



Military Menstruation: Stories of gender and periods within the New Zealand Army



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Literature review

Menstruation and the military contd.

- The body of research includes women's interest in menstrual suppression, the benefits of suppressing menstruation on deployment and the need for increased education regarding menstruation suppression. (Trego, 2007; Doherty & Scannell-Desch, 2011; Manski, Grindlay, Burns, Holt & Grossman, 2014; Wardell & Czerwinski, 2001).
- Current literature presents menstruation within the military context as an aspect of health that is an individual responsibility. ***Is being operationally ready an individual task, an organizational commitment or does it require a joint approach?***

Literature review

Menstruation and the military

- Women were **reluctant to provide information** regarding their experiences with menstruation on deployments as it might be used to support the idea that women **should not be in combat roles** or even in the military as a whole.
(Wardel & Czerwinski, 2001; Trego, 2007)
- “And what about PMS and that time of the month? Do we just stock Midol(*panadol*) and carry that around with us? There’s nothing good about that”.
(RAND National Defense Research Institute, 2015, p. 193).

Literature review

Menstruation and the military contd.

- “If you have other women that you work with, I think it makes it a little ... easier at least to ask, whereas if you’re in a chain of command with mostly men and no other women, or all men, I can’t say that even as an officer I’m gonna approach my department head or the XO and be like, ‘Hey, Sir, I’m having this female issue.’” (Manski et al., 2014, p.2)
- “If you say, ‘It’s a woman issue,’ they [the chain of command] would just be like, ‘I don’t wanna hear it, go!’” (Manski et al., 2014, p.2)

Literature review

Menstruation and the military contd.

- I don't know if it was because of the stress that we were under this assignment, but I would go like a couple of months, like three months, without having a period and then I had a period. It would be really heavy and at times I couldn't like move or do anything ... that just not sanitary, and it's hard when you're in a little space and you're trying to ... change your pad, or ... clean yourself and so — it's a real big inconvenience — not having a regular restroom to go to. ” (Trego, 2007, p. 3)
- If menstruation is seen as a barrier to operational readiness, ***menstrual suppression may become an expectation and individual responsibility rather than a choice.***

Responsiveness to Māori

As a bicultural nation, it is essential to include a Māori lens to this research, particularly noting the fact that 16% of the NZ Army is Māori (NZDF, 2017).

“narratives which position Māori women’s menstruating bodies as ‘pollutive’ are highly political and are a continuation of colonial violence and cultural genocide. This is because it perpetuates the dualistic language of conquest and denies our 123 cosmologies which inform us that menstrual blood is a medium of whakapapa that connects us to our pantheon of atua” (Murphy, 2017, p.122).

When waiwhero (menstruation) first arrived, there would be the giving of gifts, the community would get together to share kai and there would be a ceremonial bleeding onto the whenua as a gift to Papatūānuku (Murphy, 2019).

Although Murphy and many others are reclaiming Māori korero about menstruation, discussing waiwhero with wahine in the Army might still bring about discomfort.

Methodology

Aim:

Examine women's experiences of menstruation in the New Zealand Army and understand the influence of military systems and processes.

Key Research Questions:

- How do women in the New Zealand Army perceive menstruation and how is it managed in a military environment?
- How can narrative interviews add to our understanding of military women's menstrual experiences?
- How are women's experiences of menstruation negotiated in and shaped by the military environment?

Methodology contd.

Qualitative Study

Effective to gain a layered insight into a particular problem or phenomenon (Sutton, 2015).

Narrative Inquiry

Stories and individual voices at the heart of the research. Leaning on the complexity of stories to establish a greater understanding of a phenomenon or lived human experience (Lewis, 2017; Creswell, 2007).

Narrative interviews

Technique that allows participants to summarize their experiences and bring them to life by telling their story. The interviews will be semi-structured to allow a mix of both open-ended and more directed questions, including relevant prompts.

Key informant interviews

Given the importance on systems, hierarchy and processes within the Army, open, semi-structured interviews will be conducted with key military members to better understand the military environment and how it can shape women's experiences.

Selection of participants

Narrative Interviews

- 15 to 30 participants
- Recruitment will be facilitated through NZDF Organisational Research. The NZDF Organisational Research team will place posters in Army Health Centres as well as advertise the study in the Army News (organisational newsletter) and the intranet.
- Burnham, Linton, Waiouru and Trentham Camps
- Inclusion criteria:
 - Someone who menstruates or has menstruated in the past
 - Currently serving in the Army

Key informant interviews

- Up to 15 key informants
- Military health care workers, training instructors and members of the chain of command
- Burnham, Linton, Waiouru and Trentham Camps
- Topics that will be covered include:
 - Past experiences with menstrual management within their trade
 - Attitudes to menstruation in the Army
 - Existing processes and systems related to menstruation in the Army
 - Training on menstruation

Participants needed

I'm looking to recruit and interview women from a range of trades, ranks and location! The interview will last approximately 45min and can be done over zoom or in person. If you would like more information, have questions or are keen to get involved, please email me at

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Thank you