BACKGROUND
The role of women in the military has steadily been increasing since the early 1970s. The most recent changes occurred between 1992 and 1994, when both legislative and policy changes expanded opportunities for women. Congress has taken a keen interest in this process, and the House report for the Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 1997 included as a special interest item a direction to the Secretary of Defense to evaluate the performance of the military services in integrating women into occupations previously closed to them. The report also asked for an assessment of the effects of this integration on readiness and morale.

PURPOSE AND APPROACH OF THIS STUDY
In response to the congressional direction, the Under Secretary of Defense (Personnel and Readiness) asked the National Defense Research Institute to assess the extent and effect of the integration of the women. To meet the congressional deadline, the study had to be completed in the relatively short time of three months. Thus, the study is not a comprehensive analysis of the integration of women into the services. Instead, it is a short-term analytic effort that evaluates the progress of integrating women into occupations and units previously closed to them and the effects of that effort on selected units.

The study has three components. The first determines how each service implemented the guidance to open new skills and organiza-
tions to women. Each service interpreted the guidance differently, and it is important to understand those interpretations before assessing the progress in implementing the congressional guidance. The second component assesses the progress of what we refer to as gender integration. In this component, we determined the extent to which the services carried out their interpretations of the congressional direction. The third component assesses the effects of gender integration on the readiness, cohesion, and morale of units.

To complete the third component, we relied on a series of visits to military units. We visited 14 units, chosen to provide the broadest possible view of the effects of the policy changes. We used three techniques during field visits to gather information about gender issues and their effects on readiness, cohesion, and morale. We interviewed commanders and other senior leaders, conducted a series of focus groups with unit personnel, and administered a survey to focus-group participants and other unit personnel. Almost 500 people participated in the focus groups, which were organized by rank and sex.

RESULTS

In response to the policy and legislative changes, the services have opened more occupations and organizations to women. Table S.1 shows the change in the number of positions open to women. The movement of women into these positions has varied, depending on such factors as the number of women in each service, their interest in these positions, training or retraining times, and whether facilities or systems had to be reconfigured.

Clearly, progress has occurred in all services. Some of the changes were numerically small but significant. Women now fly combat aircraft and serve on combat ships. As a result, they will have opportunities to acquire the type of experience that leads to the most senior positions. However, limitations still exist, and some of them

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1 We did not visit any Air Force units. Because of the time available and the way the Air Force had implemented the guidance, we could not get valid results in the time available and could not guarantee confidentiality and anonymity. Chapter Two contains a more detailed explanation.
operate in complex ways. Certain units and skills are still closed to women; these are primarily those that engage in direct ground combat or collocate with units that do. In other cases, the skill is open to women, but only at certain organizational levels, e.g., brigade or higher. Some assignments that are officially open to women may actually be closed because the position is coded to be filled by someone in an occupation closed to women, e.g., infantry. Unfortunately, there is no other way to determine the actual availability of positions formally open to women except to examine the prerequisites for those positions that have been established at the local level. Finally, some limitations are informal, e.g., the commander who will not have a driver or an aide of the opposite sex because of concern about rumors or potential charges of sexual harassment. In other cases, a commander may have a woman assigned to a nontraditional position, but actually performing duty in another.

**Effects on Readiness**

A major finding of this study is that gender integration is perceived to have a relatively small effect on readiness, cohesion, and morale in the units we studied. Members of the units we visited, which included both recently opened units and units with recently opened occupations, said that integration of women had not had a major effect on readiness. Both men and women contended that women perform about as well as men. This is not to say that integration has no effect; it does. However, other influences, such as leadership and training, are perceived as being far more influential.
readiness do occur. For example, pregnancy can affect the availability of women. The effect is greater when the unit has many women or when it is understaffed; therefore, the limitations pregnancy imposes are both more visible and have a disproportionately greater effect.

**Effects on Cohesion**

Perceptions about cohesion tend to vary by rank more than anything else. Higher-ranking men and women reported more cohesion than junior personnel. Any divisions caused by gender were minimal or invisible in units with high cohesion. Gender appeared as an issue only in units with conflicting groups, and then it took a back seat to divisions along work group or rank lines. When gender negatively affected cohesion, it was generally because gender is one way that people break into categories when conflict surfaces, because structures or organizational behavior highlighted gender differences, or because dating occurred within a unit. Gender integration was also mentioned as having a positive effect, raising the level of professional standards.

**Effects on Morale**

In recently opened units and units with recently opened occupations, gender did not figure prominently in issues cited as affecting morale. Leadership was regarded as the overwhelming influence. Insofar as gender was an issue, it focused on two areas: sexual harassment and double standards. Most reported that sexual harassment did not occur in their units. Of those women in the units studied who have been harassed (considerable confusion exists about what constitutes sexual harassment), most did not report it. Most frequently, they regarded such incidents as minor and handled them on their own. Less frequently cited reasons included a fear of overreaction by the institution, resulting in draconian punishment; a belief that such reports will be used against the case for women in the military; and a belief that nothing will happen to the offender. The fear of unsubstantiated or false sexual harassment charges was prevalent among men surveyed. The perception of a double standard was held most widely by men and tended to revolve around such things as different physical standards and a perceived unwillingness of male
supervisors to demand as much of women as they do of men. Finally, dating and sexual relationships, even those not forbidden by the regulations, can pose problems for morale within a unit.

**Other Findings About Gender**

The study provided an opportunity to gain insight into related aspects of the integration of women into units that had recently opened or included recently opened occupations. These are relevant to the public debate, so we report them here:

- While 25 percent of women and 39 percent of men preferred segregated basic training, a majority of both sexes preferred integrated training.
- While a small percentage (14 and 18 percent, respectively, for men and women) favored concentrating women in fewer units, the rest were split between assigning women across all units or having a gender-blind assignment process.
- Most study participants did not care whether they reported harassment to a man or a woman. However, 22 to 35 percent did have a preference, most often for someone of the same sex.
- Over half of surveyed men in the enlisted ranks favor some relaxation of the ground combat exclusion policy; only one-third of male officers agree, and Army and Marine Corps men of all grades are more likely to prefer the current policy. A change in the policy is supported by over 80 percent of the women surveyed. Those who support change differ on allowing women to serve voluntarily in ground combat positions or requiring them to do so, as men are.

**POLICY IMPLICATIONS**

During our visits, we were given numerous suggestions for remedying issues that related to gender. Some suggestions were very specific, such as ways to improve how women are supervised and kept informed when they are in female berthing areas on ships. Others were broader, such as to evaluate how much discretion commanders and supervisors should exercise in how they use the women assigned
to their units. We have been careful to incorporate both types of suggestions in this report.

The personnel in these units did perceive some differences in the availability and physical abilities of the women the units, compared to men. However, it is not clear which differences are perceptions due to women’s greater visibility and which would be borne out by systematic data. Better information would clear up any misperceptions and identify areas in which policies might be developed to minimize differences that do occur.

Double standards are a major problem area. We heard repeatedly how double standards (e.g., different performance expectations, different responsibilities) undermine women’s credibility and generate hostility from junior enlisted men, who believed that they are afforded the fewest privileges of anyone. Therefore, new policies should avoid establishing double standards for men and women in the same positions and, where possible, eliminate double standards that exist now. In fact, another consistent message we heard was the call for a screening process that would help the military to assign qualified personnel to heavy-labor occupations and remove the need for a double standard.

Navy personnel were highly satisfied with the practice of assigning women leaders in advance of or in conjunction with the assignment of junior women. Their presence helped with transitional issues, provided a positive role model for female behavior, and contributed overall to the discipline on the ship. In Army and Marine units that lacked female leadership, both junior and senior personnel found this situation undesirable, or less preferable to a more balanced representation of women. A policy of ensuring senior female leadership in integrated units may not be feasible in all cases, but the experience of the units we studied suggests that it is desirable when it is feasible.

Especially during the transition period, new norms are required when men and women work together. The military’s sexual harassment programs and policies on interpersonal relationships among servicemembers continue to be evaluated. Our study adds to the evidence pointing to areas needing the most focus: clearer guidance on what constitutes acceptable and unacceptable behavior, more
emphasis on the “do’s” than on the “don’ts” in instructing men and women about working together, and ensuring that sexual harassment complaints are—and are perceived to be—handled as fairly as possible.