



WHEN FEMALE PEACEKEEPERS' "ADDED VALUE" BECOMES AN "ADDED BURDEN"



By Nina Wilén (<https://www.egmontinstitute.be/expert-author/nina-wilen/>) (23 November 2020)
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Calls for the increased participation of uniformed United Nations female peacekeepers have multiplied in recent years, fueled in part by new scandals of peacekeepers' sexual abuse and exploitation (SEA), tarnishing the UN's reputation, and in part by the will to show explicit progress at the 20th anniversary of the adoption of UN Security Council Resolution 1325 (<https://www.unwomen.org/en/docs/2000/10/un-security-council-resolution-1325>) on Women, Peace and Security. Linked to these calls, numerous UN reports and policy documents have emphasised the "added value" that female peacekeepers can bring, explaining how their increased participation can render peace operations more effective and efficient. As these arguments about women's "added value" as peacekeepers are mostly promoted by organisations that strive to foreground women's rights, we can assume that they are made with the hope that this will increase gender equality.

Read the full text below.

This commentary is a blogpost at OUPblog (<https://blog.oup.com/2020/11/when-female-peacekeepers-added-value-becomes-an-added-burden/>), at Oxford University Press.

(Photo credit: United Nations, MONUSCO)

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However, there is a need to acknowledge that this is a one-sided debate which only focuses on women and does not question male peacekeepers' performance. There is thus a clear risk of contributing to gender inequality and a backlash against women's participation in peace

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operations if female peacekeepers' contribution continues to be instrumentalized. This is because the discussion about female peacekeepers' "added value" is both unrealistic and unfair. It is unrealistic because the expectations generated by the "added value" discussion are based on research conducted on only 4% of all peacekeepers, making it difficult to generalize from the findings. It is unfair as the "added value" risks becoming an "added burden" which only is carried by the female peacekeepers, not their male homologues, who so far have escaped demands about any "added value." (<https://www.egmontinstitute.be/whats-the-added-value-of-male-peacekeepers/>) This, in spite of the fact that they constitute the large majority of military peacekeepers.

Many female peacekeepers internalize these expectations of "making a difference" as women in a male-dominated environment and try to fit into gender-related expectations and/or work harder than their male colleagues, thereby producing self-fulfilling prophecies. Research has for example shown how female peacekeepers often have worked a "second shift," either before deployment, by trying to get additional training in areas where women are assumed to perform better than their male colleagues, or during the deployment, by using their free time to volunteer in tasks where they are supposed to make a difference as female peacekeepers. Examples include Rwandan female peacekeepers (<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/13533312.2018.1503934>) organizing nightly tutorials after pre-deployment classes on how to talk to Sexual and Gender-based Violence (SGBV) victims and Indian female peacekeepers (<https://www.ucpress.edu/book/9780520290617/the-women-in-blue-helmets>) volunteering to engage with local communities, offering free health care services for pregnant women, and first aid courses to schoolgirls after their regular working hours. The fact that over 75% of troop contributions come from Africa and Asia, with African states contributing close to 50% of all peacekeepers, means that this "added burden" falls disproportionately on female peacekeepers from the Global South countries.

In addition to undermining gender equality by putting extra expectations on female peacekeepers to perform "better" than their male counterparts, the "added value" argument also risks reinforcing gender stereotypes for both men and women, and may narrow down the spectrum of tasks that women and men can do in peace operations, leaving the "warrior tasks" to the male peacekeepers and "diplomacy tasks" to the females. Such a division is not only based on shaky evidence, and may undermine women's integration into infantry units where these characteristics are not valued, but it also misses the point of peacekeepers serving as role models that can break gender stereotypes that are detrimental to gender equality.

How do we then get around this minefield of gender dilemmas and avoid instrumentalizing women's performances in the military? How can we merge normative agendas of increasing women's participation as soldiers and peacekeepers without pushing them to live up to unrealistic demands and contradictory gender stereotypes?

Women's participation in the military: How can we merge normative agendas of increasing women's participation as soldiers and peacekeepers without pushing them to live up to unrealistic demands and contradictory gender stereotypes? [acceptez notre utilisation de cookies conformément à notre politique des Cookies \(/cookies-policy/\) et à notre politique de confidentialité \(/privacy-policy/\)](#) Si vous n'êtes pas d'accord, cliquez ici pour quitter le site.

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Turning the table around and focusing on making the military environment a more inclusive workplace could make both the military in general, and peace operations in particular, more effective, while simultaneously facilitating recruitment of underrepresented groups. Such a transformation of the environment is not only to the benefit of female soldiers, but moreover to the organisation as a whole, as research has long proven that diversity is an asset. Yet, such a makeover of a traditionally conservative domain needs representative leaders who are able and willing to drive and push for change. Instead of concentrating on what "added value" that female peacekeepers could, or should, bring, the focus ought to be on how to recruit male and female military leaders who show empathy, inspire, and encourage excellence while valuing diversity and inclusion.

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She is the author of the article 'Female peacekeepers' added burden (<https://www.egmontinstitute.be/female-peacekeepers-added-burden/>), published in *International Affairs*.

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