



**Care Responsibilities
and the Meaningful
Participation of Women in
Security Sector Institutions
of Troop and Police
Contributing Countries and
UN Peace Operations**

Literature Brief

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Monash University is conducting research on caring responsibilities as a key factor in the underrepresentation of women in UN peace operations. The project is funded by Global Affairs Canada (2023-26), as part of the Elsie Initiative.² The project is the first to identify the causes and consequences of marginalising women with caring responsibilities³ from security institutions in Troop and Police-Contributing Countries (T/PCCs) and UN peace operations. This project aims to propose ways to reduce this marginalisation and thereby improve rates of recruitment, retention of women in security institutions, and their subsequent deployment to UN peace operations. Through so doing, the project aims to improve women’s meaningful participation in UN peace operations, enhance operational effectiveness and advance gender equality. The expected results of the project also include UN peace operations and T/PCC security institutions being more gender-responsive and attentive to care responsibilities and needs, including the self-care and well-being of personnel. In turn, this is anticipated to contribute to improved workplace cultures and a reduction of the factors that can contribute to stress, burnout and safeguarding cases.

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Introduction

This project fills a gap in the literature on the impact of having caring responsibilities among peacekeepers and, specifically, how these caring responsibilities may contribute to the underrepresentation of uniformed women in UN peace operations. This remains an underexplored issue despite barriers to women's participation in security institutions and peacekeeping arising as a result of gendered assumptions about who is a security actor and who provides care, and the workplace cultures that sustain and (re)produce these assumptions within security institutions.⁴

This Literature Brief draws from academic and grey literature to map the current research landscape on gender and security sector institutions, situating key themes on women's representation and inclusion in the security sector and peacekeeping, and gender-responsive Security Sector Reform (SSR), alongside research on care and the workplace and the ethics of care. Doing so seeks to underscore the need to bring these discussions together to better understand how security sector institutions (with a focus on the armed forces and police) and UN peace operations can be more responsive to the needs of personnel with caring responsibilities and, in so doing, advance gender equality, improve workplace cultures, and promote more inclusive and effective practices.

The Brief begins by engaging with literature on women in the security sector and in UN peace operations, before discussing the concept of the meaningful participation of women, and examining literature on gender-responsive SSR and care and the workplace. The Brief concludes by outlining the opportunities that are present when these bodies of scholarship are drawn together, forming the basis of Monash University's project for the Elsie Initiative.



Women in the Security Sector

The past three decades has produced a substantial body of literature on the persisting barriers to women's meaningful participation in security institutions.⁵ Research focuses on how gendered stereotypes, assumptions, and roles create barriers that contribute to the underrepresentation of women in security institutions.⁶ This largely stems from, as Stephenson notes, historical structures of society whereby women's "roles as wives and mothers came first..." before their roles and identities as actors in public spaces (i.e. political and security spheres).⁷ A study by Vermeij examines how gender stereotypes regarding security continue to perceive women as weaker than men and, in turn, in need of protection (which is assumed to be given by men), rather than viewing women as legitimate security providers.⁸ Gender stereotypes also regard women as more empathetic, trustworthy, and less violent, with their role in security institutions regarded as being against their "nature".⁹ This perception of who provides security can create barriers to recruitment of women, even with images used in recruitment campaigns reinforcing gender stereotypes and acting as a deterrent to those who do not identify with who is being pictured as a security provider.¹⁰

Similarly, there is a prevailing assumption that women are physically and mentally weaker than men, with studies revealing how increasing the number of women in combat roles is viewed as a potential hindrance to the operational effectiveness and success, and is further perceived to undermine unit cohesion which is predominantly male dominated.¹¹ This is largely due to the solidarity between soldiers being built through masculine ideals of brotherhood, whereby feminine characteristics are seen as a "...weakness that will inhibit combat efficiency."¹² However, research shows little evidence to suggest that cohesion decreases with higher numbers of women,¹³ instead highlighting how persisting gender norms in security institutions are counterproductive and based on stereotypes that perceive the provision of security as a man's role.¹⁴ One study notes that women in the South African National Defence Force who reported feeling unsupported by their male colleagues and pressure to conform to masculinised behaviours, also reported that this division disappeared once deployed as there was a sense of comradeship and interdependence in the unit.¹⁵ The negative experience of the women officers prior to deployment highlights the importance of addressing gender biases and stereotypes, and further suggests that women often need to prove themselves in order to be accepted as members of the unit – which has been highlighted elsewhere.¹⁶



Photo: Si Longworth Photography, 2019

Assumptions about the kinds of societal roles men and women can, and should, occupy continue to create barriers for women's participation in security institutions, with women primarily expected to fulfil roles as caregivers. This often results in women being expected to fulfil caring and domestic responsibilities alongside their professional roles, resulting in many feeling that they need to choose between a family or a career.¹⁷ Although the gendered distribution of care work creates barriers for women's participation in most workforces,¹⁸ it presents a significant barrier for women entering security institutions given the gendered assumptions about who provides security, discussed above – if it is not typically women, it is even less typically mothers. Significant barriers to the security sector for women with caring responsibilities also arise because of the often harsher working conditions in the sector, namely the expectation to travel, long working hours, and dangerous work environments.¹⁹ One study finds that women in security institutions feel the need to “...[time] pregnancies to fit within rigid career time lines” in order to avoid missing critical opportunities for their career development, or feel they need to keep their family plans quiet early in their career.²⁰ Therefore, with gender norms perceiving women as caregivers and security provision as a male profession, the working conditions and masculinised cultures within security institutions fail to adequately respond to the needs of personnel with caring responsibilities. This negatively impacts both women and men, by being harmful to men in overlooking their roles in providing care and, thus, reinforcing the responsibility to provide care as belonging to women (often serving to further marginalise them from economic and political life). Therefore, challenging stereotypes around who gives care (and who provides security), and supporting carers in security institutions, regardless of gender, can positively contribute to alleviating some of the difficulties in establishing a work-life balance in security institutions.²¹

Studies on workplace cultures highlight the gendered nature of care and its impacts on women in the workforce, notably the barriers that prevent women’s meaningful participation, recognition, remuneration, and opportunity. For instance, Burgess writes on the ‘motherhood penalty’ experienced by many women in the workforce who have children, or who are of childbearing age, whereby their competency is questioned and their participation in the workforce negatively impacted.²² However, it is not experienced in the same way by men who become parents (or carers), as gender stereotypes present mothers as not being the “ideal worker” due to assumptions about their skills, capabilities, commitment, and priorities.²³ Moreover, given the gendered nature of care work and the fact that women typically are the main (or sole) carer, women’s time away from the workforce (during maternity and carers leave) hinders their career progression, and further feeds harmful gendered stereotypes about the capabilities – and reliability – of mothers. Men may suffer in other ways, of course, when they may feel discouraged to take paternal or carers leave, or their requests for support to respond to their caring responsibilities are not taken seriously.²⁴

Research on the marginalisation of women in security institutions emphasises the importance of organisational culture in hindering or advancing women’s inclusion. Finch, Huhtanen, and Bannister, for instance, refer to women’s marginalisation as arising from an organisational culture that has embedded traditional gender norms and positions men as legitimate security actors and therefore “...more suitable for



British Army Warrant Officer. Photo: Cpl. Elizabeth Scott, 2019

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elite jobs...”²⁵ Given security institutions continue to be dominated by men and viewed as a masculine profession, women face discrimination within these institutions, such as harassment, stereotyping, and discrimination. Unconscious gender biases can also manifest among officers, with women who conform to masculinised behaviours and cultures often being more accepted by male colleagues.²⁶ Biases are subtle and can be difficult to identify, with other subtle barriers manifesting in promotion and deployment processes, ineffective reporting systems

and response mechanisms for complaints of harassment and misconduct, and working conditions that are not conducive for personnel with caring responsibilities, thus limiting their career progression.²⁷ This not only impacts the women working in security institutions, whose careers may be negatively affected by gendered assumptions and norms, but may also serve as a deterrent for other women wanting to enter security institutions.

Persisting gender stereotypes, assumptions, and roles not only create barriers to women wanting to enter the security sector, but also impact their careers within these institutions. A concern highlighted across the literature is the retention of female officers across all security institutions.²⁸ For instance, a study on the retention of women in the United States Air Force finds lower levels of women in senior leadership positions in comparison to the higher number of women occupying lower ranks.²⁹ This finding indicates lower numbers of women either remaining in the institution or fewer leadership opportunities available to them. The study identifies key factors that impact whether women remain in the Air Force, with the family life of the officer being the main influencing factor, noting the challenges of caring for children (especially if the partner is also in the armed forces and deployed), long working hours, and a lack of childcare facilities.³⁰ Gender roles that perceive women as primary caregivers are reinforced through a lack of organisational policies to support carers. This creates additional challenges in accessing leadership roles among women with caring responsibilities given the reduced opportunities for deployment and training, and in some cases, restrictions on what positions women can occupy (i.e. combat roles) in the armed forces which limits their leadership opportunities.³¹

Underrepresentation of women in all ranks and roles have broad implications across security institutions, preventing meaningful change in male-dominated organisational cultures and low numbers of women in leadership meaning fewer role models and mentors for other women.³² Vermeij reports that the persisting lower numbers of women in security institutions often leaves women feeling monitored and “policed” due to a sense of being “more visible” in the male-dominated sector. This leaves many to feel pressured to outperform their male colleagues and prove their capabilities.³³ The burden placed on women to work harder to combat persisting gender stereotypes that women are weaker, undermines ongoing efforts to increase women’s participation in security institutions.³⁴ Moreover, it suggests that women continue to face barriers once they have obtained a role in security institutions, indicating an organisational culture that remains male-dominated and masculinised.

While assumptions that women’s participation in security institutions, particularly defence institutions, can compromise operational effectiveness, as mentioned earlier, there has been some research that has demonstrated that women’s participation in security institutions can positively impact operational effectiveness.³⁵ This is particularly evident in contexts where social norms restrict women’s access to security, including their ability to report issues which is argued to be positively increased where female officers are present.³⁶ Moreover, in contexts where there are rigid gender norms on who should perform security roles (predominantly being viewed as a man’s role), research suggests that these norms influence how female security providers view themselves and their own abilities to perform their duties.³⁷ These gender norms can hinder the career progression of, and opportunities for, women in security institutions, with research suggesting that leadership continues to be more reluctant to deploy women, particularly to higher risk contexts, to be less likely to deploy women who have children, and less likely to appoint women to tactical roles, regardless of their skills and experience.³⁸

Low numbers of women, and a failure to ensure their meaningful participation, as will be discussed shortly, has gendered effects and outcomes that can further marginalise women in security institutions. For instance, a study on military families finds that “most military programs are not tailored to families of female service members” due to their lower levels of representation. As a result, additional stress is placed on families of female personnel, seeing double the number of divorces among female personnel than male.³⁹ Lower representation of women in the workforce is explored more broadly across literature, seen for instance in a study by Rummery and Fine who discuss the impact of unpaid care work being disproportionately taken on by women, particularly those in lower-paid employment. This, they argue, results in women taking more time off from employment due to caring responsibilities, impacting their long term financial income and representation in the workforce.⁴⁰ Further, women’s roles and responsibilities in the domestic sphere reduces their capacity to participate in political activities, which in turn reduces their representation and limits the extent to which their voices are heard in decision- and policy-making processes.⁴¹

While scholarship has investigated the challenges women continue to face in the security sector and the barriers to the recruitment, retention, and promotion of women, scholarship has also looked at the efforts to address these challenges and barriers. For instance a recent report by Albu and Marzac focuses on the Government of Moldova's implementation of the Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) agenda to address barriers women face and challenge gender stereotypes, increase opportunities for personnel with caring responsibilities, adopt more inclusive and responsive human resources policies, address sexual and gender-based violence in the security sector, strengthen transparency, and increase civil society participation.⁴² Although efforts such as these have been made to increase the representation and treatment of women in the security sector, literature overwhelmingly agrees that efforts have fallen short of meaningful change with persisting gender norms, rules, and expectations undermining policies to enhance gender equality in security sector institutions.⁴³

In the Policing and Gender Tool, part of the Gender and Justice Toolkit (DCAF, UN Women, OSCE ODIHR) providing policy and programmatic guidance to those working within or alongside security and justice sector institutions and seeking to advance gender responsiveness, a number of recommendations are proposed to enhance the retention of women in security institutions, these include:

- Establishing mentoring programs to help advance the careers of women
- Implementing quotas in training and deployment
- Introducing career development programmes to increase women's leadership
- Establishing more police associations (including women and LGBTQI+)
- Ensuring women are represented across all sectors and are not solely assigned to gendered roles
- Conducting ongoing reviews and evaluations of policies, including salaries, and family leave and support
- Reforming selection criteria and promotion panels.⁴⁴

Studies seek to highlight the impacts of gender norms on what roles women can and should occupy, and how these norms restrict women's participation in security institutions and undermine efforts to advance gender equality.⁴⁵ It should be noted, however, that both men and women hold biases regarding gender roles⁴⁶ and therefore efforts to address these biases should include all personnel regardless of gender, background, and rank. In a recent study on gender and the military, Watson argues that in order to advance gender equality in security institutions, gender stereotypes need to be addressed among men and women to shift perceptions on what roles men and women should occupy. For example, increasing men in nursing roles in the South African National Defence Force is noted as a way of challenging gender stereotypes and biases.⁴⁷ By addressing these stereotypes and rigid gender norms, it is believed women will have more meaningful access to roles in security institutions, enhancing their participation in providing security and creating more opportunities for career development, including leadership and deployment.

Deployment of Women

Barriers to women's participation in security institutions, notably the armed forces, also impacts the extent to which women are deployed on peace operations, as well as other operations and missions, including combat operations and humanitarian missions. Where women are underrepresented in the armed forces, police, and correctional services, they will – of course – be less likely to be represented in deployments. Moreover, women in security institutions may face additional challenges when seeking to be deployed. A country's likelihood to deploy women is influenced by gender norms and expectations. Where gender norms situate women as lacking security expertise or capabilities, needing protection, or being weak or nurturing, women may be less likely to be deployed. These gender norms and expectations can also restrict women's ability to enter the armed forces and access opportunities to advance their career, as well as influence the way they are treated by others (which also has implications for women's retention and promotion). By way of contrast, countries with higher levels of gender equality and stronger gender mainstreaming policies and practices within their military are more likely to deploy women.⁴⁸

This said, even where there are tangible efforts to advance gender equality and gender responsiveness within the armed forces, gendered assumptions prevail about women as lacking the skills and inclination to work in the sector, or as being physically weaker than men, as noted above.⁴⁹ As a result, the security sector remains dominated by men, even where women have demonstrated their combat skills. For instance, in Nepal, where 30 percent of the People's Liberation Army (PLA) were women, only 3 percent were integrated into the security sector after the conflict due to sustained gender norms around women's roles, namely caring responsibilities.⁴⁸ The expectation that women provide care not only marginalises them from meaningful participation in security institutions (and other formal institutions), but also – paradoxically – helps sustain these institutions that are dependent on the care work provided by women, thus often enabling male spouses to be deployed on operations.⁵¹

Other barriers to deployment include women having less access to information about deployment opportunities, as well as eligibility criteria that requires a certain amount of time in service, making higher numbers of women than men ineligible due to typically spending less time in security institutions, including as a result of career breaks due to childbirth or caring responsibilities.⁵²

Aside from challenges women face in being deployed, studies also reveal the challenges women experience during deployment, including instances where they have been deployed as part of efforts to increase the number of women. Such studies cite an environment of resentment and hostility towards women recruits.⁵³ This is found to be the case where women are appointed to junior roles. It has also been found to be the case, perhaps surprisingly, where women have been appointed

to leadership positions, resulting in bullying, isolation, and exclusion by peers, and increased competition among women to be recognised for higher positions.⁵⁴

Of course, challenges felt by personnel during deployment are not only experienced by women, with most who are deployed facing difficulties due to long periods of separation from family and friends, complex working environments, and long working hours.⁵⁵ Among these challenges include family-related stress whereby those on deployment face concerns about their family members while away, with security institutions attempting to address these stressors by increasing access to communication and mental health support. However, it is acknowledged that the support available for deployed personnel largely depends on the country the officer is deployed from and the available resources.⁵⁶

Although – until recently – an overlooked topic in scholarly and grey literature, caring responsibilities are recognised as being a significant barrier faced by women to accessing roles in security institutions and, significantly, whether they are deployed. This is due to the gendered nature of care work (with women typically undertaking more care work than men), gendered assumptions that women (and not men) who have children are less capable (because they may take time off, be distracted, have other priorities), and lack of institutional support to better balance both care work and paid work responsibilities (which harms both women and men,



UN Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) Malaysia Women Peacekeepers. Photo: Cpl UN Photo/Pasqual Gorriz, 2012

but in different ways).⁵⁷ These barriers are faced by women globally, with studies highlighting the impact on recruitment, retention, and career advancement as a result of caregiving.⁵⁸ For instance, a study on the Australian Defence Force (ADF) found that close to 90 percent of male personnel in the most senior ranks (star ranks) had children, while only 22 percent of women in the same ranks had children.⁵⁹ This indicates that women with children may find it more difficult to be promoted than their male counterparts with children, and often face the decision: "...choose a family or a career".⁶⁰ This similarly suggests that, given the high numbers of star ranked men with children, male personnel largely rely on their partners to provide care to their children and as a result do not have their career progression impacted as greatly as female personnel. Given deployment is an important component of career progression in security institutions, the study findings point to the eligibility for promotions to be hindered by a lack of deployment opportunities (among other factors, such as training) among female personnel based on their caring roles and expectations.

In studies of gender and security institutions, the issue of sexual assault, harassment, and violence is frequently cited as persisting issues impacting women in security institutions, becoming a critical barrier for women when deployed.⁶¹ This is not unique to the security sector and is also evident in scholarship on the broader humanitarian sector.⁶² It does, however, highlight the issue of organisational culture which is emphasised by scholars who seek to uncover the masculinised cultures dominant in security institutions which sustain environments that (re) produce gendered violence and undermine efforts to enhance gender equality.⁶³ This masculinised military culture in security institutions is frequently discussed in literature on peacekeeping, manifesting in similar or more extreme cultures that reinforce harmful gender stereotypes and violence.⁶⁴ This impacts the meaningful participation of women in security institutions and peace operations, as well as – more specifically – the participation of women with caring responsibilities. Research on the marginalisation of carers in peacebuilding has indicated that harmful workplace cultures are a contributory factor to women with caring responsibilities 'choosing' to leave the sector. Further, their departure – and the lack of organisational support they receive, further feeds these harmful workplace cultures with consequences for all peacebuilders and peacebuilding beneficiaries.⁶⁵

As has been highlighted, caring responsibilities have a critical impact on women working in security institutions and deployed on operations and missions, including peace operations, influencing opportunities for promotions, deployment, and development, with research noting a tension between family and work life in the sector.⁶⁶ Research on the impact of caring responsibilities on the recruitment and deployment of women in security institutions emphasises the need for more supportive policies that are attentive to the needs of carers and those they care for.⁶⁷ Increasing the number of deployed women is believed to have a positive impact on women across security institutions more broadly, serving as role models for other women, creating a positive relationship between deployment of women and career progression.⁶⁸ Here, it is argued that women trailblazers hold an influential role in shifting organisational cultures by demonstrating their capabilities to take on a wide

range of roles and ranks.⁶⁹ To overcome challenges around women's recruitment, retention, promotion and deployment, efforts are being made to increase the number of women in security institutions and there is increasing recognition of the barriers that caring responsibilities, in particular, have in this regard. This is evident in the 2020 NATO summary of member and partner nations report which finds that the average percentage of women in NATO members' armed forces is at 13 percent, with many states focusing on implementing initiatives to support a greater work-life balance, implementing policies on maternity, paternity, and parental leave, and introducing more part-time roles to support caregivers.⁷⁰

This Literature Brief, having highlighted the barriers women face in entering security institutions and accessing opportunities for deployment, will now turn to scholarship on women in UN peace operations to highlight the specific gender norms, structures, and relations that emerge in peace operations.

Women in UN Peace Operations

There has been a concerted effort over the past decade to increase the number – and meaningful participation – of women in UN peace operations, most notably demonstrated in the UN’s Uniformed Gender Parity Strategy (2018-2028)⁷¹ and Government of Canada’s Elsie Initiative for Women in Peace Operations.⁷² This has occurred alongside global initiatives to improve the recruitment and retention of women in T/PCCs.⁷³ However, numbers continue to remain low across peace operations. As of 2022, women comprise only 7.8% of uniformed personnel, and the proportion of female troops from T/PCCs is only 6.8% (compared with the UN Uniformed Gender Parity Strategy target of 9%).⁷⁴ Although numbers continue to gradually rise, with a previous study showing women only made 3 percent of military personnel in 2013,⁷⁵ women are often assigned to gendered roles such as administrative, nursing, or community engagement duties, and are not deployed to missions with higher levels of combat or risk.⁷⁶ Instead evidence indicates that women “...may be deployed to missions that are most amenable to women and thus may not face the multitude of barriers...”⁷⁷ This suggests that increasing numbers of women being deployed may not be addressing the structural barriers nor the gender norms that prevent women from meaningfully participating in security institutions and peace operations.

There has been a concerted effort over the past decade to increase the number – and meaningful participation – of women in UN peace operations, most notably demonstrated in the UN’s Uniformed Gender Parity Strategy (2018-2028) and Government of Canada’s Elsie Initiative for Women in Peace Operations.

The literature on gender and peacekeeping seeks to uncover the persisting barriers that women continue to face in deployment to UN peace operations.⁷⁸ For instance, a recent report on women police officers identifies key barriers as being a lower awareness of deployment opportunities, as touched upon in the previous section, eligibility criteria that requires more experience in the service than many women have, and stigma or concerns over leaving their children. For those who do deploy, many report feeling ill-prepared due to inadequate pre-deployment training, including being assigned gender roles

and expected to intuitively know how to integrate gender into the mission without appropriate gender training.⁷⁹ However, while attention is predominantly paid to these barriers, some studies highlight the initiatives that have been undertaken by the UN and T/PCCs to advance women's participation in peace operations, with all-female police units being among those frequently cited.⁸⁰ Despite these initiatives, there remains an emphasis across the literature that women continue to be assigned roles that stem from gender stereotypes regarding women's 'peaceful' character and natural ability to respond to gender issues.⁸¹ This is shown to be evident even in the all-female police units, whereby the first unit sent to Liberia from India were largely praised for their community engagement rather than their capacity to protect civilians, ultimately reinforcing the notion that security is a man's role.⁸²

When to deploy women to peace operations is also explored in scholarship, with Tidblad-Lundholm discussing the lower numbers of women deployed to higher risk peace operations, arguing that there is an "...uncertainty associated with deploying personnel to a new mission."⁸³ This uncertainty is based on the risk factors considered in deployment decisions, significantly the uncertainty around local perceptions towards the peace operation and the duration of the mission, with T/PCCs found to deploy women later in a peace operation once it is more established and stable.⁸⁴ Given the expectation that increasing the number of women will contribute to operational outcomes and improve mission culture to reduce instances of misconduct, for instance (discussed shortly), the later deployment of women peacekeepers raises questions regarding the effectiveness of women's contributions to the peace operation if the mission and its culture has already been established by the predominantly male troops sent in earlier stages.



Peacekeeper serving UNMISS.
Photo: UNMISS/Gregorio
Cunha, 2023

Literature on gender and UN peace operations highlights the gendered assumptions associated with women's roles in peacekeeping, from negative stereotypes regarding their capabilities as security providers, to stereotypes that their femininity will make them naturally attune to gender issues (such as gender-based violence).⁸⁵ For instance, there is a prevailing perception that women will improve the effectiveness and legitimacy of UN peace operations based on behaviours and norms associated with gender (femininity), despite there being little evidence to suggest that men and women peacekeepers behave differently.⁸⁶ As a result, when women are deployed to UN peace operations, scholarship suggests that they are often assigned to gendered roles (such as Gender Advisors) due to persisting gender norms, roles, and stereotypes.⁸⁷ Kumalo, for instance, finds that female police officers deployed to UN peace operations are more often assigned to "safe" tasks, such as support units or community engagement, while male officers are more likely to be assigned to frontline and leadership roles.⁸⁸ This is similarly noted by Gordon, McHugh, and Townsley who highlight how informal gender norms and rules,⁸⁹ which posit that security provision is a man's role and the male "bonding process" needs protecting,⁹⁰ marginalise women to administrative or "soft" duty.⁹¹

Related to this is the commonplace conflation of 'gender' and 'women', which places the responsibility of increasing the gender responsiveness of peace operations onto women peacekeepers. When women are deployed, in other words, they are expected to fulfil all gender-related tasks. For instance, women peacekeepers are: 1) relied upon to enter gendered spaces to gather information that men may be unable to access; 2) expected to reduce the rates of sexual exploitation and abuse within peace operations by countering masculinity; 3) assumed to be more equipped to respond to sexual and gender-based violence; and 4) required to build trust with the



Female engagement patrol, MONUSCO. Photo MONUSCO/Michael Ali, 2018

local community based on the assumption that women are more trustworthy and less likely to use violence than men.⁹² These gendered roles and expectations lead some to argue that this places a “burden” onto women who are assigned with the duty to improve peace operations, often leaving them to meet impossible standards and expectations, while absolving male colleagues of the responsibility to enhance gender-responsive peacekeeping.⁹³ Furthermore, Wilén explores the assumption that women have an “added benefit” based on the perception that women uniquely contribute to peacekeeping due to traits associated with femininity (such as empathy). However, she argues that more evidence is required – notably higher numbers of women – to adequately explain if, and why, women are more likely to promote peace and how they contribute to operational outcomes and organisational cultures.⁹⁴ Calls to shift away from the essentialist portrayal of women is echoed by Hernandez, who argues that simply increasing the number of women to promote more gender-responsive peacekeeping is “over-simplified” as decision-making remains male-dominated.⁹⁵ Thus, structural changes need to be made alongside efforts to increase the number of women, including addressing organisational cultures and structures to be more inclusive.

Moving beyond the focus on women as sole contributors and pioneers for the gender-responsiveness of peace operations, Finch, Huhtanen, and Bannister call for an “organisational culture reboot” to address the key challenges women face in security institutions to improve gender responsiveness, inclusiveness, and overall operational outcomes.⁹⁶ Organisational cultures are identified as an integral component of transforming security institutions and peace operations to be more inclusive, with some studies arguing that there is a prevailing “warrior” ethos in security institutions. This privileges behaviours which are regarded as masculine, such as aggressive behaviours that centre physical strength and domination, and discourages feminine behaviours such as empathy and compassion.⁹⁷ Of course, the type of mission itself and its mandate can determine the type of culture that will be present, with factors such as gender-awareness training of personnel and the local conflict dynamics (including whether high or low risk) influencing gender relations within the peace operation.⁹⁸ In contexts where the “warrior” ethos, or a militarised masculinity, is the dominant form of masculinity, there is a tendency to portray the “ideal” soldier as a brave, strong, heterosexual male, reinforcing stereotypes and gendered cultures within peace operations which privileges a certain type of man.⁹⁹ Consequently, the “warrior” ethos may simultaneously discourage the deployment of women in peace operations, while feeding gendered assumptions about women’s place, capabilities and strengths. Heinecken, for instance, writes on the militaristic nature of peacekeeping, with combat being centred in training for national militaries and peacekeeping deployment, observing that women “...have no choice but to conform and assimilate masculine values, norms and practices to be judged as capable soldiers.”¹⁰⁰ Furthermore, the men in Heinecken’s study reveal that women were viewed as incapable of occupying combat positions, perceiving them as “physically, psychologically and emotionally less capable” of being on the frontlines.¹⁰¹ Elsewhere, it is argued that the prioritisation of militarised masculinity “...contributes to the gendering...” of peace operations, evident in the underrepresentation of women in the male-dominated institution.¹⁰²

Some research has shown that despite efforts by the UN and strategic partners to increase the number of women in peace operations, participation - especially meaningful participation - is hindered by masculinised institutional cultures within T/PCCs and peace operations. Also showing how these cultures hinder meaningful change that is promised by the increased participation of women and efforts to advance gender equality,¹⁰³ is research suggesting that this culture of militarised masculinity overlooks the balance between parenthood and military life.¹⁰⁴ Moreover, the reliance of women's representation to address structural issues within peacekeeping that stem from institutionalised military masculinities, fails to meaningfully promote their participation and inclusion by placing the burden of change solely on women (as previously discussed).¹⁰⁵ Sexual exploitation and abuse (SEA) within peace operations is often situated in this discussion, with several studies noting militarised masculinity and gender power structures as driving factors of gendered violence given the promotion of physical domination.¹⁰⁶ On this, some studies note that women's presence has a "civilising" effect on personnel and can encourage changes in male behaviours, reducing rates of SEA and instances of misconduct.¹⁰⁷

To address the continually low number of women being deployed to UN peace operations, in the Policing and Gender Tool, Denney recommends changes be made within security institutions, including:

- T/PCCs increase the number of women being selected and deployed and introduce a requirement for T/PCCs to send at least one subunit of female officers
- Reform the selection process to enable more opportunities for women to apply for deployment
- Increase training prior to deployment for officers and introduce training for recruiters as well
- Increase development and training to support a "talent pipeline"
- Improve facilities and accommodation in missions
- Conduct ongoing research into the barriers faced by women at all stages of their careers.¹⁰⁸

These recommendations are echoed in the UN's Pledging Guide for the 2023 United Nations Peacekeeping Ministerial, which calls for the creation of a database to track the number of women who are eligible for deployment, the establishment of mentoring programs and networks, barriers to women's access to leadership be addressed, and gender-responsive training for men and women in leadership positions.¹⁰⁹ Similarly, a report by RAND emphasises the integration of a gender perspective across all levels and operations of peacekeeping to improve its effectiveness,¹¹⁰ shifting away from placing responsibility onto women personnel and recognising the shared duty to improve gender-responsiveness in peacekeeping.

A report on measuring opportunities for women in peace operations (MOWIP) by the Geneva Centre for Security Sector Governance (DCAF)¹¹¹, provides a

number of recommendations.¹¹² First, the study reveals that peacekeepers identify communication and capacity to work amongst multicultural colleagues as the two most important skills required for peace operations, while the UN criteria did not mention these skills and instead privileged “...demonstrated ability to drive a 4x4 and handle a small arm (combat).”¹¹³ The report suggests that reforming the skills criteria for deployment to UN peace operations can increase opportunities for women’s deployment, and also provide an opportunity to diversify skillsets among personnel more broadly.¹¹⁴ It is also recommended that personnel conduct a character assessment prior to deployment to determine their attitudes and beliefs “...in relation to UN and [peace operation] values and mandates” to identify harmful opinions and assumptions around gender.¹¹⁵ A third recommendation is regarding social exclusion in peace operations, whereby instances of harassment and bullying marginalise women and undermine efforts to increase gender equality in security institutions. The report recommends strengthening reporting mechanisms, including an informal process to help identify and respond to harassment earlier, as well providing bystander and awareness raising training among personnel – both at the UN and T/PCC level.

Finally, the MOWIP report recommends more resources and attention be given to mental health support for those who are to be deployed, and during and after deployment. The research finds that women reported more issues after returning from deployment, such as higher rates of divorce or their partner cheating on them, which may have a negative influence over whether they decide to deploy again – or influence whether other women deploy. This is particularly so when women have primary caring responsibilities and may view deployment as having a negative impact on the household and family structure. This said, the report recommends more mental health support be given to personnel to support them and their families prior to, during, and following deployment.¹¹⁶

This Literature Brief will now turn to the meaningful participation of women to highlight calls for greater attention to transformative actions that address some of the key challenges discussed thus far.



MONUSCO’s Pakistani Female Engagement Team, MONUSCO. Photo: MONUSCO/Kevin Jordan, 2020

Meaningful Participation

Greater inclusion and representation are assumed to result in more needs, concerns, and priorities being captured and reflected in political and peace processes. Therefore, it is expected that through increased participation of women (and other groups) political and peace processes will be more effective.¹¹⁷ However, literature suggests that without addressing structural inequalities and ensuring meaningful participation, simply ‘adding women’ will not enhance outcomes.¹¹⁸ For instance, Bastick, Grimm, and Kunz, argue that efforts should not be solely focused on recruitment of women, but also on enhancing effective retention strategies to ensure their meaningful participation and advancement in the security sector.¹¹⁹ Indeed, simply recruiting women without considering the structures to which they are recruited can expose women to harm.¹²⁰ Similarly, recruiting women to gendered roles and not creating processes that will enable their promotion and influence will simply justify and sustain the gendered status quo.¹²¹

For security institutions, ensuring women’s meaningful participation requires effective retention and promotion strategies as well as recruitment drives, and efforts to challenges gender norms and biases that may marginalise women and feed harmful workplace cultures.¹²² For UN peace operations, meaningful participation “is demonstrated by the presence and leadership of women in UN peace operations, across all ranks and functions.”¹²³ This means women:

- ... contribute to, and are included in, all aspects of operational and mission planning, and decision-making processes
- ... hold operational command and leadership positions, and non-traditional as well as non-stereotypical roles
- ... have access to the same training, promotion and career advancement opportunities as their colleagues who are men
- ... hold positions that are in line with their training, rank and area of expertise [and]... their workplace is free from all forms of harassment, bullying and intimidation¹²⁴

Other research has highlighted the importance of leadership to address challenges to women’s meaningful participation, including the impact that responsive leadership models can have on facilitating access to opportunities among women peacekeepers and creating a supportive workplace culture. According to Rudberg, meaningful participation of women requires more than just increasing numbers, it demands greater access to leadership, training, and decision-making.¹²⁵ However, women are found to be less likely in leadership positions, as men are often promoted before women, with those who are in senior roles often reporting they face resistance by male colleagues who undermine their work.¹²⁶

Efforts to improve the meaningful participation of women in security institutions are increasingly seen in Security Sector Reform (SSR) programmes. It is recognised across scholarship that SSR provides an opportunity to integrate gender-responsive policies and practices into an institution.¹²⁷ A gender-responsive SSR moves beyond solely increasing the representation and participation of women to demand attentiveness to the gendered implications and dynamics behind decision-making, the ways in which gendered power structures impact people in different ways, and the different security needs of different people.¹²⁸ Literature on gender-responsive SSR will now be examined in relation to women's participation in security institutions and their subsequent deployment in peace operations.



UNMISS Force commander pinning UN services medals. UN Photo: Isaac Billy, 2022

Gender-responsive Security Sector Reform

A substantial body of literature on SSR has developed over the past two decades, examining the theory, policy, and practice behind (re)forming and (re)strengthening security institutions, notably following conflict.¹²⁹ Studies on SSR argue that a key objective is to increase civilian oversight of security institutions, promote the rule of law, protect human rights, and advance both state and human security.¹³⁰ Building from the latter point, Larzilliére notes a discursive shift away from traditional, state-centric approaches to security and towards a focus on human security, a concept which centres the needs of people and seeks to enhance living conditions in addition to security measures.¹³¹ Alongside this discursive shift, in policy discourse and scholarship, there has been greater attentiveness to the relationship between gender and security institutions. Policy frameworks,¹³² policy guidance,¹³³ and scholars have argued that SSR provides an opportunity to implement and advance gender-responsive policies to increase women's participation in security institutions, while also improving the effectiveness of these institutions in addressing the security needs of the population.¹³⁴

Integrating gender into SSR processes is considered an important and vital way of enhancing the effectiveness of security institutions, by recognising and responding to the needs of more diverse populations, ensuring security institutions are more locally owned, and involve greater participation with more groups and communities.¹³⁵ It is further believed that where security institutions are more representative of diverse groups, there is increased delivery of security and justice, greater responsiveness to diverse security and justice needs, and increased recognition and protection of human rights.¹³⁶ Thus, by integrating (or mainstreaming) gender into reform processes, it is argued that security institutions are more attentive to the impact of security policies and operations on different populations, and how (in)security is felt differently across groups.¹³⁷ Doing so also reforms institutional processes to improve the recruitment, retention, and career opportunities for women,¹³⁸ by recognising a broader range of security needs and thus security providers.

Security institutions can (re)produce gender structures and relations through their actions and interactions with broader society, namely through discourse, policies, and agendas, and are themselves "...organizations with their own gender regimes and patterns."¹³⁹ This is supported by Gordon, McHugh, and Townsley who argue that institutions (re)produce, and function within, social and gender norms, relations, and structures.¹⁴⁰ Therefore, gender-responsive SSR demands attentiveness to the gendered implications and dynamics behind decision-making, to the ways in which gendered power structures impact men, women, and people of diverse gender identities, and to the different security needs of different people.¹⁴¹ Multiple studies examine the extent to which gender-responsive SSR has been effective, focusing

predominantly on conflict-affected environments.¹⁴² For instance, a study by Cousins on police reform in Solomon Islands posits that gender-responsive SSR utilises opportunities that emerge in the wake of conflict to introduce policies that promote women's inclusion and leadership, and shift gender norms and relations to advance gender equality more broadly.¹⁴³ The post-conflict context presents a critical juncture to implement changes, whereby the continuation of harmful gender power structures and relations into a post-conflict context enables an environment for gendered violence to persist or even worsen.¹⁴⁴

Gender-responsive SSR processes are argued to benefit security institutions and local populations, by increasing the diversity and inclusiveness of the institution and allowing it to draw from the range of skills and knowledge of its staff, while being more representative of the population in which it serves.¹⁴⁵ They are further argued to support the economic empowerment of women working in the sector who can then act as a 'role model' to other women and girls.¹⁴⁶ Most studies, however, point to the shortcomings of gender-responsive SSR, with key critiques of gender-responsive SSR echoing critiques in the efforts to increase women's participation in peace operations (as previously outlined). This includes the over-emphasis on the role of women in changing cultures of violent masculinities within security institutions,¹⁴⁷ the essentialist portrayal of women that links their roles in security institutions solely to addressing gender issues,¹⁴⁸ and failing to address the Westernised (neo-colonial) model of reform that (re)produces and sustains global power imbalances through a top-down approach.¹⁴⁹



MINUSCA Peacekeeper. Photo: UN Photo/Eskinder Debebe, 2017

By enhancing the meaningful participation of women, beyond numbers, it is argued that initiatives to make security institutions more diverse strengthens its capacity to meet a wider range of needs within the population, improving operational effectiveness, and diversifying skills and knowledge of staff.

The aforementioned report by Denney on women in the police force cites the need for more policies that support affirmative action, flexible working arrangements, and equipment and facilities that meet the needs of different people, while also noting the need for a shift in organisational culture within the security sector.¹⁵⁰ Thus, reforms to security institutions should go beyond reforming policies and procedures to also include reforming the organisational cultures that (re) produce gender relations and norms within these institutions and peace operations. For instance, Bastick, Grimm, and Kunz argue that shifting

the male-dominated security institutions and work cultures requires gender training among all personnel, alongside the reforms of guidelines, procedures, and policies to increase the sensitivity, inclusiveness, and responsiveness of the sector.¹⁵¹ Gender training has been highlighted elsewhere as a way of shifting the attitudes, beliefs, and assumptions held by peacekeepers (and actors in security institutions more broadly). It is argued to help raise awareness of barriers women in particular face, and addressing harmful, discriminatory, and abusive behaviours through ongoing training throughout all career stages by both T/PCCs and the UN.¹⁵² Moreover, it is argued that shifting organisational cultures also includes the promotion of more “positive masculinities” that challenge the persisting militarised masculinities in security institutions and instead encourages a more inclusive culture.¹⁵³ With others noting that to address the structural inequalities within security institutions, men and masculinities must too be considered in reform processes to avoid placing responsibilities for change on women.¹⁵⁴

Despite criticisms that focusing solely on increasing the number of women in security institutions enacts change - many scholars call for structural changes alongside the representation of 155 - it is generally accepted that making security institutions more inclusive is beneficial to the institution’s culture and its goals.¹⁵⁶ By enhancing the meaningful participation of women, beyond numbers, it is argued that initiatives to make security institutions more diverse strengthens its capacity to meet a wider range of needs within the population, improving operational effectiveness, and diversifying skills and knowledge of staff.¹⁵⁷ Therefore, gender-responsive SSR aims to ensure women’s participation is more meaningful (and less tokenistic) and improve the organisational culture by shifting away from militarised masculinities and making

a more inclusive work environment. This said, scholars argue that there needs to be continued effort to make structural changes alongside increasing the number of women, with the integration of women into male-dominated institutions potentially increasing their risk of physical harm, particularly in contexts where gender norms restrict the role of women in public spaces.¹⁵⁸ This also includes being attentive to the burden and pressures placed on women who are among the first to take on leadership roles, whereby efforts should also be made to shift the organisational culture to ensure women leaders do not face backlash or harm. This can be done through increased training on gender and human rights among all personnel and reforming institutional policies to be more gender-responsive and provide opportunities for more women in leadership roles, addressing critical barriers, such as care leave and responsibilities, that hinder women's participation.¹⁵⁹

Human resource management (HRM) is identified across scholarship as an important tool in advancing women's meaningful and equal participation in security institutions.¹⁶⁰ This includes the development of policies that address barriers to women's participation, such as ensuring equal pay measures are in place, and introducing policies that encourage retention of staff with caring responsibilities, such as flexible working hours and arrangements and improve access to parental leave.¹⁶¹ Diversifying staff and ensuring a wider range of people have access to different roles enables institutions, operations and functions to draw from a larger pool of skills and capabilities. This is important in complex contexts such as UN peace operations, which are required to address a wide range of security issues, from armed conflict to gender-based violence, and benefit from diverse skills and experiences among peacekeepers who are deployed.¹⁶² Further, research also recommends that human resource policies be improved to offer more carers leave, shorter contracts and, where feasible, more family duty stations to allow more families to remain together when a family member is deployed.¹⁶³ Drawing from literature on workplace cultures and care, the next section will highlight some key ideas on addressing harmful cultures within workplace environments to advance greater inclusion and representation in security institutions, particularly of personnel with caring responsibilities.

Care and the Workplace

In the outlined discussions on efforts to increase the meaningful participation of women in security institutions, there has been little discussion on how theories and values of care can contribute to gender parity and gender equality efforts. Research on care ethics has contributed to broader studies on gender-responsive institutions and societies, with many studies focusing on justice, social work, academic, and economic institutions.¹⁶⁴ However, it has, to date, largely overlooked how an ethics of care can transform military cultures. According to Trujano and Lévesque, care is defined as the “...direct care of persons, such as children, the elderly, persons with illnesses or disabilities, and others.”¹⁶⁵ It ensures the “physical or safety needs” of the care recipient are met through a range of paid and unpaid activities, and their “emotional and cognitive needs” are similarly supported.¹⁶⁶ Care is thus centred around a relational understanding of how we interact with and care for others (and ourselves) rather than viewing our experiences as being separated, and further expands care beyond those closest to us to include the wellbeing of the broader community.¹⁶⁷

The feminist turn in care ethics uncovers how groups can be silenced as a result of patriarchal structures within institutions and societies, arguing that caring means being more attune to the voices of those who are marginalised and silenced, and to be responsive to differences rather than overlooking them.¹⁶⁸ According to Durano, feminists seek to reduce inequalities by being attentive to the “boundaries of power” which form the “foundation of all negotiations on social contracts...”¹⁶⁹ For instance, Robinson demands attention towards the binary nature of care which adopts simplistic terms such as “abled/disabled” and reinforces the notion of victimhood and the power imbalances associated with it. Here, Robinson argues that feminist care ethics challenges these binaries and instead highlights the reciprocal nature of relationships.¹⁷⁰ Further, recognising and listening to more diverse voices ensures greater representation and participation of marginalised groups in decision-making processes,¹⁷¹ challenging rigid gender structures whereby patriarchal norms reinforce separateness and individualism.¹⁷²

This said, assumptions on ‘who cares’ are largely determined through gendered socialisation processes, behaviours, and relations that define gender roles and expectations (as has been discussed throughout this literature brief).¹⁷³ This is highlighted by Carol Gilligan whose work uncovers and challenges the gendered drivers and impacts of care work, whereby gendered structures that underpin notions of care inform the way in which care work is distributed, undervalued and gendered.¹⁷⁴ Furthermore, feminist scholars writing on care work emphasise the disproportionate amount of unpaid work taken on by women (cooking and preparing meals, cleaning, childcare, and so forth) and the ways in which this unpaid work sustains the productivity of employees in the labour force,¹⁷⁵ therefore making the formal economy dependent on the gendered informal and un/underpaid economy where these care activities generally take place.¹⁷⁶ In other words unpaid care work

paradoxically helps to sustain gender inequalities, given it is predominantly women who take on the majority of unpaid care work and men who still tend to dominate many sectors in the paid workforce. Feminist care ethics demand a reimagining of the family as belonging solely to the private realm, arguing that the gender norms and power relations embedded within institutions impact beyond the public sphere and into the ‘private’, thus they should be viewed as interconnected rather than as separate.¹⁷⁷ This is evident in a study on parenting in the aid sector, which notes that some organisations still view parenting as an external responsibility and personal choice that may require one to leave the sector altogether.¹⁷⁸

Although there is little scholarship linking care with security institutions, discussions on the conceptual definition and scope of care, and broader analyses of the relationship between care and workplaces can be drawn upon to enhance understandings of care within peace operations. For instance, a report by CIPD and the University of Sheffield notes: “caring responsibilities have a clear influence on people’s working lives, and work has a clear influence on people’s caring lives.”¹⁷⁹ A subsequent report by CIPD calls for workplaces to be more carer-friendly and highlights how responsive and inclusive policies on care and caregivers can, and has, benefitted workplaces by improving the wellbeing and efficiency of employees.¹⁸⁰ This can similarly be applied to discussions on security institutions

and peace operations. For instance, in their paper on the increased visibility of care in the UN and its partners, Esquivel posits that care is assumed to be the “‘natural’ responsibility of women” and thus the duty of care has fallen onto women globally.¹⁸¹ Moreover, Robinson argues that systemic inequalities within the global system require a “moral recognition and responsibility” to listen to the voices of those who are most vulnerable.¹⁸² Adopting moral values and ethics of care that are attentive and responsive to the needs of others is necessary to increase the meaningful participation of women within institutions,¹⁸³ including security and peace operations.



Military family. Photo: World’s Direction, 2017

Linked with scholarship on care is research on depletion, with studies uncovering and highlighting the harms caused by the disproportionate distribution of care work to women.¹⁸⁴ Here, feminist scholars discuss depletion through social reproduction (DSR), which occurs when the “...resource outflows exceed resource inflows in carrying out social reproductive work over a threshold of sustainability...”¹⁸⁵ This occurs across three gendered sites. First is the physical body when an individual may experience depletion due to a lack of self-care and wellbeing, impacting their physical and emotional capabilities and reducing long-term productivity. Second, is the household, spanning from the personal household to places of care (such as nursing homes), when inflows of resources (i.e. the support the carer is receiving) are unable to support members of the household and their overall wellbeing. Finally, DSR can occur at the community level when time poverty arising from paid employment and an over- or under-use of community resources reduces space for community networks and connections.¹⁸⁶ Situating care and DSR into a discussion on security institutions and peace operations uncovers the importance of promoting self-care and wellbeing. This is important to mitigate the risk of negative physical and mental health outcomes, encouraging greater work-life balance and equal distribution of care work. This can be done by recognising and responding to the challenges faced by personnel with caring responsibilities, especially women, in balancing their professional roles and caring responsibilities, including by ensuring support mechanisms are available to mitigate negative impacts on careers.

Applying an ethics of care within security institutions and peace operations can challenge potentially harmful models of militarised masculinities that values individualism and competition, instead encouraging the collective responsibility of care work to sustain wellbeing and benefit everyone.¹⁸⁷ Linking care with security institutions and peace operations highlights the overlooked element of mental

health among soldiers due to the perceived stigma on seeking help and care.¹⁸⁸ This is also seen in literature on the wellbeing of humanitarian aid employees, with one study noting the impact of stressful and traumatic environments on staff, leading to burn out, breakdown in workplace relationships, and lack of successful programmatic outcomes.¹⁸⁹ A similar study highlights the risk humanitarian workers face in psychological harm, including PTSD, anxiety, or mental illness, with uneven healthcare and support provided to peacekeepers depending on their country

Applying an ethics of care within security institutions and peace operations can challenge potentially harmful models of militarised masculinities that values individualism and competition, instead encouraging the collective responsibility of care work to sustain wellbeing and benefit everyone.

of origin.¹⁹⁰ Snelling posits that international organisations are increasingly attentive towards staff wellbeing, implementing support measures through human resource and organisational policies, and finding that staff wellbeing is linked with programmatic outcomes.¹⁹¹ This is supported by Young, Pakenham, and Norwood whose study finds work stressors among aid workers to stem from “...within the organisation and team” and are compounded by lack of organisational policies to support staff manage workloads.¹⁹² They further argue that “...stress reduces the effectiveness of aid workers and fundamentally hinders their ability to provide services to aid beneficiaries”.¹⁹³

These findings are arguably more pertinent to the armed forces, especially personnel deployed on peace and security operations, given the highly stressful and traumatising environments they often work in, and given military culture and masculine ideals that can discourage personnel from seeking help. Research has indicated that strict adherence to militarised masculine ideals can contribute to more severe cases of PTSD.¹⁹⁴ These individual harms – and the stressors that cause them combined with a lack of attentiveness to care – can impact operations. It can impact relations between personnel as well as between the mission and the community (the beneficiaries), thereby undermining the overall effectiveness of the mission. Other research has indicated that advancing an ethics of care could improve the wellbeing of peacekeepers by moving away from potential harmful ‘warrior mindsets’ and militarised masculine identities to instead: promote mindfulness among soldiers to help acknowledge and regulate emotions and reduce stress; support greater connections between colleagues enhancing care and compassion; encourage reflection and self-awareness; and, establish a clear mindset on values and goals, improving the mental and physical health of soldiers by (re)instilling meaning to their work.¹⁹⁵

By supporting the self-care and wellbeing of peacekeepers, it is expected that they will, in turn, have more capacity to care for others, reducing risk of harmful behaviours within and outside of the peace operation.¹⁹⁶ Recognising care as an important component of peacekeeping and security not only shifts the organisational cultures away from harmful practices that privilege a militarised masculinity, it also encourages more support for personnel, which mitigates the effects of stress and trauma from challenging work environments. Moreover, adopting an ethics of care into security institutions recognises a greater diversity of possible security providers, and thus integrating “...different ways of thinking and being...” which can subsequently enhance the operational outcomes of peace operations.¹⁹⁷ Demonstrating that security institutions care can also challenge rigid norms on who provides security - and moreover whose security is being provided - and can encourage recruitment and retention of women in the sector.

Linking it together - Addressing key gaps in literature through the Monash GPS Elsie Initiative project

This Literature Brief has highlighted some of the literature on the underrepresentation of women in the security sector and in UN peace operations, as well as the gendered nature of care work and the impacts it can have on women's participation in the workforce. However, there has yet to be any comprehensive research on the impact of having caring responsibilities on the recruitment, retention and promotion of women in the security sector institutions of T/PCCs and their subsequent deployment on peace operations. Monash GPS's research project on uniformed personnel with caring responsibilities in security institutions of T/PCCs and UN peace operations, aims to fill this gap.

An environment that is more attentive to care can also lead to operations that are driven by and benefit from an awareness of the importance of connectedness and relationality and, thereby, advance operational effectiveness.

This project intends to respond to the need for more research to understand how supporting personnel with caring responsibilities can increase the meaningful participation of women in UN peace operations. It will further contribute to understandings of how promoting an environment in peace operations that recognises, values, and supports caring responsibilities and care needs can contribute to overall operational effectiveness. Beyond facilitating the

meaningful participation of women, one measure of this could be the improved wellbeing of peacekeepers, arising from greater attentiveness to care, including caring responsibilities and care needs. This can help reduce the risk of stress and burnout among peacekeepers in high risk security settings.¹⁹⁸ In turn, this can positively impact personal relationships, including with families, which carries further implications for the well-being of personnel including on mission.¹⁹⁹

An environment that is more attentive to care can also lead to operations that are driven by and benefit from an awareness of the importance of connectedness and relationality and, thereby, advance operational effectiveness. A care approach, according to Robinson, should be viewed as a practice that is relational and increases the capacity to continually connect with the self and with others. It enhances our skills to listen, respond, and build meaning around world views and shared values and responsibilities.²⁰⁰ This understanding can shift the burden of caring responsibilities placed onto women and contribute to the efforts to change institutional cultures to be more inclusive and responsive to different needs. This can be done by utilising a feminist approach to be attentive to the silenced voices,²⁰¹ and emphasising the need to listen to more diverse voices in order to enhance outcomes of UN peace operations, namely the efforts to build a more inclusive and sustainable peace. By doing so, barriers to women's participation can be better addressed by shifting workplace cultures to be more inclusive and addressing rigid gender norms on who is a security actor and who is a caregiver.

Notes

1. Monash GPS is grateful to Global Affairs Canada for funding this project, as part of the Government of Canada's Elsie Initiative for Women in Peace Operations.
2. Team Members include: Dr Eleanor Gordon (Project Lead), Monash University; Professor Katrina Lee-Koo, Monash University / University of Queensland; Dr Richard Fosu, Monash University; Lauren Lowe, Monash University; Joana Osei-Tutu, Deputy Director Women, Youth, Peace and Security Institute, Kofi Annan International Peacekeeping Training Centre / Monash University (Global Consultant); Jane Townsley, Executive Director, International Association of Women Police (Global Consultant); Dr Irine Hiraswari Gayatri, Cluster Research on Foreign Policy and International Issues, Research Centre for Politics, BRIN (Indonesia Consultant); Anushka Chavan (India Consultant); WGCDR Llani Kennealy (Retd), MA (Global Consultant); Jennifer Grover (Global Consultant); Council for Strategic and Defence Research (CSDR) (India Consultant / Partner).
3. 'Caring responsibilities is a term that acknowledges the essential (usually unpaid) activities that carers perform for themselves, and others, in response to a specific need. The term gives credence to the argument that care work is in fact labour, and not simply "help".' Gordon E and Jones B (2022) Caring for carers in international organisations: Ensuring Inclusive, Responsive and Effective Peacebuilding. DCAF Policy Brief 1B, Opportunities for Women in Peacekeeping; Policy Series. Geneva: The Geneva Centre for Security Sector Governance (DCAF). <https://www.dcaf.ch/caring-carers-international-organisations>.
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5. See Gordon E (2018) 'Gender and defence sector reform: Problematizing the place of women in conflict-affected environments,' Journal of Intervention and Statebuilding, 13(1): 75-94, doi: 10.1080/17502977.2018.1516389; Vermeij L (October 2020) Woman first, soldier second: Taboos and stigmas facing military women in UN peace operations, International Peace Institute, New York. <https://www.ipinst.org/2020/10/taboo-and-stigmas-facing-military-women-in-un-peace-operations>.
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