“I’m proud that I’ve been in the army as a woman”

A qualitative study of women’s testimonies of their military service in Israel

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ABSTRACT

The IDF (Israel Defence Forces) plays an important part in many Israelis lives since there is a mandatory military service for both men and women, making the country stand apart from many others. Although it may seem as men and women shares an equal army service experience, this is not the case. Women only make up of 34 percent of all IDF soldiers. Furthermore, female soldiers are often subjected to military positions that are considered gender appropriate for women. Even though women are moving into combat units and positions of military leadership, gender segregation is still evident in the Israeli army.

This study explores the perspective of Israeli women’s experience in their time in the army by using a phenomenological approach. This is a qualitative study which is based on semi-structured interviews which were conducted with nine women from Israel who has completed their service. The aim of the paper was to analyse the respondents experience in the military and if they experience limitations because of their gender. The results of the study show that the respondents feel they are being given different opportunities than their male counterparts, especially when it comes to joining combat units. Furthermore, while some felt mistreated by the male soldiers, others stated they never felt differential treatment. This study concludes that combat units seems to be the main barrier between men and women, which reproduces inequality in the army. In order to reduce gender segregation there needs to be more female combatants and more men working in positions not related to combat.

Keywords: Israel, IDF, military, women, combat, limitations
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1. INTRODUCTION

In this chapter the reader will be introduced to a short background of the Israel Defense Forces as well as previous research on female soldiers in the Israeli army. Relevance and contribution will also be discussed at the end of the chapter. Purpose and research questions will also be included based on the research background and previous studies. Lastly, the chapter will conclude with a disposition that will summarise each of the seven chapters included in the study.

1.1. Background

The military seems to be a specifically gendered organisation and has been said to standardise and advocate masculinity by its very definition. Including the importance on traditionally masculine traits such as physical strength and power, and internal stratification of roles, which tend to intensify gender differences within the military. Research within the American military suggests that femininity becomes stigmatised, since it is judged as something fragile and weak which goes against the very purpose of the institution (Levin, 2011).

Israel is a country that stands apart from many others because they have mandatory military service for both men and women. This alters considerably from a system of military self-selection, and may lead to people believing that Israel’s military treats men and women alike. Although it might appear as if everyone is sharing a comparable army service experience, Hauser (2011) writes that this is not the case. Women only make up of 19 percent of border guards, 31 percent of the air force and 24 percent of the navy. Even though 88 percent of military occupations are open for women, only 69 percent of military positions are occupied by women (Hauser, 2011).

In 2000 the Israeli parliament passed an amendment to the Law of Military Service, which stipulated women’s right to equal choice of army professions. However some politicians and religious leaders have met this with objections and hardly any women pursue these opportunities. Even though women are moving into combat units and positions of military leadership at growing rates, big gender distinctions still exist within the Israeli military (Levin, 2011). This study will further explore the limitations for women in the army and their individual experiences of the military service. In order to get the women’s perception of their time in the military, nine interviews were conducted with Israeli women who has done the military service. As will be seen in chapter 1.3 there is a lack of research on how Israeli women experience their time in military service. Previous research also indicates that women’s issues are not a top priority in Israel (Golan, 1997; Johnson, 1989). However, since the military is a vital part of many Israeli’s lives, in order to achieve a more equal society in Israel, gender-related issues in the army needs to be addressed.

1.2. Brief history of the IDF

The roots of the current IDF (Israel Defense Forces) can be traced back to the early 20th century when the primary defence organisation of pre-state Israel was called Bar Giora - a secret unit which was founded in 1907. Of nearly a dozen members of Bar Giora, two were women. They increased
in 1909 into a band of Jewish watchmen called Hashomer. Debates erupted over women participating in the activities of Hashomer and two key roles for women were selected. Some of the female participants were full-fledged members who were trusted with weapons and organisational matters, while others were simply the wives of Hashomer members who were there to take care of the men by nursing them, welcoming them home and in some emergencies, loading weapons. Haganah, which included all capable Jews, both female and male, was formed in the 1920s when the Arab attacks in Pre-state Israel became more serious and organised. Their job was to acquire arms, provide military training and set up defence posts in cities and towns (Johnson, 1989).

The IDF was later created when Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion wanted to unite different Jewish fighting forces and organise a professional and depoliticised army for defence. It was established in 1948 during Israel’s War for Independence, which also marked a turning point for women’s participation in military units. One-fifth of all soldiers were women during the early parts of the war, and female soldiers actively took part in combat. They served as ambulance drivers, medics, intelligence officers, radio operators, doctors and artillery officers. However, their roles became less battle oriented in the latter stages of the war, and a specialised division of labor developed between female and male soldiers. A decision was made to enforce an obligatory military service for both men and women (Johnson, 1989).

This decision is unique for Israel since not many other countries draft both sexes. It may seem like it is a step towards gender equality and that Israel’s military treats women and men alike. However, the conditions for both sexes is different. Women are excused if they are married, pregnant, mothers or religious (men can also be excused for this reason), leading to a large difference between the numbers of women and men serving in the army. Merely 65 percent of qualified Jewish women are being drafted by the Israeli army compared to 75 percent of eligible Jewish men. Only 34 percent of all IDF soldiers are women and the female soldiers are being funnelled into a small set of military positions that are considered gender appropriate for women. The length of obligatory military service also differs. Women are only required to serve two years while men serve for two years and eight months. When the military service is completed there is a requirement to do reserve army duty. However, the majority of women do no reserve army duty, while approximately 50 percent of men are called upon for active reserve (Hauser, 2011).

As of 2016 the IDF started a new experimental program to fully integrate women into the Armoured Corps. Women can now serve as tank crew members, however this rule has not yet come into effect. If the program proves to be successful then women will have the chance to join any combat role except for elite Special Forces. In 2015 the army’s psychological and medical experts decided that the “attempt to train women for frontline combat roles (beyond their physical ability) for the sake of ‘equality’ will result in many injuries just to find the one woman who can cope with the required physical demands” (Sadan, 2016). The army has also debated about women’s special privacy needs which cannot be accommodated by crew operating for days at a time in their tanks (Sadan, 2016).
1.3. Relevance and contribution

This study aims to bring forth a new perspective of how Israeli women perceive their time in service and how their experience has been. The purpose of this paper is to contribute to the research field of gender-related issues in Israel with a focus on the military. By writing this study there is an ambition to contribute with new discussions and linkages that will bring more attention to this specific topic. As will be shown in previous research, there are gender differences in the military, most notably towards women. It is important to understand how women experience the military service and if progress is being made towards a more equal society.

1.4. Previous research

Orna Sasson-Levy is one author who has covered themes about Israeli female soldiers. She discusses about “masculine” roles and how “gender identities” are being formed in the army. Women are also being limited to enter specific roles in the army such as combat, which favorize men. In the case of Israel, the author writes that only a progress in peace process will strengthen non militaristic conceptions of citizenship, which are necessary in order for women to have full participation and equal rights in state institutions. The author conducted in-depth interviews with 52 male soldiers and 47 female soldiers within a year of their release from the military. The author argues that the female soldiers that are being put into “masculine” roles shape their gender identities accordingly to the hegemonic masculinity of combat soldiers. Rather than challenge the military, it strengthens the military gender order when women mimic combat soldiers. They conform to a perception that identifies “soldierhood” solely with masculinity (Sasson-Levy, 2003).

In the article “New Roles or “New Times”? Gender Inequality and Militarism in Israel’s Nation-in-Arms” by Robbins & Ben-Eliezer (2000) the authors write about women’s involvement in the military, or lack thereof. They discuss how the military encourages different forms of participation by promoting profound images of femininity and masculinity. The authors write that even though women actively participate in the military, they do so in a highly gendered manner. The authors suggest that women are being coerced into either being very “feminine” or act in a “masculine” way, depending on which role in the army they had. The authors’ methodological approach locates the Israeli military in changing national and international contexts, and assess the interaction between external discourses of Israel’s political-military context and gender. The active contribution of women to the military project has not taken apart the cultural ideal of the Israeli male fighter and leader. Rather, the variety of roles implies that women’s service has remained divergent in an organization whose main purpose is still defined as the representation of masculinity (Robbins & Ben-Eliezer, 2000).

Another author who has conducted previous research about female soldiers in Israel is Galia Golan. She writes about how, in a country such as Israel, a contributing factor to gender relations is the militarization of society. Girls are being treated differently even before doing the mandatory military service. In the year prior to the draft, numerous branches of the army pursue the boys, competing with each other to engage the best recruits and appear in local high schools.
In regards to the girls, no such courting takes place. There are also some positions where women cannot rise above a certain rank, such as certain combat positions. Status in an army is determined by one’s relationship to combat. The closer a woman’s task is to a combat position, the higher her status will be. Gender inequality is not a top priority considering the struggle Israel is facing in their conflict with Palestine. The power of the religious establishment in Israel is also delaying the progress towards gender inequality (Golan, 1997).

Johnson (1989) conducted her research on military roles of Israeli women and brings forth the topic of how women’s issues are perceived as minor in comparison to the more severe social problems Israel is facing, notably national security. Despite the fact that both men and women are being drafted to the army, the military system is far from equal and displays traditional role divisions between men and women. The author also addresses that many oppose women in combat roles due to a strong sense of familyism. The women’s role is instead to reproduce and take care of the next generation of soldiers. The underlying reasons for opposing women in combat derive from moral and normative expectations of Israeli society which reflects traditional female roles. Women are still unequally represented in clerical and service positions and lack status in the army due to limitations against combat duty. However, the author concludes that there is currently a trend within the military towards better and more opportunities for female soldiers and increased emphasis on equal practices (Johnson, 1989).

**Purpose**

The purpose with this study is to analyse how women are experiencing their participation in the military service and if they experience limitations in the army because of their gender.

### 1.5. Research questions

To answer the main purpose of this paper - how Israeli women experience their time in military service, I will take guidance in the following questions:

- Do women experience having different opportunities in comparison to men in the army?
- Did the respondents feel they were being treated differently in comparison to men?
- How do the respondents relate to the hegemonic masculine ideas of being a soldier?

### 1.1. Disposition

This study consists of seven chapters. It has been divided into seven because the author thought it would be easier for the reader to connect the empirical results and analysis in separate sections.

**Chapter 1. Introduction**

In this chapter the reader will be introduced to women’s participation in the Israeli army. To better understand the current situation the reader will be introduced to a brief history of the IDF. Later on, the reader will also be introduced to the research questions and purpose of the study.
Furthermore, relevance and contribution as well as the author’s ethical considerations as will be presented in this chapter.

**Chapter 2. Methodology**
In this chapter the reader will be presented to the methodology and research approach. It will also give the reader an insight on the motivation of research approach, limitations of the study, interview procedure, presenting the respondents as well as ethical considerations. The interview participants will also be introduced in a table which will include the date and time of the conducted interviews.

**Chapter 3. Theoretical Framework**
The theoretical framework will consist of four theories. This chapter will present the reader to the “social role theory”, “gender expectations”, “gender and military sociology” as well as “hegemonic masculinity”.

**Chapter 4. Empirical Results**
In this chapter the empirical results will be presented. It has been divided into four chapters. In this chapter the readers will be presented to the conducted interviews with the nine respondents. The empirical results will be presented with quotations which will strengthen the reliability in this study.

**Chapter 5. Analysis**
This chapter will analyse the empirical results and connect it to the theoretical framework. This chapter provides an insight to see if there are connections to the empirical results and theoretical framework, as well as analyse it. It tries to answer the three research questions and will be divided accordingly.

**Chapter 6. Conclusion**
This chapter will conclude chapter 5. The author will answer the research questions and conclude the research purpose. Furthermore, the chapter also includes research contribution and suggestions for further research.

**Chapter 7. Final discussion**
In this chapter the reader will be given a final discussion of the conducted research.
2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Theories connected to gender perspectives were chosen because of their relevance to this study, and to analyse this study’s material and research questions. Amongst the chosen theories is the social role theory which speaks about how men and women differ in status and cultural stereotypes of men and women that leads humans to adjust and develop certain traits “appropriate” for their gender. The theory of gender expectations speaks about the way women are expected to act and to behave. Gender and military sociology brings up how the stereotypical view of male and female roles are encouraged in the military. The last theory connects to hegemonic masculinity which speaks more of how the idea of femininity is associated with inferiority while masculinity is connected to strength and physical fitness.

2.1. Social Role Theory

The social role theory is a social psychological theory that refers to gender differences and similarities in social behaviour. Its key principle is that differences and similarities appear primarily from the classification of men and women into social roles within their society. The behaviours of men and women generally support and maintain the division of labour through socialisation and the establishment of gender roles. For example, men are more likely than women to be the main family providers and take full-time roles in the paid economy, often ones which involves physical strength, leadership skills and assertiveness. Gender-stereotypical expectations are reinforced between men and women when status differences appear (Rudman & Glick, 2008).

The social role theory also explains how social roles and gender hierarchy create shared, prescriptive cultural stereotypes of men and women that lead humans to adjust (e.g., to develop skills, traits and behaviours that are “appropriate” for their gender). Role segregation produces stereotyped expectations, which means that people associate women with communal traits, such as being helpful and kind, while men are stereotyped as more aggressive, competitive and assertive. Roles does not only support stereotypes about men and women, but also help creating a corresponding reality. The social role theory also focuses on the gender-based hierarchy, in which men have more power and status than women (Rudman & Glick, 2008).

2.2. Gender expectations

The gender-expectations of women’s behaviour are usually described as nurturing, caregiving and peaceful. Women often participate in peace activism, such as protests, public speeches, and political and economic boycotts. This could be seen as challenging existing gender norms as women move from the private sphere of the home (women’s domain) to the public sphere (men’s domain). On the other hand, women also serve as combatants, engaging in state-sanctioned violence as members of the military. This form of political activism - as combatants rather than as peacemakers - challenges gender norms about women’s “proper” behaviour and roles. The dissertation surrounding women and war is that women are by nature peaceful, while men are aggressive and apt to war. Men are the protectors while women are the protected (Kaufman & Williams, 2013).
2.3. Gender and military sociology

Women have been (and are) kept out of the armed forces because of the myth of biology, which is not seen as the social construction that it is. Winslow (2010) writes that in this argument, women are supposed to be genetically programmed to nurture life and are physically and emotionally not strong enough for combat. However, countless studies have shown this to be untrue and that women have been involved in innumerable military tasks. Women’s ability to perform in leadership roles in the combat arms is constantly questioned and compromised. Because of their gender, women may simply not be seen as competent leaders. The attributes of a successful leader (assertiveness, decisiveness and confidence) in the military are stereotypical of men. Women are also being portrayed as in need of protection and male courtesy, which only reinforces male attitudes towards women in combat and symbolically makes war a man’s business. The stereotypical views of male and female roles are encouraged in the military and especially in officer training. This will in turn contribute to and sustain sexist attitudes and behaviour in the military which may complicate the process of integrating women into the armed forces (Winslow, 2010).

2.4. Hegemonic masculinity

Many theorists have built on the insight that masculinities occur in relations of hierarchy, influenced by a loosely comprehensible and evolving hegemonic form which dominates not through force, but by consent. One important site for the investigation of hegemonic masculinities is the military. Constructions of femininity and masculinity in the army context arguably form the entire gender order. The idea of hegemonic masculinity has been used broadly in order to capture the way in which certain ideas about being a man and a soldier govern in military cultures, with important associations for the gender order en masse. Even though the ideas differs slightly in different times and places, it is usually connected to combat which in turn is connected to: strength, action, aggression, competitiveness and physical fitness. Not all soldiers fit this part, or even the majority, but this model rather acts as a cultural idea and negotiates their masculinity in relation to it (Duncanson, 2015).

Hegemonic masculinity is also the result of the power struggles and rivalries between distinct groups of men who attempts to prove their masculinity. These power struggles can be expressed in gendered terms as well: the threat of being feminized is used to degrade certain people. For example, in army training when the use of “girl” and “woman” are said in order to put down those who are failing to complete different physical challenges connected with manliness. Women are being affected by this since “feminized” qualities are associated with inferiority. Femininity is being associated with passivity, weakness and peace privileges while masculinity is associated with toughness, war and aggression, which feminizes non-violent alternatives and reinforces the systems of war and militarism. It maintains the very idea that gender is a dichotomous structure, where masculinity is valorised over what is feminine, not just in military contexts but beyond (Duncanson, 2015).
3. METHODOLOGY

This chapter will present the chosen method for this study and further explain how the primary data was conducted. It will also bring forth the researcher’s role as an interviewer in the study, as well as discuss ethical considerations.

3.1. Research approach and qualitative method

Before a study is conducted, researchers must choose a specific approach. In order to understand Israeli women’s experiences in the military, this study undertakes a phenomenological approach. In this case trying to understand the social reality through the perspective of the respondents. According to Smith et al. (2009) when the researcher uses a phenomenological interpretation, he or she aims to understand significant life experiences or events and how it affects their everyday life. This study considers the military service as a significant life experience for women in Israel. When a researcher undertakes a phenomenological stance, he or she usually gathers data by conducting interviews, or analysing written or oral reports from the respondents in order to understand their experiences. Considering that this study is based on the experiences of women in the Israeli army, it was more appropriate to understand their experiences by having a physical interaction with them. Therefore interviews, which is a widely used qualitative technique, was conducted.

A qualitative study is built on a research strategy where the emphasis is more often on words than on the quantification when collecting and analysing data. The two most important forms to describe qualitative interviews are semi structured and unstructured interviews. Conducting semi-structured interviews were preferable for this study, meaning that there was an interview guide, but the respondents had the liberty of forming the answers in their own way (Bryman, 2008). Semi-structured interviews were also to prefer since it is more suitable for studies who aims to analyse how people perceive their own social world. It also enables both the respondent and the researcher to conduct the conversation in unexpected directions but at the same time keep the interview within the relevant frameworks for the study. Qualitative interviews also offers the possibility to reach more unexpected and diverse responses. Responses provided in a survey are often less spontaneous and more polished than in a qualitative interview (Esaiasson, Peter., Gilljam, Mikael., Oscarsson, Henrik., & Waingnerud, Lena., 2012). The secondary data mainly comes from scientific articles. The articles were found through the database “Primo”, using specific words such as “Israel”, “Women”, “Military service”, “Army” and “Gender inequality”.

The interviews will be treated as testimonies, which will be seen as interpretations of reality. An interview guide was also prepared beforehand (see appendix). The order of the questions could vary and the respondents sometimes brought up themes before the question was asked. Some themes developed throughout the interviews that were not covered in the interview guide, such as the religious aspects of the military. This could be seen as a benefit of doing semi structured interviews since the respondents can contribute with new perspectives that the researcher might not have thought of.
Advantages of doing qualitative interviews is that you get the perspective of a smaller group of people instead of surveying, which requires many more participants. Some disadvantages of doing qualitative interviews is that you cannot generalise. However, this study does not seek to generalise but to further increase knowledge on gender-related issues in the Israeli army. Another disadvantage is the time-consuming transcription of audio-recorded interviews. Although it stores more data than writing down the interviews, it is far more time-consuming (Saunders, et al., 2000).

3.2. Processing qualitative data

The focus has been on women and their experiences of the military, which has influenced the material for the study and questions for the interviews. Since the theme was about women in the Israeli army, the interviews were formed after theme. Three themes for the interview guide emerged. The first theme “Your time in the military service” consists of more general questions of the military service which will give the reader a better understanding of how the military service operates in Israel. The second theme “Thoughts on gender and discrimination” is connected to gender and military sociology by Winslow (2010). The theory mentions how war is a “mans” business and that stereotypical views of male and female roles are encouraged in the military, which will in turn contribute to sexist attitudes and behavior in the army. Therefore, the questions for the second theme were seen appropriate for this study. The third theme “Women in the army” consists of questions connected to chapter 3.4 which is about hegemonic masculinity from a military context. Lastly, concluding thoughts were included in order to let the women speak freely of their time in the army. The interview material was then categorized and summarized in order to detect general patterns.

3.3. Interview procedure

It was decided beforehand that the interviews would be conducted during the period of March – May 2017 in Israel. The interviews took place over the course of six weeks where the respondents agreed to be interviewed in either their workplace or at their house so we could speak privately. Most of the interviews took place in Tel Aviv, except for one that took place in Jerusalem. The interviews ranged from 25 to 90 minutes. It was important to conduct the interviews in a quiet and undisturbed environment, since it could otherwise disturb the quality of the recording, and to ensure that the respondents did not feel uncomfortable or worry that someone might be listening (Bryman, 2008).

All nine respondents spoke fluent English so there was no need for a translator. However, since their first language is Hebrew there might be a risk that their answers was not as descriptive and nuanced as it could have been in their first language. Although this is a risk that was taken, it should not affect the results of the study. To make sure that language would not be an issue, we kept the conversation in a simple and coherent manner. It was also ensured that the participants had enough time to reflect and think through their answers before responding. The respondents were encouraged to talk freely and efforts were taken to safeguard objectivity in the stated questions. All of the respondents were interviewed separately, on different days and with the same semi-structured questions.
Seven of the interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed. This was done in order to capture the respondent's answer in their own words and not lose special phrases and expressions that might get lost if you only take notes, as Bryman (2008) mentions. However, in some cases the respondents did not want to be audio-recorded since it made them feel anxious, so it was decided that the interview would be in written form instead.

The interviews were then analysed to see if there were any patterns, differences and similarities. All participants had the opportunity to see what was written down and approve their statements to further confirm the validity of the study.

### 3.4. Selecting the respondents

Nine different women from Israel who have completed their military service were interviewed for this paper. They were chosen because they have a first-hand knowledge and experience on this specific issue. All of the respondents come from various backgrounds and most had different positions in the army. Women ranged in age from 21 up to 32 years of age at the time of the interview. Since times are always changing it was necessary to limit the ages of the respondents so that no more than 10 years should have passed since serving in the army.

Through two contact persons the other female respondents were enlisted. The snowball effect came to use, meaning the women were asked for further contacts making it easier to find respondents to interview. However, the risk of using the snowball effect could be that their connections are friends who might share the same beliefs and experiences, making their opinions bias. However, since their friends had different positions in the army they did not share similar experiences.

### 3.5. The Respondents

In this section comes a short introduction of the respondents. Eight of the women did not want to be anonymous which means that name and age was not modified. One of the respondents chose to be anonymous. The table below summarises the conducted interviews by including the geographical location of the interview, date and time, the military positions of the respondents as well as the duration of the interview. This in order to further strengthen the reliability of the study. Below is a summary of the conducted interviews.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interviewed respondents</th>
<th>Respondents position in the army</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Geographical Location</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Time duration</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>May</td>
<td>Secretary</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>Tel Aviv</td>
<td>11/4-17</td>
<td>90 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bar</td>
<td>Psychological examiner</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>Tel Aviv</td>
<td>13/4-17</td>
<td>20 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Name</td>
<td>Position</td>
<td>Age</td>
<td>Location</td>
<td>Interview Date</td>
<td>Duration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------</td>
<td>---------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-----</td>
<td>--------------</td>
<td>----------------</td>
<td>----------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Talia</td>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>Tel Aviv</td>
<td>27/4-17</td>
<td>30 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Naama</td>
<td>Officer in a combat unit</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>Tel Aviv</td>
<td>3/5-17</td>
<td>45 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*Keren</td>
<td>Operation officer</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>Jerusalem</td>
<td>9/5-17</td>
<td>40 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hadas</td>
<td>Non-commission officer</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>Tel Aviv</td>
<td>10/5-17</td>
<td>60 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mor</td>
<td>Intelligence unit</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>Tel Aviv</td>
<td>12/5-17</td>
<td>75 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Danit</td>
<td>Bootcamp Commander</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>Tel Aviv</td>
<td>14/5-17</td>
<td>25 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yarden</td>
<td>Commander</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>Tel Aviv</td>
<td>14/5-17</td>
<td>35 minutes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Anonymous. The respondent has received Keren as her anonymous name because she did not want to disclose her name on the thesis.

May is 21, works as a waitress and currently lives in Tel Aviv. She completed her military service as a secretary.

Bar is 24, lives in Tel Aviv with her parents and works for a TV-channel. She served as a psychological examiner.

Talia is 24, studies in Tel Aviv University as a transpersonal psychotherapy. She served in the Education Force as a “teacher soldier”, meaning that she was a counsellor for children in the boarding school.

Naama is 32, works and lives in Tel Aviv. She stayed in the army for 4 years, instead of 2, and served as an officer in a combat unit.

Keren is 29, studies at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem. She asked to serve for 3 years as the boys do instead of 2 years, and continued as an operation officer. Keren is not her real name since she chose to be anonymous.

Hadas is 32, works in Tel Aviv and served as a non-commission officer and was responsible for the education part in a unit.

Mor is 28, is a student in fine arts in Tel Aviv and did two years of service for the Intelligence unit.

Danit is 29, works in Tel Aviv and served in the army as a commander in a boot camp and continued afterwards as a sergeant. She served 2 years in total.
Yarden is 24, works as a waitress in Tel Aviv and served in the Intelligence Force and later became a commander. She served her mandatory 2 years plus an additional 8 months.

2.5. My role as a researcher

Since I am a Swedish woman who has never been drafted nor grown up in an environment where the military has had a strong presence in your everyday life, I cannot fully relate to the respondents experiences. I also do not share the same knowledge of the Israeli society, as an Israeli researcher does, which makes me somewhat of an “outsider”. But there are also benefits of being the “outsider”. For example, I am not subjected to the same discourses and might notice things that the insider has taken for granted. Being an “outsider” can also benefit me in a way that it contributed to trust: since I have no personal relations with the Israeli army, the women might have felt like I would not judge them for the things they opened up about and said (Sprague, 2005).

Being a foreign female might have affected the results since English is not our first language, and some of the women struggled with some expressions and words. If a female Israeli would have conducted the interviews, the results might have been different since speaking in your mother tongue allows you to express yourself differently. Also, since I am an “outsider” I do not understand the situation as well as an Israeli woman would have, which creates a certain distance from me and the respondents. However, there was an instant connection with all women which created an atmosphere of trust and made the interviews progress in a relaxed and smooth way.

3.6. Limitations and delimitations

Due to the nature of this study, some limitations were necessary because there were not enough resources or time. Choosing to only focus on women in Israel who have completed their military service was one of them. This study does not include the perspective of men, nor their opinions or thoughts on the military service. It was desired to only include women in this study to get their perspective of this specific matter. Women’s issues have always been of interest which is why this specific topic was chosen.

The reason for choosing Israel specifically is because there was an opportunity to be in the country to collect data in first hand, which is beneficial for the reliability. The reason for not interviewing women who are serving at the time of the interview is because of the fact that many do not have time to be interviewed, did not want to be contacted for an interview and because women who have already served have more knowledge and experience. The women who have completed their service also have at least two years first-hand experience in the matter this study aims to investigate. The respondents have also had the chance to reflect on their time and experience in service in retrospect, something someone currently stationed in the military lacks an opportunity to do. Lastly, someone who is currently doing their military service might have a stronger incentive to be positive, or negative, towards the institution they are in service for.

Almost all women came from different units and withheld different positions in the military. Some variation was made in order to distinguish the different (and similar) experiences the women had.
Women who come from the same base and unit will most likely share similar experiences and thoughts about the military service since they would have had the same duties and job chores.

However, it is important to remember that this study only gives the perspective of these nine women and is not to be seen as representative for all women in Israel who has been drafted to the military. Their significance does not lay in their previously held position in the army, it is the fact that they have experienced being a woman in the army. This research seeks to contribute to a debate and increase the understanding of women’s experience of the military service in Israel, based on the testimonies from the nine respondents who participated in this study.

6.2. Validity

Validity concerns whether the findings really are what they appear to be about and is an important quality criterion. Validity can be divided into internal and external. Internal is how well a research has been conducted and whether there was a cause or effect relationship between the variables. The second term is whether you can generalize the research. Since qualitative research involves people understanding people, it can be complex to assure and assess validity (Saunders et al, 2009). In order to increase the validity, it is important to respect neutrality and not be bias. Furthermore, the respondents of the study are involved in the problem area or are directly influenced by the Israeli army’s, which strengthens the internal validity. The study’s communicative validity has also been strengthened, meaning that a detailed methodology of how the study will be analyzed has been made (Mälardalen University, 2014). Although the study cannot be generalized, the results can be extended for further research in the area of female soldiers in the Israeli army and how they are affected by gender differences.

6.3. Reliability

Reliability can also be divided into external and internal. External (complete) reliability is fulfilled when the same result is repeated several times. Internal is when the results from the research should be the same regardless of who is conducting it. Since qualitative research is about interpreting words rather than numbers (Bryman & Bell, 2013), it can be difficult to obtain reliability with a qualitative study since you cannot generalize and achieve similar results if the study is repeated. The reason may be that the information in qualitative interviews may vary since the respondent’s opinions and perceptions about the subject may be changed. In order for future researchers to have the opportunity to conduct the same study and receive similar results, there will be a detailed description of how the study has been conducted.

In order to increase the reliability, it is important to be aware of and relate to the weak points of having interviews as a method. The interviewer has a major influence role during the interviews as well as when interpreting the material. The collected material is influenced by the researcher through selection of questions, topics, and respondents (Esaiasson et al., 2012). The use of quotations in the empirical section and the analysis also affects the study’s reliability positively as they strengthen the respondent’s views as well as give link to the theoretical framework.
Transparency is substantial, which is why a thorough presentation on how the interviews have been conducted was presented.

3.7. Ethical considerations

At the beginning of every interview the respondents were given the opportunity to be anonymous. It is important to note that the participants of this study are aware that consideration was taken of their privacy, confidentiality and anonymity in the best way possible. The women also knew that they could at any time interrupt the interview or choose to not answer some (or any) questions, and that their participation is voluntary. It was always made clear that the essay was about women’s experience of the military service in Israel. The women were then asked if their testimonies could be used for the paper. It was ensured that the respondents could choose where they wanted to be interviewed, in order to make them feel comfortable and safe. The interviews were only recorded if the respondent felt comfortable with it. Furthermore, the empirical data throughout the study has been handled with care.
4. EMPIRICAL RESULTS

Below are the empirical results which will be divided into four chapters: Experiences and limitations for women in the Israeli army, gender-related discrimination within the Israeli army, gender inequality in the Israeli army, and lastly, the hegemonic masculine ideals of a soldier. The results are testimonies from the nine women who were interviewed and is not to be seen as representative for all women in Israel.

4.1. Experiences and limitations for women in the Israeli army

Women in Israel are each year being drafted to the mandatory service. While some of the respondents replied that they did not mind being drafted, others answered that they would not do it if it was not compulsory. May was one of the respondents who had conflicted thoughts about it. When asked how she felt about being drafted, she said she did not feel like she earned anything from it. In her opinion the things she did in the army was for nothing and that being a secretary was not a valuable experience. She clarifies that there are people who do relevant work in the military, but does not believe a secretary’s role is important. However, she emphasises that she did enjoy some parts of the military, mostly because of her new found friends, but that she would not it again if it was not mandatory. She also expressed her frustration about the army and said it is stupid since everyone needs to be a part of it, but feels like half of the people do nothing important. She felt it was unnecessary for her to be a soldier sometimes and explains:

“... The Haredim [ultra-orthodox Jews] hates the soldiers and also the Arabs hates us. I feel like - who am I protecting? Why am I protecting the people who hates me? But at least I don’t need to go on reserve, because of the position I had.”

May also expressed her desire to work as something different than a secretary at first. When asked if she had the opportunity to choose whichever position in the army she could, she says:

“I wanted at first to do something big in the military but girls can’t do bigger things. They have a unit of [female] combat soldiers but they won’t go to Gaza or to wars. They will be inside the border, but if there are no boys left, only then they [women] would have to go to war.”

Although there are limitations for women in the army, May says she is happy that she is not a man since they receive harder punishments. She says women are being treated more gently compared to men and that if men do something “wrong”, they receive punishments such as doing hundred squats or pushups, et cetera. For women it is different, she says, instead of getting physical punishments, they have to stay on Saturdays (which is usually their day off). She also emphasise that women only need to serve for two years in comparison to men who serve for two years and eight months.

Keren is one of the respondents who had a positive experience of the military service and said she would do it again even if it would not be obligatory. She chose to serve for an extra year beyond
the two mandatory years. Keren was a platoon commander of recruits for eight months, and afterwards positioned as the operation officer of her battalion. When asked if she ever got denied anything because of her gender, she replies: “Well, we can’t serve in just any unit in the army, so I think that counts.”

While discussing about limitations for female soldiers, Naama brought up the fact that it is more difficult for women to enter combat units and believes they should have the opportunity to enter whichever position they wish to, but that the army needs to be prepared for it. She means it could be problematic and challenging, but necessary in order to integrate more women in combat. Naama explains that there are now decisions in the army to bring women into more combat fighting positions inside a tank and that many people are arguing about it. She says: “Think about when you need to pee. Men can pee in a bottle, we can’t. It would be very hard for women, but if they want to do it, then they should at least have the opportunity and we should try and see what happens”. She adds that it could be a non-healthy environment to mix both men and women, but that it could be dealt through education. She adds:

“You shouldn’t dismiss it because we think that our society isn’t ready. Improving facilities and education would be an option. It’s a functional army that actually fight but we have to give girls the opportunity to do it as well.”

Hadas speculates that if a woman wants to be in the combat field, she will find a way to do it. She also expressed that she was lucky since her unit gave all women the opportunity to serve if they wished to. Mor is another respondent who felt like she was fortunate in the military, since she was content with her position and did not feel dissatisfied with her time in service. She points out that it is more difficult for men to get into positions like she had, since men are normally aimed for combat. She says:

“... I think they’re denied of doing these positions that are very interesting, that in some sense go easier to girls because they don’t aim us for combat. But, if you look at it the other way around, girls who want to do combats really, really have to struggle and there’s many limitations for women there as well.”

Naama believes that some positions are better suited for men and some are better for women and speculates that it all depends on the personality. Men and women were not being treated differently where she was positioned, but says there is a training course in the beginning of the army where she had to endure many physical things that was harder for women. She argues that there are some situations where women will have more difficulty coping with. Naama says: “I’m just saying that the physical things for me was very hard. We had to walk with weapons and vests. I carried 30 kg with me and we had to hike with it. For me it was very hard. I guess for some men it was also hard for them, but I think some physical things are harder for women.”
4.2. Gender-related discrimination within the Israeli army

A recurring theme in the interviews were how most of the respondents experienced that their male colleagues expected less of them because of their gender. When Bar was asked if women and men are being treated differently, she replied and said: “Men expect less of you because you are a woman. You work less and you are being treated like you can’t do physical things like carrying heavy stuff”. Keren said that being a woman in the army meant she was denied certain things. She mentioned how she did not get the position she wanted although she excelled as a platoon commander. She mentions how her friend overheard her superiors speak about how they did not want Keren to continue with her soldiers because the company commander did not wish to have girls in his company. Keren explains that men do not want women to command them and says:

“You hear a lot of “you’re not telling me what to do! I’ll go ask the other officer, which was not surprisingly enough, a man”, and then women are also not picked for missions if they [men] can avoid that... Overall, women are in most times being made fun of as well. The men can say things like ‘Oh, you’re a combat soldier and you’re a woman? You must have a beard or be lesbian or just ugly’ and things like that...”

The other respondents on the other hand, did not experience any discrimination or felt like they were being mistreated during their military service. Danit said that in her unit she felt like everyone was being treated equally but that men and women were usually separated due to religious reasons. In her unit everyone shared equal job chores. Mor says that even though she never experienced any kind of discrimination, she knows she is one of the lucky ones and that there are gender-related discrimination towards women. She also mentions how she used to get high praise from her officers and felt like she was making a real difference by protecting and serving her country. Naama who also served in Intelligence, never felt that she was being treated differently in her unit, and says:

“My unit was more about the capability that you had in how intelligent you are, how much of a leader you are and things like that. In things like this, there aren’t differences.”

Talia, who served as a teacher soldier in the education unit, did not experience any discrimination either from her commanders in the army or from people she worked with in the boarding school. However, she continues and says: ”I have friends that have experienced it from the people they worked with but it wasn’t because of their gender but because of the hierarchy of the place.”

As mentioned earlier, many of the respondents return to the topic that women are limited to enter certain positions in the army, mostly combat positions. May is one of the respondents who believes that women are doing an equally important part in the army as men, but that men are being favoured. May continues on this topic and says:

“... From the beginning you can’t do certain things that are as important as men. You can’t really fight and you can’t really be... I don’t know... There are a lot of women in most positions but you can’t fight and be a warrior so you can’t be in a high level in the army.”
Keren mentions how she believes some men do not agree with women being in the army and that many do not want to serve in the same unit as women. While discussing the pros and cons of being a female soldier, she says she believe women are stronger since they have more to prove, which results in a greater ability to achieve their goals. However, she points out that a con is that she is in fact just that: a female soldier. She recounts hearing men telling her “you can’t do this, you’re too weak”, and dealing with people who thought she should not be there. She adds:

“Dealing with all of those who think we shouldn’t be there, and thinks we are less of women because we insist we can be as good as or even better than them. It’s tiring enough to be a soldier, so dealing with misogyny makes it worse.”

She hopes that in the future there will be more combat units that integrate women and that discrimination against women within the army will not be tolerated. She hopes this can be done by educating commanders and officers to accept and respect equality of the genders.

Yarden and Danit are two of the respondents who did not respond if there are any cons of being a female soldier, but rather emphasised the positive aspects of it. Yarden was glad to not do any physical efforts or guard gates, which she said was more of a “man’s job”. She also accentuated the fact that women are not expected to do combat roles, which from her perspective is something positive. Danit and Bar both referred to the two year mandatory army service as something positive for women, since they serve less time than men. However, Bar continues and says:

“The cons are that we are being taken a little less seriously, contributing less and there are people who makes a real difference out there- I just didn’t feel like my job was very important. I believe that women makes the army a nicer and better place, but when it comes to the real purpose of the army, which is protecting like the people in combat, then I don’t feel like I was doing an important job.”

Even though Danit did not mention any cons of being a female soldier, she does believe that men perceive women as “cute”. She also mentions that she feels men perceive women as less contributing, less important in the army, and that they are right in some ways since women does not have the same opportunities as men. She adds: ”It feels like men look at us in the army sometimes and think: what is she doing here?”.

4.3. Gender inequality in the Israeli army

The question “would you say that men and women are being treated differently in the Israeli army? If yes, in what way?” was asked to all respondents. Although all women agreed that gender inequality is something that exists within the Israeli army, some never experienced it. There were also some who said they were being treated differently in comparison to their male colleagues, while others felt they were being treated equally during their service. Naama believes that gender inequality is not a matter of opinion, but “it is what it is”. She also brought forth the fact that some
positions are only open for boys and that the main reason for this are the required physical abilities that some believe a woman does not have. Naama continues and says:

“Remember that the army was established a long time ago. Many units are only for boys. If you want to modify that, you have to make a big reform and think about how you put girls in the same unit. For example, you have situations where you only have boys... For example, a girl wouldn’t have a place to get changed if she would be in a men’s unit.”

Yarden who also served in the Intelligence Force believes that gender inequality is visible, but that it has improved somewhat in these past ten years. She explained that ten years ago, girls could not be pilots for example, but that improvements have been made to include women:

“It changes... It develops... It still exists [gender inequality] because everywhere in the world, people see girls as gentle, someone to save... The man needs to save us from the dragon. But I didn’t really feel it because I served in Intelligence so... It’s not about physical strength but more about how intelligent you are.”

When Mor was asked if she believes gender inequality exists within the Israeli army, she said that it definitely does but has some conflicted thoughts about it and says the word equality is very confusing because men and women are built differently. She explains that she believes both sexes deserves equal treatment when it comes to salaries, laws, et cetera., but in order to have equality there needs to be an understanding of the differences between men and women, and to learn to accept those differences. She mentions how there are voices rising against girls going for combat roles and positions that are originally made for men. They mean that it is not about if guys are better than girls - it is about the fact that men are built differently than females, meaning that they are built stronger. She explains that for the price of gender equality, you risk the lives of soldiers. When Mor was asked to further explain, she says:

“When you put female soldiers in fighting, usually they are not as strong as the males, and then you risk your other soldiers. I think it’s a very complicated situation because there is some truth to this fact. The girls that will go for this job will have to go through the same training. If a male trains for seven months or whatever, and a female does as well, chances are that the male will be stronger than her.”

Danit mentioned how she believes that women do not receive the same opportunities as men. When asked in what way, she replies:

“First, the jobs they’re [women] being offered are not the same. You can get accepted to anything but it’s harder as a woman. My position was difficult. It was for non-combat soldiers. It was the worst type of people. They [men] really didn’t like getting orders from women.”
Bar believes there is much pressure on the army because of the rabbis, and says that the rabbi’s presence in the military affects the gender differences. According to Bar, the rabbis try to separate men and women from each other. When asked about the rabbi’s part in the military, she says that in the military there are rabbis who are in charge of all the religious aspects of life in the army, and that they try to keep them apart so that boys serve in their separate unit and girls in their own. She also gives an example of how girls are restricted to do certain things, such as singing in some places in the army: “It’s a very stupid religious rule and it’s not everywhere, but still”. Naama also brought up the religious aspect of the army and explained how many of the religious men are connected to the military service, in comparison to the religious Jewish girls. She clarifies that most religious girls have been doing “sherut leumi” (national service) instead of the military service, but that this is changing. Nowadays, many of the religious girls wishes to have the same opportunities as men and join the army.

Even though Hadas says she is sure that gender inequality exists, she did not feel it herself. While speaking about her position, she says she felt like she did not do her job as good as she wanted to and that her commander did not care about her work because it was “less important” in his eyes so she had to fight for everything. She says: “Maybe it was because of the fact that I was a woman, but it also depends on the character.” She further explains that the army is not like any other big organisation where you can leave or do what you want: “It’s a mandatory place. You can’t do anything, you’re not there because you want to be there. Sometimes it happens that things like sexual harassment occurs more often because of the hierarchy of the army. Your commanders are in very high positions and a lot of times there are secretaries that are afraid. In this field it can be kind of difficult”.

Keren believes that gender inequality exists but not as a formal point of view but rather as the point of view of the average soldier, who is not educated to equality and think it’s beneath the male soldier to serve with girls because “they’re girls so they must not be doing anything hard or important.”

4.4. The hegemonic masculine ideals of a soldier

All of the respondents were asked the question: “As a woman, how do you relate to the hegemonic masculine ideals of being a soldier?”. Nearly everyone replied and said that since Israel drafts both men and women, they do not really feel it the same way as a country with only male soldiers would. The women explained that it has always been normal for them to see female soldiers. Talia explains that she was born into the reality of a woman going to the army, and also has a mother who held a high rank in the army. She says she grew into knowing, and unconsciously accepting the fact that she was becoming a soldier one day, and sees no difference between a male and female soldier.

Hadas believes that the hegemonic masculine ideals of a soldier are formed during childhood, since as a child you look up to the soldiers who seem so brave and so big. Then, she adds, you grow up and you become one of them. She continues:
“You see that… They are basically kids. It’s not the image, it’s not the real thing. In some ways I want to believe that in those combat units, they should be masculine, they need to be strong, brave and work very hard physically. They basically protect the country. But it’s not always like that, not all of them are like this. People want to believe, because that’s when they feel safe, knowing someone strong is protecting them.”

Keren does not necessarily believe masculinity should be connected to the stereotypical view of a soldier. She says: “The history, especially ours, is filled with wars won with the help of women. In addition, being a soldier to me means to defend - hence the name IDF, and also protect, which are feminine gestures. I also believe it’s a duty anyone should do, regardless of gender”.

Mor says she identified with herself more as a soldier than a woman during her military service. She excelled as a soldier and got a diploma for her work. She always felt like a good soldier who was doing a valuable job for her country. She says that the only time she identified with herself more as a woman, and not as a soldier, was around foreigners. She explains and says: I felt like foreigners looked at me and thought “this small little girl is an Intelligence spy?” and it seemed very exciting and surprising for them. But for people in Israel it’s not something weird since we are so used to seeing female and male soldiers together.”

The other respondents did not give thorough answers on this question and only stated that they believe that the soldiers in Israel are not the “stereotypical” soldiers as you see in movies. Naama explains further into the situation in Israel and says:

“In Israel it’s different, because we have mandatory service. Most people in Israel knows what it is and most people hopefully knows that 50% are women. We don’t have any ideas of how a soldier is “supposed” to be, because most of us went through this experience.”

When Danit was asked to share her final thoughts on her time in the military, she said: “I’m proud that I’ve been in the army as a woman and it’s important that people know this. It’s necessary to know: as a woman, you can do these things. You can accomplish these things that some believes only men can do”.
This chapter will analyse the findings from the conducted interviews together with the theoretical framework. The analysis has been divided in accordance to the research questions.

5.1. Do women experience having different opportunities in comparison to men in the Israeli army?

The results of the study show that women do experience having different opportunities. However, some of the women gave more general answers and were not necessarily referring to their personal experience or their units. Except for one of the respondents who expressed her frustration about not being able to do “bigger things” in the army, the others seemed content with their positions.

Since most of the respondents served in different units and positions, their answers are somewhat distinct. However, all respondents brought up the issue that women are limited to enter certain units, most notably combat. The women all seemed to agree that men have an easier time entering combat units and that women have to struggle more in order to be a combat fighter. As May mentioned in chapter 4.2: “There are a lot of women in most positions but you can’t fight and be a warrior so you can’t be in a high level in the army”. This corresponds to what previous research has discussed. According to Sasson-Levy (2003) women are being limited to enter specific roles in the army such as combat. Even though women are slowly being accepted into combat units, it is still done in a restricted way.

In chapter 4.2, Bar says: “... when it comes to the real purpose of the army, which is protecting like people in combat do, then I don’t feel like I was doing an important job”. Combat fighters are being seen as the “protectors” of the army and is often associated with men and strong physics. This somewhat diminishes women’s part in the army since not many are recruited to combat or wishes to join. However, all units play a vital role in the army and should not be discredited as something less important. But if some women, such as Bar, are excluded from protecting their country in a way that feels valuable for them, what part do they play in the army? And if 50 percent of the population have a smaller chance of joining certain positions, can it be called an equal society? The fact still remains that if a woman would want to join a combat unit, it will be prove to be more difficult for her, as opposed to for a man.

Mor also emphasises that since men are aimed for combat positions it makes it harder for them to enter other units, such as Intelligence. This indicates that men also receive different opportunities than women when it comes to positions not associated with physical strength. It seems that men and women are being put into stereotypical labels - men being favoured for combat units that requires physical strength, while women are more prone to get positions not involving physical strength. The results of the study connects with Winslow’s (2010) theory who speaks of how people perceive women as not physically or emotionally strong enough for combat. However, the author claims this to be untrue and proves that women have been involved in many military tasks.
Another indication that women have different opportunities than men is described by Keren, who says she was denied a position in the army because her company commander did not want a girl in his unit. In this specific case, the military can be seen as an institution where men obtain more power than women. Previous research has also indicated that men have more power and status than women (Rudman & Glick, 2008).

In order to achieve a more equal society, men and women must have the same possibilities. The Israeli army needs to include the other fifty-percent of their population and be more open to letting women into positions that are stereotypically for men. If a woman is as qualified for a position as a man, she should have the same opportunity and not be neglected because of the fact that she is just that: a woman.

5.2. Did the respondents feel they were being treated differently in comparison to men?

In regards to the women’s testimonies, some of the respondents felt like their male colleagues treated them in a different way because they were women, while others did not agree, indicating diversity in the women’s responses.

In Kerens case, she was being treated differently because she was a female and a combat soldier. As was mentioned in chapter 4.2, she speaks of how “women are in most times being made fun”, implying that men do not take female combat soldiers seriously. Because she is a woman, her male colleagues treated her in a different way and would at times belittle her and tell her she was “too weak”. Female combat soldiers would also be referred to as “ugly” or masculine and must “have a beard” by the male combat soldiers. Her male colleagues also recognized “the other officer” more, which in turn was a man, indicating that her male counterparts put more trust in the other officer. Previous research by Winslow (2010) also signify that women’s ability to perform in leadership roles in combat is constantly questioned and compromised, because of their gender. In this case, it seems as though women in combat roles are at times being ridiculed by their male colleagues. This could have consequences, since it might make women more aware of joining combat units if they will be facing gender-related discrimination. Not only that, but it can also make it more difficult for women to get accepted to higher rank positions if they are not being taken seriously. In this specific case with Keren, it seems as if women in combat are being objectified. As Duncanson (2015) explains, masculinity is valorized over what is feminine, not just in military contexts but beyond.

As has been previously mentioned by Winslow (2010) stereotypical gender roles are encouraged in the military, especially in officer training. The author writes that sexist attitudes and behavior are in this way sustained in the military which may complicate the process of women’s integration into the armed forces. Unfortunately men and women are being put into stereotypical roles in the army which can be seen in Keren’s case. If a female decides to enlist in combat, she is being labelled as "masculine". This could go both ways as well - men might feel they need to enlist in combat which is a "masculine" position, while losing the opportunity to endorse in other positions that are seen as more "feminine" but might be more of interest.
In chapter 4.1 May argues that women are being treated more gently compared to men, which can be connected to what Yarden also mentions in chapter 4.2. She emphasizes how men perceive women as gentle and someone to save, rather than being the saviors. Previous research conducted by Rudman & Glick (2008) also mentions how women are seen as someone to protect while the men are the protectors. However, there were other respondents who meant they were never being treated in a different way.

Keren and May were the two respondents who expressed the most frustration about being subjected to differential treatment. Could this be connected to their positions in the army – one being an operation officer and the other a secretary? One position being considered a high rank position while the other one is not. While Keren felt her male colleagues did not take her seriously, May felt she did not contribute to the army and that her role was not of importance. It is interesting to compare the two women and see that, although one serves in a position considered higher rank, she is still being subjected to differential treatment. It may not matter which position you have in the army, but rather which unit you belong to, that makes the difference.

The study shows diversity in the respondents answers and therefore it is difficult to make an assumption. However, results indicate that the women who do experience differential treatment were being viewed primarily as feminized objects and were therefore objectified and marginalized. Women in combat are more likely to experience differential treatment and be depreciated in comparison to men. The respondents who answered they were not being subjected to differential treatment do mention they believe gender inequality is a problem in the military. Furthermore, as Bar and Danit both mentioned in chapter 4.2, men tend to take women a little less seriously which may lead to different attitudes towards female soldiers.

5.3. How do the respondents relate to the hegemonic masculine ideals of being a soldier?

The respondents did not seem to relate much to the hegemonic masculine ideals of a soldier. Some explained that this had to do with Israel recruiting both men and women and that early on in life, they know they are expected to serve in the army. Since they would eventually grow up and become a soldier themselves, the women did not see any differences between a male and female soldier. As Naama brings up in chapter 4.4, there are no ideas of how a soldier is ”supposed” to be since most of them went through the same experience. Talia also mentions in chapter 4.4 how she grew up with a mother figure who had a high position in the army, and therefore did not necessarily associate a soldier with being masculine or being a man.

Duncanson (2015) writes in his study that the idea of hegemonic masculinity has been used in order to capture the way in which certain ideas about being a man and a soldier govern in military culture. This implies that a soldier is associated with men. However, since the women in this study have all participated in the army and are used to growing up seeing female soldiers, their perceptions and ideas of a soldier differs from the hegemonic masculine ideals. The women instead emphasises how normal it is for them to see male and female soldiers together. The respondents also do not
necessarily associate soldiers with masculinity. As Keren emphasises in chapter 4.4, being a soldier means to defend and protect which she means are feminine gestures.

However, Hadas mentions in chapter 4.4 how she wants to believe that people in combat units are masculine and work very hard physically since they protect the country. When Hadas says ”they” she is referring to men. Although she does point out that not all combat fighters possess these qualities, there is still an indication that she believes men are the protectors of the country or at least play a more vital part of protecting. This was also stated by Kaufman & Williams (2013) who wrote that people see men as the protectors while women are the protected. Although both Hadas and Keren brings up the fact that being a soldier means to protect, they have divided viewpoints.

The military is an institution with a hierarchy where the combat soldiers are on top. The combat soldiers have a maintained status as the hegemonic form of masculinity. Although Robbins & Ben-Eliezer (2000) wrote that women participate in the military in a highly gendered manner, being coerced into either being very ”feminine” or ”masculine”, the study shows that the respondents did not reinforce stereotypical gender roles by acting in a certain way. The empirical findings from the study shows that the majority of the respondents have no stereotypical ideas of how a soldier is supposed to be and therefore does not relate to the hegemonic masculine ideals.
6. CONCLUSION

This chapter will conclude the research results and will confirm if the research purpose was achieved. Furthermore, validity and reliability of the study will be discussed. Lastly, suggestions for further research will be discussed.

6.1. Research results

As has been stated in the introduction, the purpose of this study was to investigate how women feel they are being treated in comparison to men in the Israeli army and if they experience limitations because of their gender. This study indicates that women do experience having different opportunities than men and some have even been subjected to gender-related discrimination. The fact that women serve for a shorter period of time may also affect women’s presence in the army and reduce their value to the military. Furthermore, the women experience limitations in certain areas of the army, such as combat units. Either they are being excluded from joining or experience having a harder time joining. Men are usually aimed for combat while women are not. However, the majority of the respondents were content with their positions in the military and were not necessarily affected by this personally.

The respondents also discussed gender inequality within the Israeli army and how women are being treated differently in comparison to men. Although all respondents agreed that gender inequality is present in the army, not all have been subjected to discrimination. On the contrary, in their units they were held in high regards. However, the women who showed dissatisfaction with their time in service did not feel they were doing an important job or were protecting the country in a way that felt meaningful for them.

The study concludes that certain combat units is the main limitation for women in the army and could be the key to achieve a more equal society. However, the respondent enlisted in combat was subjected to gender-related discrimination by male soldiers and could not obtain the position she wanted because of the fact that she was a woman. It is therefore important to further integrate women into combat and encourage the most qualified to apply. For the army to be equal, there needs to be more female combatants and more men working in Intelligence or other positions not related to combat in order to break the gender segregation and barriers.

6.2. Suggestions for further research

Since this study only gave the women's perspective on the military service, it could be of interest to do it from men’s perspective. As was mentioned earlier, men are aimed for combat units, which makes it harder for them to enter other positions. This could be interesting to do further research about and do a qualitative study on how men experience the military service and if they feel unequal treatment in comparison to women. The religious aspects of the military was also brought up hastily, and how rabbis influence the gender differences. This could be a very interesting area to
do further research about, to see how big of a role religion plays in the Israeli army and how it affects men and women’s participation. Another interesting area could be to do a study about the religious Jewish girls in Israel and their participation in the army. Like Naama mentioned, many of them wants to go to the army instead of doing national service. How is this met by the public? Since the military is such a vital part of many Israelis lives, further research about both men and women’s experience are highly encouraged. Since this study only gives the nine women’s perspectives on the military service, it could be intriguing to build further on this study or redo it to see if the results will differ.

6.3. Final discussion

Although women in Israel are serving alongside men, there are indications that it is far from equal and women’s issues are not being prioritised. Firstly, women serve for eight months less than men. On one hand it can be seen as something positive if you do not wish to be in service for longer. However, this could also imply that the military is investing less in women which in turn reduces their value in the army. The military also provides men with more opportunities than women and therefore implies that women’s status in the army is weaker. As has been previously discussed, some of the respondents even felt that the male soldiers thought they were contributing less and tends to take women a little less seriously.

However, the army should start focusing on women’s participation in the army and let them have an opportunity to enrol in units that are stereotypically for men. If a woman is as qualified, or even better, there should not be any restrictions just because of gender. Although the study indicates diversity in the respondents answers, some experiencing limitations while others not, there needs to be more awareness around this subject. Both men and women should be included in all aspects of the army in order to achieve a more equal society, which will only benefit both sexes. Otherwise, can a society really be called equal if men and women are subjected to differential treatment?
7. Reference list


Robbins, Joyce., Ben-Eliezer, Uri. (2007). *New Roles or “New Times”? Gender inequality and Militarism in Israel’s Nation-In-Arms*. Oxford University Press. Available online:


Winslow, Donna. (2010). *Gender and Military Sociology*. Swedish National Defence College, Department of Leadership and Management. Available online:

**Literature**


8. Appendix

Anonymous or not
Name
Age
Occupation

Interview questions

Your military service

Which position did you have during your military service?
Did you complete your service?
How was your experience of the military service?
Is there anything you wish could be improved with the military service?
Is there anything you wish you could have done differently?

Thoughts on gender and discrimination

Have you ever felt any kind of discrimination? If yes, do you think it was because of your gender?
Have you ever been denied anything because of your gender? If yes, what?
Would you say that men and women are being treated differently in the Israeli army? If yes, in what way?

Women in the army

As a woman, how do you relate to the hegemonic masculine ideals of being a soldier?
How do you think men perceive women in the army?
Pros and cons of being a woman when doing the military service?

Concluding thoughts

Anything else you would like to share about your overall experience of the military?