

## **Gender Equality In States' Armed Forces: Comparative And Legal Study**

**By**

**Serhii M. Perepolkin**

Department of International Law, Educational and Scientific Institute of Law and International Legal Relations, University of Customs and Finance, 49000, 2/4 Volodymyr Vernadsky Str., Dnipro, Ukraine

**Valentyna O. Boniak**

Department of the Theory and History of State and Law, Dnipropetrovsk State University of Internal Affairs, 49005, 26 Gagarin Ave., Dnipro, Ukraine

**Vitalii A. Zavhorodnii**

Department of the Theory and History of State and Law, Dnipropetrovsk State University of Internal Affairs, 49005, 26 Gagarin Ave., Dnipro, Ukraine

**Tetiana L. Syroid**

Department of International and European Law, Faculty of Law, V. N. Karazin Kharkiv National University, 61022, 6 Svobody Sq., Kharkiv, Ukraine

**Liudmyla A. Filianina**

Department of International Law, Educational and Scientific Institute of Law and International Legal Relations, University of Customs and Finance, 49000, 2/4 Volodymyr Vernadsky Str., Dnipro, Ukraine

### **Abstract**

The urgency of the study is stipulated by the existing problem of gender inequality in the armed forces, in particular, by the necessity to pay attention to the professional potential of female military personnel, as well as the effectiveness of military operations with their participation. The aim of the article is to disclose the most common challenges faced by women during military service based on the results of the gender equality state's analysis in the armed forces of various countries and to develop suggestions for their solutions. An analysis of the historical role of women in various states' armed forces and gender stereotypes regarding multiform restrictions on the women's service in the armed forces' subunits laid the foundations of this study. Considerable attention was paid to knowledge of international treaties, international organizations' acts and judicial bodies' decisions, the provisions which determine the legal status of women during armed conflicts and are used by states to improve legislation and change public stereotypes about the status of female military personnel. The use of the comparative method allowed to compare the existing doctrinal approaches to the women's gender equality concept in the modern states' armed forces, determine the quantitative rates of women's service in the armed forces of various states and analyze the most common challenges faced by female military personnel in the time of service. The analysis of scientific papers on women's gender equality issues in the states' armed forces shows that there are various problems faced by female military personnel at the time of their service. In order to solve gender inequalities in the armed forces, their Ministries of Defense should introduce measures promoting women's rights in the armed forces. Successful implementation of this goal requires the solution of a number of tasks, including the eradication of the following cases: bullying; morally outdated double and inconsistent standards' application; sexual harassment and

assaults on women; the application of any stereotypes about the violation of women's equal rights to serve in the armed forces on par with men, etc.

**Keywords:** female service member; gender equality in the armed forces; women's rights; right to motherhood.

## **Introduction**

Military service in the armed forces is one of the most topical issues of legal regulation of social relations. For thousands of years, states have largely determined the rules and conditions of the service in a single manner. As an exception, such rules and conditions appeared in domestic legal order as a result of an analysis of the most productive practices of different states or as a result of their joint activities. In the second half of the XX – the beginning of the XXI century, their progressive development and codification also began to be influenced by public opinion. Expanding women's rights to protecting peace, sovereign equality and territorial integrity of their state as part of the state's armed forces was chosen as one of the directions of its influence.

Women first began to serve in the Canadian armed forces in 1895 on equality basis with men as full members of the armed forces with a corresponding social status without any restrictions. They began to be accepted into the army during peacetime, not only in support services, but also in combat units as full-fledged servicemen. This tradition is still followed by the leadership of the Canadian armed forces.

The established direction of gender equality defending quickly gained both its supporters and critics. To date, scientific discussions on various aspects of this issue, including the role of women in World War II, the increase in the number of women in the armed forces, the involvement of women in missions, the promotion of women to leadership positions, etc., are being continued.

In the Western European states, female servicemen and servicewomen appeared during the First World War. In the early 1970s, many armies around the world switched to voluntary recruitment as the basic recruitment principle for a professional army, and the number of servicewomen began to increase markedly.

Currently, such states have had women as Ministers of Defense: Bangladesh (since 2001); Nicaragua (since 2013); Northern Macedonia (since 2017); France (since 2017); Spain (since 2018); Zimbabwe (since 2018); Maldives (since 2018); Switzerland (since 2019); Denmark (since 2019); Austria (from 2020); North Sudan (from 2020); Suriname (from 2020); Belgium (from 2020); Togo (from 2020); Montenegro (from 2020); South Africa (from 2021); Canada (from 2021); Germany (from 2021); Czech Republic (from 2021); Netherlands (from 2021) (Tenkov, 2022). It is noteworthy that in most states, women have headed the Ministry of Defense in the last three years. This shows the increase of equality in society in the modern world.

Female military personnel is working hard to prove their ability to ensure international peace and security not only by providing medical services but also by taking part in direct combat operations. Most often, scientific debates are held on the importance and application of equal rights and opportunities having a significant impact on the legislature and social reforms in the army, as well as on changes in society's stereotyped thinking on women's status in the army. The methodology of this study was determined by the goal set. It began with an

analysis of the historical role of women in the armed forces and gender stereotypes regarding various restrictions on the service of women in the armed forces subunits. Considerable attention was paid to knowledge of international treaties, international organizations' acts and judicial bodies' decisions, the provisions of which determine the legal status of women during armed conflicts and are used by states to improve legislation and change public stereotypes about the status of female military personnel. The comparative method use allowed us to compare the existing doctrinal approaches to the concept of gender equality of women in the armed forces of modern states, determine the quantitative indicators of women's service in the armed forces of various states and analyze the most common problems faced by female military personnel in the time of service. Thus, the purpose of our study is to identify the most common problems faced by women during military service through the results of gender equality in various states' armed forces.

### ***Major problems faced by female military personnel during their service***

The analysis of scientific publications on women's gender equality in the armed forces of the states shows several major problems faced by female military personnel during their service. First, it is the medical needs of women. Despite the fact that the diseases in men and female military personnel are largely similar, women face unique features of a woman's body (menstrual disorders, urinary tract infections, vaginal infections), and pregnancy, of course. For example, during the Gulf War, female servicemen had gynecological disorders in 20-25% of cases. Regarding pregnancy, according to the U.S. Department of Defense, for example, the level of unplanned pregnancies among female military personnel is almost twice as high as among the civilian population (Naclerio, 2015). Second, it is sexual violence that women suffer more than men during military service. The consequences of such violence affect both a woman's physical health (trauma, infection, AIDS, unwanted pregnancy) and her mental health, namely post-traumatic stress and disorders. The UK Justice Service considers criminal offenses related to sexual violence, most of which (76% in 2020) involve women victims, and others involve the military culture of the Armed Forces (U.K. Parliament, 2021).

Third, it is a disadvantage in promotion, a ban on competing for positions for which women have demonstrated their suitability, and promotion in special degrees (ranks). Unimpeded promotion is unlikely, for example, such as the appointment of women as defense ministers or special ranks within a state with a male-dominated government or parliament. This is especially true of states with military dictatorships or those pursuing active military policies and engaged in armed conflict. Courage and boldness are closely linked to militarism and are considered crucial elements of an effective and reliable army. Thus, it contradicts the common stereotype of a woman as a guardian, a mother, a sister, and a wife and is not associated with a woman – warrior, a woman – defender, a woman – Minister of Defense, and so on. Fourth, these are physical standards. Physical standards for men and female military personnel are the same in almost all modern armies of the world. Requirements for "gender neutrality" are the golden mean related to military training. Gender-neutral military standards make it possible for women to join the armed forces. For example, the US Ranger School has single standards that are based on the specifics of missions rather than arbitrary targets based on age, gender, or other abridgments.

In order to solve both the above and other issues of gender inequality in the states' armed forces, their Ministries of Defense should intensify their efforts to promote the women's rights related to the service in the armed forces. Successful implementation of this goal requires addressing a number of challenges, among them eradication of cases, namely unprofessional behavior against women; bullying; application of morally obsolete double and inconsistent standards; sexual harassment and assaults on women; the practice of any stereotypes based on violation of equal rights of women to serve in the armed forces on an equal basis with men,

etc. The positive practical experience of different states in this area is the best example for the implementation of reforms aimed at addressing any problems. Problems of gender inequality in the armed forces for all states concerned.

Women have repeatedly participated with men in various military campaigns in the history of human civilization's evolution. For the most part, women organized the mode of life of servicemen, and provided for their physical and emotional well-being by carrying out household or medical work (as cooks, laundresses, seamstresses, nurses). Only a small number of women took a direct part in combat operations together with men. Therefore, the issue of providing special conditions for women in the armed forces of the states was not given importance for centuries. Only after the World War II, in which a great number of women took part in military operations with weapons in their hands, the discussion of this issue and the legal consolidation of the status of female military personnel began to be given importance at the international level. Thus, the provisions of the Geneva Convention relative to Treatment of Prisoners of War of 1949 state that women prisoners of war must be treated with all due respect to their sex, and in all cases, they must be treated as favorably as men (Article 14). In any prisoners' of war camps where women prisoners of war are held, separate sanitary equipment is provided for them (Part 2 Article 29); in the case of a sentence serving, a woman prisoner of war, who had been sentenced, has to be placed in a separate berth under the female staff supervision (art. 108) (Diplomatic Conference of Geneva, 1949).

It should be noted that along with the international conventions' provisions in the field of laws and customs of war, the principle of equality between men and women and the prohibition of any discrimination against women have been enshrined in many other international legal instruments. For example, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (United Nations General Assembly, 1979) provides for equal political, economic, social, cultural and civil rights regardless of marital status and requires States to enact national legislation prohibiting discrimination against women. Beijing Declaration (Fourth World Conference on Women, 1995) recognizes women's right to full participation on the basis of equality in all spheres of social life, including participation in the decision-making process and access to power. Paragraph 18 also states that local, national, regional and global peace is attainable and is inextricably linked with the advancement of women, who are a fundamental force for leadership, conflict resolution and the promotion of lasting peace at all levels. U.N. Resolution 1325 (Security Council, 2000) on Women, Peace and Security provides the basis for a gender perspective in international security, conflict resolution, peacekeeping processes and field operations. The resolution text focuses on the importance of female military personnel in performing certain tasks in peacekeeping operations, where military and peacekeeping goals intersect. This applies, for example, to the demobilization and peaceful return of former women combatants issues solving, setting communication with the local population, especially women within the states where women are prohibited from consorting with men outside the family.

Women remain underrepresented in state and corporate management positions, receive lower salaries, and receive vocational training less frequently than their male counterparts. Gender discrimination is often the result of long-standing traditions, religious practices, cultural practices, current laws, and policies to refuse to treat a woman on an equal footing with a man. Gender stereotypes still have an impact in determining the social, professional, and managerial role of women in society. And the promotion of women to traditionally male positions also shatters habitual expectations of male and female gender roles (McSally, 2011; Krook & O'Brien, 2012).

Of course, religious and cultural traditions play a significant role in the way societies across the world approach the place of women in the armed forces. This is not surprising since such differences with regard to women's rights differ from country to country and in other spheres. For example, the European or American approach to equality will differ significantly from, for example, the Asian approach. In this context, the approach of a researcher from India, P. Chowdhry (2010), is interesting. P. Chowdhry notes that there is a strong belief that the struggle by its nature is the occupation of men, and the army is purely a male space based on all aspects of war. At the same time, the involvement of women challenges the usual gender roles in modern Indian society. But despite the seemingly threatening penetration of the latter into the army, the Indian army continues to determine itself by gender. Thus we see that despite the existing norms regarding gender equality and the presence of women in the Indian armed forces, this kind of academic viewpoint demonstrates the existing prejudices against women in the armed forces. Moreover, we can argue that such prejudices are quite entrenched in the society of the country in question because the quotation cited is from a scholar's work, which indicates a high level of such beliefs.

In contrast to the view of the Indian scholar P. Chowdhry, I suggest that you pay attention to the opinion of the American researcher, M.H. Mackenzie (2012), who notes that women can take part in combat operations on an equal footing with men, and mixed military subunits are no less effective than purely male ones. Therefore, according to the researcher, it is time to abandon a policy that does not bring anything good and considers half of Americans (women) as less equal, and the ban on female military personnel from taking part in combat operations is based on false stereotypes and outdated understanding of war. That is, these two completely opposite views vividly demonstrate the differences in approaches to gender equality in the military, as well as the overall difference in the perception of women's rights through the prism of differences in culture and tradition.

Thus, despite the international obligations of states to ensure impartiality and gender equality between men and women, the latter continue to experience violations of their rights, including in the field of military service. There is a clear argument that career advancement requires a qualified professional in one's field, and a career advancement policy should not be a reason to adjust official instructions. The growing role of women in military service has changed the balance between work and life and has become the basis for personnel changes. A female serviceman shall continue to serve in military positions in accordance with gender-neutral standards focused on specific task fulfillment.

However, it should be emphasized that female military personnel are appointed to leading positions, mostly in the armed forces of states with a large number of women parliamentarians and women leaders, and especially in peacekeeping states, where such positions are gaining new importance (Barnes & O'Brien, 2018). In addition, political and gender beliefs are often influential factors in appointing women to leadership positions in the armed forces (Bashevkin, 2014; Koch & Fulton, 2011).

In world practice, there are several ways to recruit personnel for the armed forces, namely: compulsory conscription of citizens of a certain age and voluntary contract-based making, where men are usually the subjects. Women currently serve in the military in the United States, Canada, Great Britain, Germany, France, Sweden, Switzerland, the Netherlands, Belgium, Denmark, Norway, Portugal, Israel, Spain, Greece, Turkey, Pakistan, Luxembourg, Sri Lanka, and others. At the same time, there are states where military service is mandatory regardless of gender. Thus, in addition to Israel, women are conscripted for military service in Benin, Eritrea, Cuba, Libya, Malaysia, Norway, Peru, North Korea, Taiwan, etc. But the female

military personnel's recruitment scope in the armies of the above-mentioned states is often limited to service in medical units and communications subunits.

### ***The expansion of women's rights in the field of military service***

The Israel Defense Forces (IDF) is almost the only army in the world in which women, on par with men, serve the army as part of military units, although there are some differences. Israel's geographical location and geopolitical position are the basis for such a decision. The Army of Defense for Israel numbers about 176,000, 34% of whom are women. According to the latest data, the modern U.S. Armed Forces serve more than 200 thousand women, 74,104 serve in the U.S. Army, which is approximately 16% of the total number of military personnel. But this was not always the case. Women's Armed Services Integration Act of 1948 provided for restrictions, namely on women being banned from serving on most naval ships and any aircraft intended for or likely to take part in missions. At the same time, the law did not prohibit women from participating in ground operations but limited women's participation in the armed forces to 2% of military personnel and 10% of officers (U.S. Congress, 1948). Therefore, we can state that the "mandatory" military service for women, as we can see from the above data, also affects the number of women in the armed forces. In Israel, where such service is mandatory, the percentage of women who continue to serve in the army after completing their military service is higher than in the United States, where female service is not mandatory.

In the 60-70s of the twentieth century in the USA, the increase in the number of women in military service was facilitated by the shortage of qualified men to recruit for military service as well as the movement for equal rights for women. Women demanded equal opportunities in all areas of activity, including national defense. An illustrative case against a female serviceman is the Case "Struck v. Secretary of Defense" in 1972. The basis for its consideration was the forced dismissal of a pregnant woman from the Air Force. After hearing the Advocate General's arguments, the court recommended that the Air Force refused to release Struck and change its policy on automatic release in case of pregnancy (Powell, 1972).

Instead, Congress restored the registration of men, but not women, for possible military service in order to facilitate any conscription for the first time since the end of the Vietnam War in 1980. In turn, the U.S. Supreme Court (1981) took the decision in the case of "Rostker v. Goldberg," according to which the exclusion of women from mandatory registration was not recognized as a violation of the Fifth Amendment in 1981. The U.S. Department of Defense, for its part, adopted a "risk rule" in 1981, according to which women were excluded from military units or missions during which the latter risked direct enemy fire or could be captured (Rostker v. Goldberg, 1981). Subsequently, in 1993, a special law banned women from serving on warships, and beginning in 1994, the United States abolished the "risk rule" and introduced a general policy for women's service restricting in the Armed Forces. Women were allowed to serve only in subunits that did not take a direct part in ground battles.

Significant changes in the field of gender equality in the U.S. military forces took place in 2011, after the adoption of the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2011 (NDAA). According to its provisions, each service should review the rules concerning female military personnel in order to ensure the equal participation of the latter in competition and achieve success in the Armed Forces. As a result, the role of the head of the US Northern Command (NORTHCOM) and the North American Aerospace Defense Command (NORAD) was assigned to Air Force General Lori Robinson in 2016. L. Robinson headed the first joint US-Canadian combat command and became the first female commander of this level in the U.S. history. Another example of positive change in this area is the opportunity for women to

serve in the United States Marine Corps. Thus, the first graduation of the US Marine Corps Women's Reserve took place in 2017 (Task & Purpose, 2017).

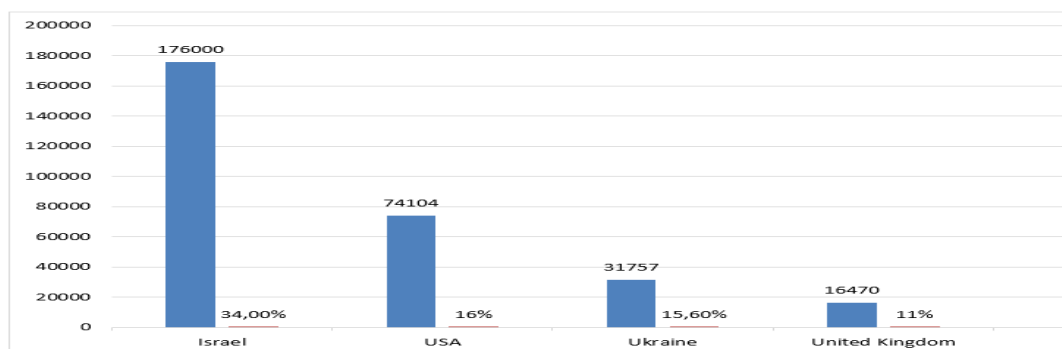
The change in physical activity standards set for female military personnel in the U.S. military is also worth mentioning as a positive practice. Thus, after it was established during training that women could not throw a grenade at a certain distance to hit the target, it was decided to replace the grenade with a lighter one and less effective in the United States. And when they realized that women on board a warship needed specific facilities that are not common to men, the U.S. Navy began to modernize ships. For example, the conversion of one aircraft carrier of the U.S. Navy for women's needs cost 1 million dollars. From this, I can argue that U.S. military policy prioritizes the professional skills of its service members without regard to gender.

The U.K. Ministry of Defense conducted a study in 2000 where it was concluded that women involved in ground combat operations could negatively affect the "cohesion of the subunit." For example, Colonel R. Kemp, who commanded British troops in Afghanistan in 2003, noted that of the small number of women who wished to join the infantry, most were not properly trained. Thus, in his opinion, the involvement of women recruits reduces the effectiveness of military operations in the army (Bryce, 2017). Retired Colonel T. Collins is of a similar opinion, noting that infantry is not a place for women, and allowing them to perform military missions is purely politically correct extravagance. He believes that for melee units, it is necessary to raise the physical training bar but not lower it (National Army Museum, 2016). However, we absolutely disagree with this point of view because we believe that women and men by nature have different physical abilities and biological features. However, this does not make women any less useful in the armed forces than men, and it certainly cannot serve as a basis for inequality in the choice of the military profession.

At the same time, it should be noted that the opportunities for women to serve in the British Armed Forces are constantly expanding at present. Thus, on July 8, 2016, Prime Minister D. Cameron announced the gradual abolition of exemptions for female military personnel serving in the land forces. From November 2016, women were able to join the Royal Armored Corps. At the end of 2018, women were given the opportunity to serve in the Royal Marines, Infantry and the Royal Air Force Regiment. Since 2019, all positions in the Armed Forces have been open to women, with the exception of Gurkhas, for reasons of military effectiveness (Ministry of Defense, 2020). As of April 1, 2021, women made up 11% of the U.K. regular force, which is 16,470 people (Ministry of Defense, 2021). Canadian women are allowed to serve in all military units. Female soldiers constituted approximately 15.3% of the Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) in 2008 (Park, 2008), of which 4.3% were women in military positions (artillery, infantry, combat engineer, etc.) (Department of National Defense..., 2020).

The events of recent years in Ukraine have made us think about the active protection of the territorial integrity and independence of this state, its defense capabilities, resources and recruitment. More than a thousand citizens of our state and foreigners have joined the Armed Forces of Ukraine as volunteers since 2014. To defend Ukraine, women began to join the Armed Forces along with men. Thus, in 2018, 25,000 female military personnel served in various positions, which was 22.4% of the total number of servicemen of the Armed Forces of Ukraine. Only 3,000 women served as officers, 70 of whom had the rank of colonel (Torop, 2018). In the fall of 2018, the first woman in the rank of Major General (L. Shugaley) appeared in Ukraine, serving in the medical service. As of March 2021, 31757 women already serve in the Armed Forces of Ukraine, constituting 15.6% of the total number of servicemen. Among

them, there are 4,810 officers (8.9%), 2,780 are privates, sergeants and officers, and 1,162 women are cadets (Mosiondz, 2021) (see Fig.1).



**Figure 1.** Female military personnel in the army of states

The number of female soldiers has increased since the full-scale conflict began. As of July 23, more than 38,000 women serve in the Armed Forces of Ukraine, of which more than 5,000 are currently on the front lines. Moreover, there are also civilian women in the Ukrainian Armed Forces, putting together a total of 50,000 women in the military. According to the figures, Ukraine has one of the largest numbers of women in the Armed Forces compared to NATO member countries ("Defended their right to choose"..., 2022).

Both the practice of Ukraine and other countries of the world shows that the involvement of women in certain tasks fulfillment and certain positions occupation is limited. Thus, the Law of Ukraine "On the Charter of the Internal Service of the Armed Forces of Ukraine" determines that female servicemen are usually not appointed to the daily duty. If necessary, depending on the title and position, female military personnel may be appointed as a regular paramedic, headquarters officer on duty, canteen officer on duty, courier, officer on duty of the women's dormitory, or depending on the military specialty.

The Law of Ukraine "On Social and Legal Protection of Servicemen and Members of their Families" allots women a special place, Art. 10-1 which provides for the possibility of a woman to have maternity leave to take care of a child under three years of age, as well as the Law of Ukraine "About Conscription and Military Service," according to Article 26, a woman has the right to leave military service to care for a child under the age of 18, including during a special period. But, the legislator does not stipulate the possibility of termination on this basis for a man. Such a possibility might be relevant, for example, in the case when a mother is dying or is unable to care for the child for other reasons and the father is forced to leave the service in the army to take care of the child. That is, the legislator once again demonstrates a special attitude toward women, namely forming a stereotype and a corresponding subconscious specific attitude, primarily among male commanders and fellow servicemen. Despite the need to protect women's rights to family and motherhood, we believe that men should also be able to exercise these fundamental human rights. For this reason, we believe that the rights relating to family life and child custody.

Regarding the military service of women and the introduction of NATO standards in the Ukrainian Army, it would be appropriate to agree with I. Zavorotko, an officer of the International Law Department of the Legal Support Department of the General Headquarters of the Armed Forces, who noted that the United States, as one of the democratic world leaders, sets an example of women's involvement in military service. For example, a woman who



wishes to serve in the military forces signs a contract stating that she commits not to marry, conceive, or have a child during her time of service in the United States. But some see this as a violation of a woman's right to motherhood (Kappiuk, 2018). However, it should be noted that this is a conscious, voluntary choice of every woman. As in the case of a "family, maternal" career for female military personnel, such restrictions are necessary to perform the tasks assigned to the military men. Also, it should be noted in defense of this position that the state spends resources on recruitment, training of female military personnel and modernization of living conditions for their needs.

## Conclusion

Given the above, it can be argued that the most important argument in favor of gender equality at any level, including military service, is that women have the leadership qualities to build a successful military career and excellent physical fitness to participate in military operations. The expansion of women's rights in the field of military service and the opening of new military positions create additional opportunities for women to exercise their right to freely choose a place, type of activity and profession in the armed forces of states. We believe that the differences that men and women cannot serve as a reason for reducing the number of military women or limiting their rights to military service.

Modern women have well-developed physical abilities and are psychologically ready to participate in hostilities. The military service of physically fit women, as well as increasing awareness of the importance of non-traditional security issues, contributes to the achievement of various goals, in particular, increasing the size and defense capability of the national armed forces; networking with local women; improving the protection of troops in the area of the operation, etc. Therefore, the female gender is an unacceptable criterion for any restrictions on military service. We believe that the equality proclaimed by key international legal acts should also be observed in the issue of women's rights to free choice of activity and profession, including if this profession is related to military craft.

The information presented in the article shows us that recently the number of female military personnel, as well as women, holding leadership positions in the armed forces has been increasing. However, in some states of the world, there is still a prejudiced attitude towards women in the military.. Therefore, further research in the direction of establishing gender equality in the armed forces of states remains an important area of development of legal science.

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