

Original article

## The role and place of women in the army of Ukraine in the context of gender equality

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### INFORMATION

#### Article history:

Submitted: 26 January 2022

Accepted: 28 February 2023

Published: 15 March 2023

### ABSTRACT

The article is the analysis of the current issues related to gender policy of the Armed Forces of Ukraine. The article presents the principle of equality that has a number of manifestations, one of which is the principle of gender equality meaning equal approach to all relevant issues regardless of gender. Gender stereotypes, gender behavioural norms and problems of gender identification in the modern Ukrainian society are analysed. The problem of gender differences is associated with the fact that due to the continuous dynamic changes in the world, more and more questions arise as to the impact of certain gender stereotypes on professional activities of a person. One of the currently discussed issues is the impact of gender mainstreaming on the role of women in the military, as well as the impact on the effectiveness of military operations with their participation.

The results of the research confirm that the principle of equal rights and possibilities for the service people of both genders is implemented in the army; however there is still the necessity to strengthen educational activities among the personnel, first of all, among the units and subdivisions of Ukraine's Armed Forces. For the last few years, considering the fulfilment of assigned tasks in both everyday life and combat operations, the role of servicewomen has increased. To determine theoretical foundations of that problem the theoretical methods of generalisation, scientific analysis and synthesis were implemented. Corresponding software was used to process empirical data and to conduct analytical calculations. Analytical processing of information was engaged to solve the problem of scientific analysis of the events as a holistic phenomenon.

### KEYWORDS

armed forces, Ukraine, gender, gender stereotype, gender equality, servicewomen

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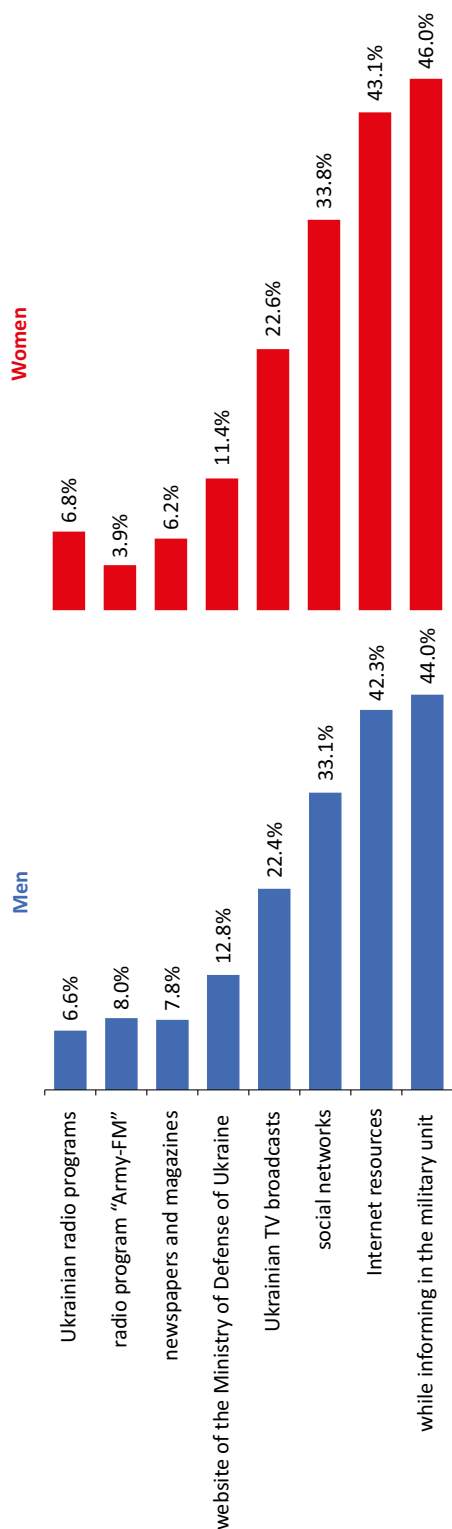
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## Introduction

General problem statement. For a long period of time, the historical worldview has been created by men who have been expressing their views on the environment, structure of an ideal family, the place and role of a woman in social surrounding. There has always been a lot of controversy as to the women's participation in military actions. The opponents of gender equality explained it by the fact that women were not capable of serving in the army due to their moral and physical features. Modern military forces of the majority of the countries cannot be imagined without the female component. This is one of the manifestations of the feminisation of society characterised by strengthening of the position and influence of women in the army. To protect women's rights a lot of surveys have been conducted, based on which it was proved that men and women suffer from psychological and physical burden at an equal level. Today, there is no doubt as to the necessity of involving women in military service as full-fledged subjects of military activities. Feminisation of the army is a specific part of feminisation of society and is manifested through strengthening the role and influence of women in the army as well as through functional dependence of the latter on the degree of implementing by servicewomen of their individual potential. The relevance of the problem is confirmed by the increasing number of servicewomen in the army, the expansion of military specialties and positions occupied by servicewomen, as well as domination of outdated stereotypes as to the place and role of women in the Armed Forces. Additionally, the topic of the study is determined by the necessity to speed up the democratic transformation of Ukraine and to clarify the specifics of women's participation in military actions in eastern Ukraine by exposing both their potential success and difficulties of integration as servicewomen.

Analysis of the Recent Research and Publications. The specifics of gender-role differentiation and gender socialisation have been researched by A. Alvinus, C. Krekula and G. Larsson [1], W. Giles and J. Hyndman [2], D. Kaźmierczak [3], T. Holovanova [4] and M. Palahniyk [5]. According to O. Voronina [6], gender theory is fundamentally based on the idea that almost everyone traditionally believes that "natural" differences between men and women are of social rather than biological nature. The main theoretical and methodological approaches to the issue of gender policy of the Armed Forces of Ukraine, as well as the current state and prospects of its implementation have been reflected in the works by Y. Tiapkina [7]; T. Khraiban and O. Silko [8]; S. Perepolkin, V. Boniak, V. Zavhorodnii, T. Syroid and L. Filianina [9]; Y. Sokolovska, I. Sevruck and N. Chuprinova [10]. The aim of the article is to assess the level of implementation of the state's gender policy in Ukraine's Armed Forces and to investigate the role and place of females in the army.

In the majority of nations, it is not possible to imagine modern Armed Forces without representatives of both genders. According to the data of the Personnel Centre of the Armed Forces of Ukraine, the total number of servicewomen, as of December 2021, was 32,569; among them 1,054 were senior officers. More than 16.7 thousand servicewomen took part in the fighting in East Ukraine. Among them, 302 servicewomen had the highest state awards. Moreover, Ukraine already has its first female generals – Lyudmyla Shuhalei and Oksana Khomenko. Since 2014, the number of servicewomen in the Armed Forces of Ukraine has doubled. Armed Forces are the institution that carries out an extremely important function of defending Ukraine, protecting its territorial integrity and sovereignty by using all the available human potential – both male and female [11].



**Fig. 1.** Distribution of answers to the question "From what sources do you obtain information about gender equality" (in % of those, who answered) Source: [12].

On 31 October 2020, it's been 20 years since the UNO Security Council adopted Resolution No. 1325 "Women, Peace, Security". This document sets the foundations for involving females in the decision-making process and increasing their representation in the defence and security sector [12, p. 5].

To assess the level of implementation of the state's gender policy in Ukraine's Armed Forces, and in accordance with the Plan of Risk Management in Ukraine's Armed Forces in 2020, of 5 February 2020, No. 3152/C, the survey on gender problems was conducted among servicepeople of Ukraine's Armed Forces. Taking into account the epidemiological situation in the regions of Ukraine because of the SARS-Cov-2 (Covid-19) respiratory disease pandemic, the survey among the servicepeople was conducted with the use of questionnaires sent to the units and subdivisions determined by the military command. The completed questionnaires were sent via courier postal service to the Scientific and Research Centre for Humanitarian Problems of the Armed Forces of Ukraine for their processing and analysis [12, p. 6].

Altogether, 1,802 servicepeople (1,360 servicemen, 411 servicewomen, 31 individuals did not specify their gender) were questioned during the survey; among them 1,060 servicepeople (818 servicemen, 228 servicewomen, 14 individuals did not specify their gender) from the Ground Troops of Ukraine's Armed Forces, 403 servicepeople (293 servicemen, 102 servicewomen, 8 individuals did not specify their gender) from the Air Force of Ukraine's Armed Forces, 102 servicepeople (71 servicemen, 26 servicewomen, 5 individuals did not specify their gender) from the Navy of Ukraine's Armed Forces, 188 servicepeople (138 servicemen, 46 servicewomen, 4 individuals did not specify their gender) from the Air

Assault Troops of Ukraine's Armed Forces, 49 servicepeople (40 servicemen, 9 servicewomen) from the Special Operations Troops of Ukraine's Armed Forces [12, p. 6].

Among the main sources of obtaining information about gender equality (Fig. 1), the participants of the survey indicated classes held in the units and subdivisions of their service (44.4%), the Internet (42.5%), and social networks (33.3%). In addition, almost 23% of the subjects receive such information through the Ukrainian TV, and about 7% – from other sources (radio programmes "Army-FM", other programmes of the Ukrainian radio, as well as from the printed media). No substantial differences concerning this question among the representatives of different types of Armed Forces, as well as between officers and enlisted personnel have been registered.

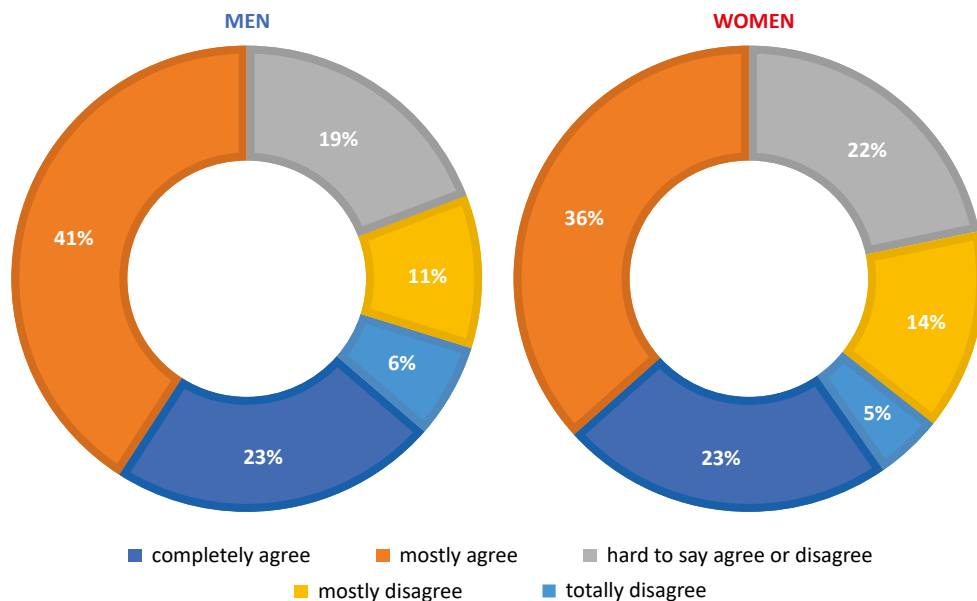
Thus, the results of the survey indicate sufficient level of awareness of the equality of rights and opportunities for men and women on service. For the purpose of assessing the situation with implementing the state's gender policy in Ukraine's Armed Forces, the servicepeople were asked to express their level of consent with advised statements concerning that aspect of the functioning of the Armed Forces. During the survey, the subjects of both genders expressed their opinions as to the implementation of the principle of the equality of the rights and opportunities of men and women while on service. The majority of the subjects, both men (63.6%) and women (59.2%), believe that Ukraine's Armed Forces have successfully (to a larger or smaller degree) implemented the principle of the equality of rights and opportunities regardless of gender. At the same time, every fifth female subject and every sixth male subject did not support that statement. About 20% of the subjects of both genders did not have an opinion on that issue. No substantial differences concerning this question among the representatives of the different types of Armed Forces, as well as between officers and enlisted personnel have been registered [12, p. 13].

Most respondents (65.5% of women and 62.9% of men) agree with the statement "Gender relations in Ukraine's Armed Forces have recently changed considerably, the servicewomen have obtained more opportunities" (Fig. 2). About 14% of servicepeople of both genders did not agree with it. And about 23% of men and 20% of women chose the variant "Difficult to say" [12, p. 13].

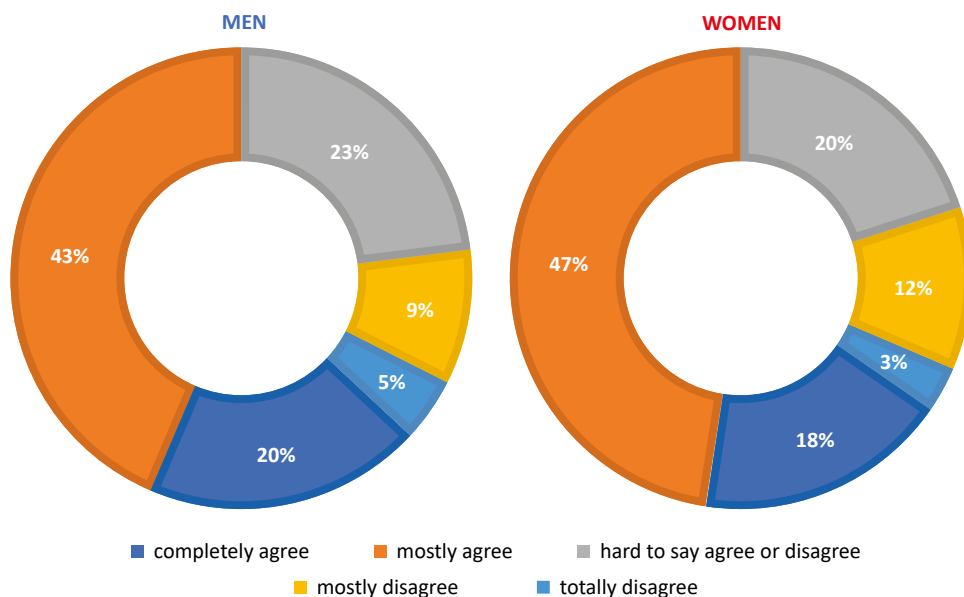
Almost every second subject, both male and female, to some degree agreed with the statement that appointing servicewomen to commanding positions took place in accordance with the existing laws and their professional competence was taken into account (Fig. 3). About 13% of all the subjects of both genders did not agree with this statement. More than 34% of the subjects did not give a definite answer. No substantial differences concerning that question among the representatives of the different types of Armed Forces, both among the officers and enlisted personnel, have been registered [12, p. 15].

A relative majority of the subjects engaged in the survey stated that the role of servicewomen in Ukraine's Armed Forces increased over the last few years (Fig. 4). 53.6% of the subjects agreed with that statement when tasks of everyday life were taken into account, and 48.8% of the subjects agreed with the above – considering the area of Joint Forces Operation/Anti-Terrorist Operation, while almost every third participant was not able to give a definite answer [12, p. 17].

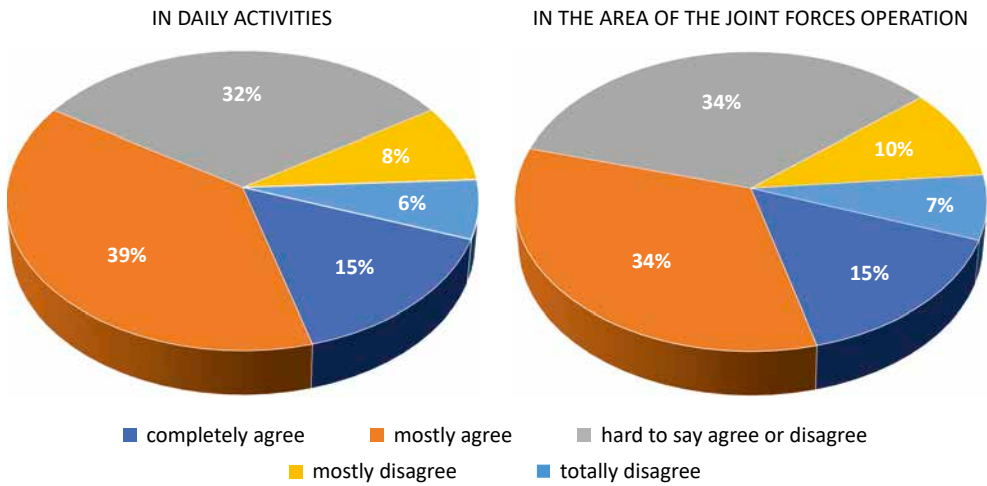
The opinions of the subjects of different genders somewhat differ (Fig. 5). The claim that the role of servicewomen increased got confirmed: in everyday life – by 62.5% of female subjects and 50.8% of male subjects; with regard to fulfilling the tasks in the area of Joint Forces Operation/Anti-Terrorist Operation – 53.7% of female subjects and 47.5% of male subjects agreed



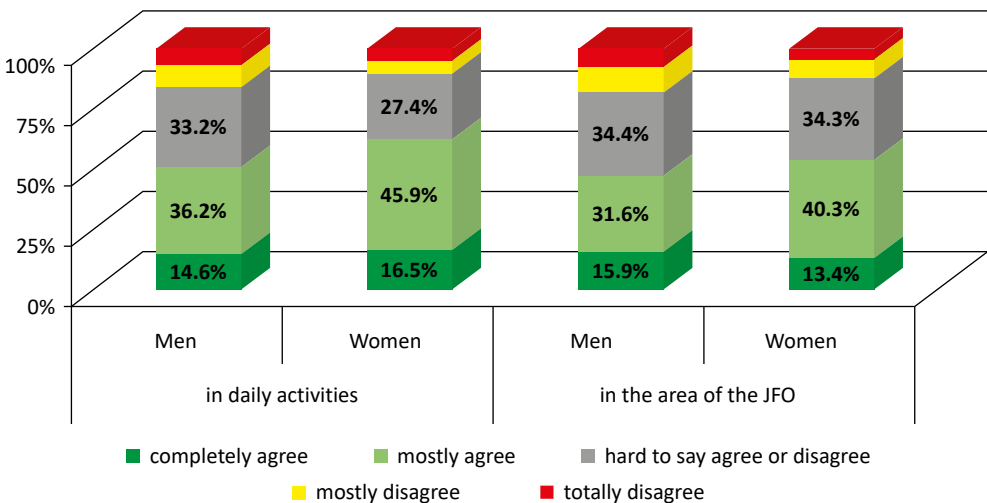
**Fig. 2.** Distribution of the answers to the question “To what degree do you agree or disagree with the following statement: Gender relations in Ukraine’s Armed Forced have recently changed considerably, the servicewomen have obtained more opportunities?” (in % of those, who answered)  
 Source: [12].



**Fig. 3.** Distribution of the answers to the question “To what degree do you agree or disagree with the statement: Ukraine’s Armed Forces fulfil the requirements of the law as to appointing servicewomen to commanding positions taking into account their professional competence?” (in % of those, who answered)  
 Source: [12].



**Fig. 4.** Distribution of the answers to the question “To what degree do you agree or disagree with the statement: The role of servicewomen in fulfilling the appointed tasks in everyday life/in the area of Joint Forces Operation/Anti-Terrorist operation has increased?” (in % of those, who answered)  
 Source: [12].



**Fig. 5.** Distribution of the answers to the question “To what degree do you agree or disagree with the statement: The role of servicewomen in fulfilling the appointed tasks in everyday life/in the area of Joint Forces Operation/Anti-Terrorist Operation has increased?” (in % of those, who answered)  
 Source: [12].

to that statement. Correspondingly, 12.1% of female subjects and 18.1% of male subjects did not agree with that claim. About one third of the servicepeople of both genders did not give a definite answer. Thus, the majority of the subjects, both male and female, believe that the principle of equal rights and opportunities of the genders was implemented in Ukraine’s Armed Forces to a certain degree. Besides, almost two thirds of the subjects believe that

gender relations have substantially changed in Ukraine's Armed Forces and servicewomen have more opportunities now [12, p. 18].

Based on the conducted research, patriotic and professional interests prevail in the personnel's motivations to serve. They include: the willingness to defend native land, interest in the military profession and prospects of promotion. With regard to motivation, the main difference between the genders was the fact that females, apart from the above-mentioned interests, also paid attention to the social guarantees and benefits, to the possibility of realising their personal aspirations, dreams, ambitions, and to the level of material provision. As the results of the survey prove, a relative majority of the subjects have no considerable complications concerning the fulfilment of their professional duties [12, p. 31].

Another research dedicated to the motivation of the military service was conducted in Kharkiv, Chuhuyiv and Dnipropetrovsk garrisons in the period from January to February 2013. Its aim was to study social and professional potential of a personality of a servicewoman and it was determined that servicewomen were more open to the needs of society than servicemen and that the motive to bring more good to society was one of the major ones in the hierarchy of social values. The evidence of the "openness" of servicewomen was the high value of the motive "to be useful to society in extraordinary situations". That motive is crucial when it comes to ensuring efficient fulfilment of the army's new functions related to its involvement in overcoming the consequences of ecological and technological accidents, acts of terror, etc. The obtained data on the motivation of servicewomen shows that, when it comes to its structure, professional orientation is harmoniously combined with social one. The structure of the qualities of a military specialist (officer), developed in accordance with the replies of servicewomen, is yet another convincing argument in favour of "feminisation" of Armed Forces. In particular, high rank was allocated to such individual qualities as responsibility for the results of professional activities (77.7%) and ability to place public interests over personal ones (59.5%); at the same time, such qualities as diligence (39.8%), initiative and inventiveness (37.8%) were not ranked so high. With regard to professionally relevant qualities, one can also notice a high degree of self-esteem, i.e. a woman-officer gives herself a rather high appraisal as a professional. Taking into account determining professional qualities of a military by servicemen, the results are somewhat different based on the survey. In general, the majority of the surveyed servicemen allocated high rank to such personal qualities as readiness to take risks (62.5%), organisational abilities (52.4%) and independence (52%). These qualities are obligatory components in the structure of a personality of an officer in the army of a totalitarian state, which, unfortunately, does not correspond to the army model of a democratic state, such as modern Ukraine [13].

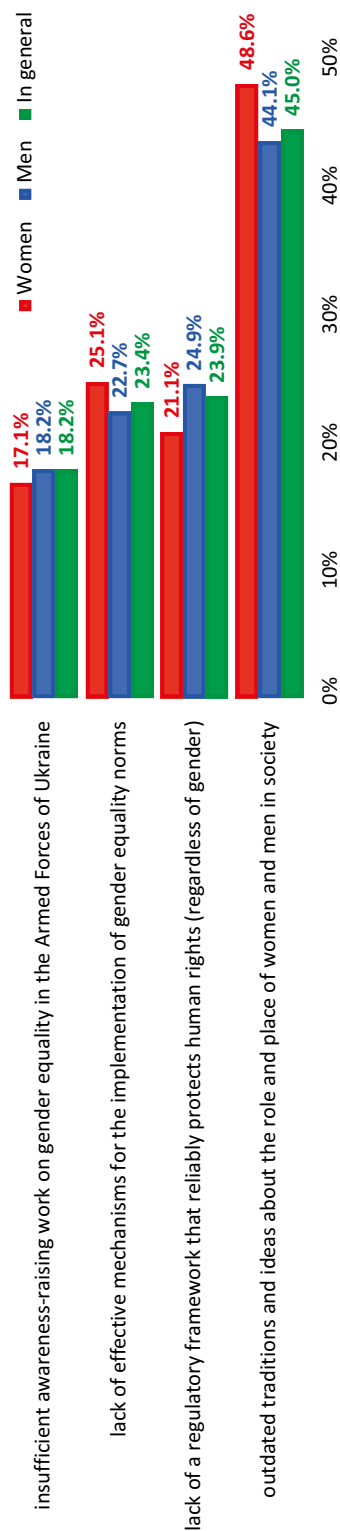
According to the research conducted by N. Pravdyvets, the main factors of building up professional identity of servicewomen are the following ones: differentiation of professional and gender roles, adequate and stable self-esteem, altruistic focus, orientation towards work and self-improvement. What are the main reasons that push women towards military service? The results of yet another research demonstrate that women opt for military service due to economic reasons – they are attracted by the satisfactory level of payment. Another important factor is the possibility of self-realisation in the military sphere. At the same time, military service gives women the opportunity to become a specialist, gain some professional education that may prove helpful afterwards, in their civil life after resignation. The feeling of social protectiveness, permanent income, clothing allowance, health care, guaranteed paid leave – all those factors contribute to the fact that more and more women join the armed forces. The possibility to arrange one's personal life, find friends or continue family tradition

also plays an important role in females' aspiration to join the army [14].

The scientists also studied the opinion of service-people on the causes of violating gender balance in the Ukrainian society and in the Armed Forces. The answers of the subjects to that question are demonstrated in Figure 6.

Almost half of the subjects believe that the outdated traditions and ideas as to the role and place of men and women in the society are the main cause of violating gender equality in Ukraine and in Ukraine's Armed Forces, in particular. Servicewomen (48.6%) mentioned that cause more often than servicemen (44.1%). Approximately 17.1% to 25.1% of the subjects of both genders also mentioned such causes as the absence of legislation that would protect human rights (regardless of gender), the absence of reliable mechanisms of implementing the norms of gender equality, insufficient information and education activities in the field of gender equality. Thus, the subjects listed a number of causes that, in their opinion, lead to the violation of gender equality in Ukraine's Armed Forces. The main one was outdated traditions and views about the role and place of men and women in the society in general and in Ukraine's Armed Forces, in particular [12, p. 54].

At the same time, optimal integration of women into military collectives requires popularisation of adequate gender stereotypes within the military environment. Traditional (patriarchic) stereotypes that dominated in the past, and still prevail today, do not facilitate women's integration into the armed forces but make things complicated instead. It is a common knowledge that gender stereotypes – views on the qualities and behaviour norms of males and females – are a precondition for construing gender and gender behaviour. Understanding gender stereotypes is of supreme importance since every person, regardless of their gender, is an individual with their own set of psychological qualities and characteristics, correlation of masculinity and femininity. It will allow every individual human being, as well as society in general, to become more productive, developed and harmonious in every sphere of activity [15, p. 93].



**Fig. 6.** Distribution of the answers to the question “Do you think that gender equality is violated in Ukraine, and if so – what are the causes for that?” (in % of those, who answered)

Source: [12].



Gender stereotypes as simplified, stable, emotionally coloured samples of behaviour and character features of males and females display themselves in all spheres of human life: in self-consciousness, in communication between men and women, in group communication, etc. Gender stereotypes can be divided into three groups: masculinity/femininity stereotypes, that impose certain ideas as to somatic, psychic and behavioural traits typical for men and women; gender-related stereotypes related to family and professional roles; stereotypes related to male and female activities. Gender stereotypes can change due to social, economic and political changes; however, this is a pretty slow process [15].

Feminisation of the Armed Forces initiated the discussion about the position of women in the army and, correspondingly, was the reason for the emergence of a scientific problem of re-estimation of former views on women's roles and positions. The analysis of the results of research on gender stereotypes popular among servicewomen allowed to distinguish the core group of gender-determined stereotypes that were the basis to divide military activities into male and female ones. Gender-determined stereotypical ideas, according to which professional abilities of servicewomen in certain areas of professional military activities were recognised as superior to those of servicemen by 57% of servicewomen. These stereotypes are substantiated by the idea that servicewomen were more competitive in professional military activities that required certain individual features, such as attention, perseverance, endurance, punctuality, sensitiveness, creativeness, etc. The author of this research emphasises that those areas of professional military activities did not include combat ones, such as operation and combat activities management, direct involvement in combat actions, performing diversions in the enemy's rear, etc., as they are associated with extreme physical strain. The author sticks to the position that servicewomen with gender-determined stereotypes contribute to a more efficient organisation of military service in modern conditions. Under conditions of equal training and equal attitude towards men and women, they can fulfil their duties as efficiently as men. Moreover, not every man is a good soldier. Taking into account the changes in the nature of modern combat actions, muscle strength does not play a significant role anymore, and thus gender should not be a decisive factor in determining the roles of men and women in military structures [16].

Scientists believe that the presence of women considerably relieves strain in military collectives, makes commanders and superiors more content and, which is more important, considerably improves the culture of relations among the members of the collectives. It should also be noted that, unlike servicemen, the educational level of servicewomen is considerably higher [17].

Troops quality is of supreme importance for the state; therefore, Ukraine's Armed Forces do not pay so much attention to gender but rather to professionalism. The Ministry of Defence has been quite active in that area and has become the institution that has assumed the responsibility for the realisation of Partnership and NATO goals, in particular, with regard to gender issues of military service. As early as in 2016, it expanded the list of military professions available for women. Before that time, women could only work as radio operators, accountants or chefs (not combat ones), today, they can work as mechanics, drivers, artilleryists, etc. On 27 October 2018, the law "On Changes to the Laws of Ukraine as to the Provision of Equal Rights of Men and Women for the Period of Military Service in the Armed Forces of Ukraine and Other Military Formations" came into force and equalised the rights of men and women. Since then, women have been involved in military service on the same conditions as men, except the situations stipulated by law concerning the protection of maternity and infancy; gender-based discrimination is prohibited [18].

It should be noted at this point that, until recently, there were only two states in the world where there were no restrictions for women and they could perform military service on the same terms as men – the USA and Australia. Ten years ago, the US Department of Defence “opened” all the states for servicewomen. In October 2018, woman even headed the United States Army Forces Command. Since 2011, there have been no limitations for women to take all the positions in Australia, similar law was introduced in Norway as early as in 1985. Although, with regard to the above, Israel is ahead of all other states. In that country, women constitute 34% of all IDF staff. Currently, servicewomen can be found among UNO stabilisation peacekeeping forces in Congo (observer), UN mission in the Republic of South Sudan (headquarters officer) and joint peacekeeping forces in the security area of Transnistria region of Moldova (observer). Ukrainian Armed Forces are doing their best to increase the number of servicewomen. They have been conducting selection and training of women for further inclusion into the contingent of international peacekeeping operations on the positions of headquarters officers and counsellors on gender-related issues [18].

One can also observe the tendency that differences in relation to gender roles in the army are associated, in particular, with women’s professions at war: more often, female soldiers talk about the equality between men and women and press for treating them as comrades-in-arms. Nurses and psychologists demonstrate a more traditional attitude towards the distribution of gender roles and accept care for servicemen. But this is just an observation based on the images of women-participants of Joint Forces Operation as portrayed on TV and in the media. Based on the available material, three images of servicewomen in the media can be distinguished: woman-fighter, caring assistant, revolutionary. Woman-fighter is a female soldier who participates in combat actions on the same terms as men. She lives in the same conditions and fulfils male tasks: shoots from sniper rifle, from machine gun, drives combat vehicles, carries the wounded from the battlefield, etc. For the time of war she abandons her family, kids and business. A caring assistant is a caring and attentive female soldier, medic, psychologist, photographer, etc. Such women take care of male fighters and support them with their work and their presence. They are more “feminine”, more willing to follow a traditional, gender-based division of labour. Revolutionary – is a category that unites several women, whose activities in Joint Forces Operation have a revolutionary and innovative character. They are reformers and innovators, they break outdated schemes and stereotypes, develop new military branches and are on the same level of army hierarchy as men, their names and stories are generally recognisable [19].

## Conclusions

To sum up, with regard to the implementation of the state’s gender policy in the Armed Forces, one can say that purposeful activities of the bodies of military command and all the officials of different levels ensure equal rights and opportunities for servicemen and servicewomen to some extent. In particular, military personnel believes that they are sufficiently informed of the issue of gender equality. The majority of the servicepeople confirm positive changes in the Armed Forces’ activities related to the implementation of the state’s gender policy. First of all, it concerns the fulfilment of the principle of equal rights and opportunities of servicepeople of different genders, increasing role of servicewomen in carrying out assigned tasks in everyday life and in combat areas. Patriotic and professional motives are the main once when it comes to motivation of the personnel (both male and female) to get involved in the military service. The main cause for occasional violating gender equality in the army is outdated traditions and ideas on the role and place of women and men in the

society in general and in the Armed Forces, in particular. Among the measures that would further promote gender equality in Ukraine's Armed Forces is the necessity to reach the equality of professional duties of servicemen and servicewomen as well as responsibility for their fulfilment. Not less important is the formation of a modern worldview and replacement of stereotypical ideas of military personnel as to the role and place of women and men in the army. There is a tendency to believe that the differences in the attitudes towards gender roles in the army are related to female professions in wartime: more and more often, female soldiers talk about the equality between men and women at war and seek more respect and positive attitude towards them as comrades-in-arms. Nurses and psychologists demonstrate a more traditional view on gender roles distribution and accept the soldiers' care. They also ignore certain features they believe are not necessary for them. For instance, they do not have to be in the same physical shape as men. Meanwhile, one can come across stories in the Ukrainian media about "heroes", with their names and actions mentioned, while there are not many stories of that kind about "heroines". Those women are described as "petit", "militant", "beautiful", "courageous", "saviours" and "defenders". One can see glorification and romanticisation of female images in combat situations. One can also come across cases of portraying women in the army as those fulfilling the function of supporting male fighters. At the same time, one can notice images of women who are not inferior to men taking into account their combat skills and achievements.

For the purpose of determining the dynamics of changes of attitudes as to the role and place of women in the army and implementation of the principle of equal rights and opportunities for servicepeople of different genders in Ukraine's Armed Forces further sociological research in that field should be conducted.

### **Acknowledgement**

No acknowledgement and potential founding was reported by the authors.

### **Conflict of interests**

All authors declared no conflict of interests.

### **Author contributions**

All authors contributed to the interpretation of results and writing of the paper. All authors read and approved the final manuscript.


### **Ethical statement**

The research complies with all national and international ethical requirements.

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### Rola i miejsce kobiet w armii Ukrainy w kontekście równouprawnienia płci

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#### STRESZCZENIE

Wyniki badań świadczą o tym, że w wojsku realizowana jest zasada równych praw i możliwości dla żołnierzy obu płci, ale nadal istnieje konieczność wzmocnienia działań edukacyjnych wśród kadr, przede wszystkim jednostek i pododdziałów Sił Zbrojnych Ukrainy. Od kilku lat wzrasta udział żołnerek w wypełnianiu wyznaczonych zadań zarówno w życiu codziennym, jak i w działaniach bojowych. Dla określenia teoretycznych podstaw tego problemu zastosowano teoretyczne metody uogólnienia, analizy naukowej i syntezy. Do opracowania danych empirycznych i przeprowadzenia obliczeń analitycznych wykorzystano odpowiednie oprogramowanie. Zastosowanie analitycznego przetwarzania informacji umożliwiło przeprowadzenie naukowej analizy wydarzeń jako zjawiska holistycznego.

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**SŁOWA KLUCZOWE** siły zbrojne, Ukraina, płeć kulturowa, kobiety w siłach zbrojnych

#### How to cite this paper

Petrova L, Rebrii I, Zubrytskyi H. *The role and place of women in the army of Ukraine in the context of gender equality*. Scientific Journal of the Military University of Land Forces. 2023; 55;1(207):20-32. DOI: 10.5604/01.3001.0053.4101.



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