessness refers to the inability for one to have an opinion or contribute to any decision-making processes regarding to their own development. Similarly, a command and control environment infringes on the women's rights to be who they want to be. In addition, a lack of agency (freedom/autonomy) and voice, creates an image that in a military institution, women, are considered as equals and in the absence of equality there is bound to be room for exploitation and oppression.

The mere fact that, women seldom occupy positions of influence, suggests that they are considered inferior and have to abide by the control exerted on them by their male counterparts. This was considered to be a huge challenge because, in most cases, they just have to respond to instructions without questioning the reason or the motive. Here is what one of the participants had to say:

> The problem, because it seems the higher you go with ranks the more you become like a flower pot, you can't make decisions, like I am one person if you tell me to do something, I don't like to be told how to do my job, it's like the more you go up, they tend to want to tell you how to do your job, so that thing I don't like it, I am my own individual, the more you tell how to do some things, I won't do it, I will do it in the way I see fit, because if I do it your way I feel stupid and I'm going to need that you tell me how to get every single step done because it's your idea.

[Participant 5 in-depth interviews May 2019]

The participant revealed that she would feel more comfortable if she is given a platform to exercise her freedom without being harassed and commanded by the male counterpart generally because they are believed to be superior to the female counterparts. Similarly, another participant shared the same sentiments and added that the expectation that female army personnel are supposed to obey instructions without questioning; which is disturbing, especially if you have knowledge about what you are supposed to do. Here is what she had to say:

> ...so I realised that if I stay here, there is no goal, these people are just messing us around, they are taking us for granted in a way. Also the command and control environment is also very difficult, especially if you are an academic. Also, especially for me because I was from transformation. I know a lot of rules and challenges, especially in basic military training. So I started questioning a lot of things like why are they doing this because you supposed to do this, the minute you start questioning things in a command environment it becomes a problem for you, it's like you can't contribute. So yours is to obey, they say obey and complain later. But that's not an environment for me cos mina I talk. (chuckles) I am very opinionated. I need to understand what I am doing, why am I doing it, how am I going to benefit. That is why I say I used, I was kinda like I'm done.

[Participant 1 In-depth interviews, May 2019]

Moreover, another participant argued that the quest for women to be respected does not mean that they should receive special treatment. But rather it means that they should be given the same treatment as normal human beings who know what they are doing and what they should do at any given time. Here is what the participant had to say:

> ...women must be allowed to play their role. We're not saying women must get special treatment. If my role is to be on the frontline, then let me be in the frontline, they must not be subjected to the offices, they must be well utilized.

[Participant 6 In-depth interviews, May 2019]

Generally, the military as guided by of control and command environment in the SANDF is another huge challenge that women face in the military. The role of women in the military should not in any way be considered inferior since they are equally competent. However, the command and control environment has a tendency of treating labourers as lacking capacities, with women suffering the most in such institutions. This finding is backed by Sjoberg and Gentry (2007); and Heinecken (2015) who argue that the command element in the military is strong, especially among men towards women and, in some cases, it is men to men. The argument was that the fact that women in the military are usually denied access to higher ranks in the military roles shows that they are denied the chance to reach the highest levels of command.

Socio-Cultural Factors Hamper Women's Inclusion in the SANDF

Sociologists argue that culture consists of the values, beliefs, systems of language, communication, and practices that people share in common and that can be used to define them as a collective (Durkheim, 1951; Fulcher&Scott, 2011; and Ritzer&Guppy, 2014). According to one of the participants in the study, culture has a role in the underrepresentation of women in the military. One of the participants indicated that:

> I think it also has to do with the culture, because I've spoken to one woman, and I congratulated her saying wow! The navy is getting women, because the first lady was the commander of the marine, so she said, yes but the person in charge of her is a male. So you understand what I mean.   With me, I am the only Coloured warrant officer in that mastering I am in, and there is another Black female in front of me. Soto promote me in order to become class one, they must first promote her to be the first class one in that environment that we are working in, and then they must promote me. I did my research and I told them. Me and her are the only two women, when I got transferred to here, there were only 3 ladies, and the other two fell out of the race because their husbands had important work. So it was only me, so she must be promoted to be the first Black lady in that mastering and then I must be the first Coloured on in that mastering but, it is difficult, when you see all the White people in front. It is hard for a woman to get there.

[Participant 7 Focus Group discussion, June 2019]

Participant 7 disclosed that culture and race still limit women from joining the military terrain. Culture limits women from entering higher ranks whilst race creates room for discrimination. Also, it is evident that even though women are given an opportunity to ascend to higher ranks, they still somehow find themselves under the leadership of men. In the South African context where culture is highly valued like many other African countries, one can imagine the amount of stereotyping and marginalization that takes place on the basis of gender. This is mainly because in a patriarchal society, men are heads of the family with women, being support structures of the head of the family. Therefore, even at work, although unfair, women are subjected to the same notion, with men less interested in the approval of the leadership of women. This results from gendered stereotypes that men are independent and women are interdependent, as such excluding women from decision-making processes that could lead to change and development.

Also from the response, there seems to be an outcry from women in the military for change, to have the opportunity to be led by fellow women, to have the same opportunity as men. The mere fact that when one woman was congratulating the other, the other responded by saying that "yes but the person in charge of me is male", shows that the military still holds male leadership as key. This gives women a sense of hopelessness, as far as change of leadership roles is concerned. It may still be challenging for the military to accept women in leadership since such conduct is taught and learned from a young age with men finding it difficult to accept women's need for empowerment and self-growth. One participant had this to say:

Yes, I agree with her, because the men would say you wanted equal rights but you don't want to do this and that, and I said we are women, we are not robots.

[Participant 9 Focus Group discussion, June 2019]

The above statement also shows that men in this environment can be very inconsiderate to women, by insinuating that equal rights are gained and not given freely as human rights. This may also suggest that in order for women to receive equal rights they need to work twice as much. The fact that men in higher positions usually require favours to offer women what they need makes one to wonder: what exactly is it that women need to do in order to be pushed to higher ranks? The latter statement is supported by Participant 1 who had the following to say about promotion being a result of sexual favours:

...The other thing is that, if you are a woman and you get promoted, it becomes a problem to most of the men. Because apparently there are women who date or sleep with men to get promotions, then comes you who didn't do that, you become painted with the same brush. Once such mentalities are created and rumours are spread, they won't respect you. It is not easy to respect such a person. So, those are some of the challenges that women face.

[Participant 1 In-depth Interviews, June 2019]

To this point, the Liberal Feminist Theory is used to argue that judging women based on their gender and not their capabilities sets the agenda for equality and women's inclusion backwards. The quest for recognition of women should not be on the basis of their natural or feminine attributes. Further their inclusion in military roles and ranks that are higher should not be seen as resulting as of offering sexual favours. This minds set reveals that gender mainstreaming may be such a taboo that even those who simply work for the military do not in any way believe that women are just as capable as their male counterparts. The challenge of mainstreaming women into the military to the point of equal representation and visibility will continue to persist regardless of the 2015 Defence review policy because men in the military are yet to accept women as part of national security and not just decorative ornaments

Conclusion

The paper debated on the gender mainstreaming practices and whether they are adequately implemented as per the 1996 White paper of Defence and the 2015 Defence Review which forms part as the basis of all if not most of the policies seeking to address gender parity and equality in the SANDF. The paper also discussed a number of challenges and issues that limit or slows down the progress the SANDF seeks to make in ensuring that women and men are equally represented in combat roles and all ranks within the military. Key issue identified is that regardless of the fact that, the 2015 Defence Review is put in place to address the current status quoi of women in the military, issues like sexism, unequal treatment, cultural norms and masculine military traditions, does not allow women to be autonomous and able to make contributions to their own growth and empowerment in the military. The lack of voice, recognition, representation in leadership and management positions is a hindrance, therefore alienating women from the processes of labour. The voices of the women of in the study, are a reflection that women are included in combat and other military ranks just to ensure compliance and the filling up of quotas and as opposed to recognizing the contribution that women can make to peace-keeping and national security as a whole which further suggests that SANDF still continues to prefer male combatants over female combatants.

Recommendations

The SANDF as a government institution could also create a sense of urgency to all the units in the quest to ensure equal representation of women. Creating a sense of urgency not only will ensure that more women can be part of the military, but will also create an awareness of the necessity for women to join the army. Essentially, policies and machineries for change in the organization will serve to be helpful. These machineries should be those that penetrate through social cultural norms and patriarchal ideologies that tend to impede on the progress of women. The policies and machineries should be formulated in a way that they are transparent and speak directly to women's needs to avoid gender blindness. Moreover, partnering with community organizations, for example, schools, religious institutes and political institutes, would further decrease the proximity between gender education and the army.

Acknowledgements

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