

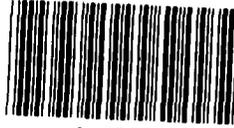
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UNITED STATES GENERAL ACCOUNTING OFFICE

WASHINGTON, D.C. 20548

FEDERAL PERSONNEL AND
COMPENSATION DIVISION



119809

OCTOBER 28, 1982

B-209523

The Honorable Verne Orr
The Secretary of the Air Force

Attention: Assistant Auditor General

Dear Mr. Secretary:

Subject: Losses of Air Force Women in Nontraditional
Occupations (GAO/FPCD-83-7)

Before October 1, 1981, the Air Force followed a policy of trying to obtain the same percentage of women in all noncombat occupations. Because of this policy, many women who would have preferred assignment to traditionally female occupations were placed in nontraditional occupations. At the same time, attrition rates for women in nontraditional occupations have been considerably higher than attrition rates for women in traditional occupations.

To gain insight into the causes for such differences in attrition rates, we sent questionnaires to men and women in 10 Air Force Specialty Codes (AFSCs) within four groups of occupations, as well as to men and women throughout the Air Force. Two of the occupations--administrative and medical service--traditionally had been open to females, while the other two--vehicle operator and dispatcher and aircraft/ground equipment mechanic--traditionally had been closed to them. We expected to find common problems for women in both groups of nontraditional occupations. Our survey results disclosed, however, that each group had a different set of problems.

We conducted our work between September 1981 and June 1982 in accordance with generally accepted Government audit standards. Our questionnaire methodology is detailed in the enclosure.

During our review, we learned that on October 1, 1981, the Air Force discontinued its policy of trying to obtain an equal percentage of women in all noncombat occupations. Now, the Air Force is assigning variable recruiting goals for each AFSC, using survey data that identifies the number of qualified women interested in and available for enlistment into each AFSC.

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This policy change should help to reduce attrition among those women who entered the Air Force after 1981. However, in our view, it does not address the problem of women who enlisted before the policy change and who may be considering leaving the Air Force because they are dissatisfied with their assignments. Responses to our questionnaire identified factors contributing to losses of women and men in the Air Force for each of the 10 AFSCs sampled, and this information may be of value to you.

If you have any questions or want additional information, please contact Drs. Kenneth Coffey on (202) 275-5140 or John Goral on (202) 275-4075.

Sincerely yours,


Clifford I. Gould
Director

Enclosure

SUMMARY OF RESPONSES TO GAO QUESTIONNAIRE

We sent questionnaires to random samples of men and women in four different groups of Air Force occupations, as well as to a sample of men and women throughout the Air Force. Their responses are projectable to the Air Force as a whole, to traditionally female occupations (administrative and medical service AFSCs), and to nontraditional occupations (aircraft/ground equipment mechanic and vehicle operator/dispatcher AFSCs). In our analyses, we used a total of 2,231 completed questionnaires, representing an overall response rate of 76 percent.

We used multiple regression analysis to determine which questions had the strongest relationship to stated intentions to stay in the Air Force. Previous research has established that stated intentions are a good indicator of subsequent behavior. 1/

Analysis of our questionnaire data showed that problems causing losses of men in the Air Force as a whole were generally different from those causing losses of women. Moreover, the analysis showed that problems causing losses were generally different across each of the four occupations sampled.

Intention to stay in the service was more predictable for women than men in each of the occupations surveyed, but it was more predictable for men than women in the samples drawn from the Air Force as a whole. Also, intention to stay was more predictable for women in specific AFSCs than it was for women in the Air Force as a whole, while for men the predictability of intention to stay was the same in specific AFSCs and in the Air Force as a whole.

VEHICLE OPERATORS AND DISPATCHERS (one AFSC)

Eight questions in our survey related to the intentions of women in the vehicle operator/dispatcher AFSC. One question asked if women believed they had been misinformed by Air Force recruiters or career counselors. Women who were less inclined to stay in the service were more likely to say that they had been misinformed at the time of enlistment. Of those intending to stay in the service, 8 percent said they were misinformed to a great extent, while 29 percent of those not intending to stay said they were misinformed to a great extent. In addition, the latter had more negative feelings about their current jobs and about supervisors who were officers.

1/Winston K. Chow and J. Michael Polich, Models of the First-Term Reenlistment Decision (RAND R-2468), Sept. 1980.

An individual's intention to stay in the service is significantly determined by the type of information received during the recruiting process. We and others 1/ have found that the more accurate recruits' perceptions are about jobs they will be holding, the less likely they are to quit those jobs. Also, in our previous study 2/ of recruiting malpractice, many Air Force recruiters and recruiting supervisors said that the misleading of applicants about conditions of service or benefits, assignment or school availability, and qualification requirements may be a problem.

Women vehicle operator/dispatchers who intended to remain in the Air Force said that they liked their current jobs more than the kinds of jobs they might have as civilians. They were also more likely to have talked with recruiters or career counselors about the possibility of changing AFSCs after enlistment. We concluded that they may have had more realistic expectations about their jobs when they entered the Air Force than those women with less positive attitudes.

Responses to certain questions about reenlistment intent were similar for males and females. Specifically, males who were less inclined to stay also

- had a more negative attitude toward officer supervisors,
- were likely to have felt misinformed by recruiters or career counselors, and
- were less likely to have discussed the changing of their AFSCs after enlistment.

Other responses to survey questions predictive of vehicle operator/dispatchers' intentions about staying were unique to males. For instance, those less inclined to reenlist

- were in lower pay grades,
- were single,
- spent less time on duties related to their primary AFSCs, and
- had negative feelings about enlisted supervisors.

1/"Student Attrition at the Five Federal Service Academies" (FPCD-76-12, Mar. 5, 1976) and John P. Wanous, Organizational Entry, Palisades, Cal.: Goodyear Publishing Co., 1981.

2/"Recruiting Malpractice: Extent, Causes, and Potentials for Improvement" (FPCD-81-34, July 20, 1981).

AIRCRAFT/GROUND EQUIPMENT MECHANICS (six AFSCs)

Ten questions related to the intentions of women in six aircraft/ground equipment mechanic AFSCs. Women less inclined to stay in the service compared their current jobs unfavorably with the kinds of jobs they might have as civilians. They also spent less time on duties related to their AFSCs than those more inclined to stay. Sixty-five percent of those who intend to stay in the service, compared to only 32 percent of those not intending to stay, spent most of their time on duties related to their AFSCs. Women less inclined to stay were also more likely to

- have negative feelings about Air Force pay and benefits and enlisted supervisors,
- indicate that recruiters had an impact on their decision to enlist,
- report having looked forward to working in their AFSC right after technical school,
- have an immediate supervisor other than an enlisted non-commissioned officer, and
- think it would be hard to change to a different AFSC.

The only item common to the prediction of intentions of men and women was the extent they liked or disliked their current military jobs compared with potential civilian jobs.

Five items were unique to the prediction of intentions of men. Males not intending to stay in the service were more likely to

- have an enlisted noncommissioned officer as a supervisor,
- have negative feelings toward officer supervisors,
- have had training similar to their AFSC before joining the Air Force,
- have been assigned to their current duty station for longer periods than males who intended to stay in the service, and
- believe that women in their AFSCs have better promotion opportunity.

ADMINISTRATION SPECIALISTS (one AFSC)

Women in the administration specialist AFSC who were less inclined to stay were more likely to compare their current jobs unfavorably with possible civilian jobs. They also

- felt negatively toward Air Force pay and benefits,
- believed it would be hard to change to a different AFSC,
- reported they were misinformed by recruiters or career counselors, and
- said they were told it would be easy to get out of the Air Force before completing their initial enlistment.

Women who intended to remain in the Air Force were more likely to have been older at initial enlistment than those who did not intend to stay.

Men who intended to remain in the Air Force were less likely to indicate that recruiters had a greater impact on their enlistment decisions than men who did not intend to stay. They also reported that their technical training was not challenging.

MEDICAL SERVICE/OPERATING ROOM SPECIALISTS (two AFSCs)

Women in two medical service/operating room specialist AFSCs who did not intend to stay in the Air Force were more likely than women intending to stay to compare their current jobs unfavorably with civilian options. They also were more negative about Air Force pay and benefits and more likely to have discussed with counselors or recruiters the possibility of leaving the Air Force early if they did not like it.

Men in this occupation who were less inclined to reenlist were also more likely than men intending to stay to like their current jobs less than possible civilian jobs and to have discussed leaving the Air Force early if they did not like it. Also, those men not intending to stay were more likely to report that a recruiter had influenced their enlistment decision.