

WG 4 (Physiological Health)

Women Medical Personnel Pioneering in the Man-Dominated Warzone

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Introduction:

Women's involvement in male-dominated environments has expanded worldwide over the last decades. Nevertheless, the basic needs of females in these environments are still overlooked. Female Advanced Life Support providers (FALSp) are among the first women to occupy combat positions in front-line troops. This study investigates the unique experiences and needs of FALS providers in maneuvering units of the Israel Defense Forces.

Methods:

Sixty female and forty male ALSp serving in combat units in Gaza between October 2023 and March 2024 enrolled in the study and were surveyed. Data on demographics, operational assignments, hygiene habits, gear suitability, health concerns, and emotional well-being were collected and analyzed.

Results:

Nearly 75% of the FALSp that were mobilized to Gaza during the study period were surveyed. Female participants reported substantial challenges with hygiene and physiological needs, including 80% avoiding urination and 70% reducing fluid intake. Inadequately fitting protective gear was cited by most of women. Women were less likely to distribute weight within their units. Emotional impacts included stress over familial responsibilities and reintegration into professional roles post-deployment. Despite these burdens, 88% of women felt secure among male colleagues.

Conclusion:

The findings underscore an urgent need for holistic strategies to support FALSp in austere, male-dominated combat settings. Key recommendations include developing gender-tailored protective gear, ensuring ready access to feminine hygiene products and appropriate medications, and implementing robust emotional and family support programs. These insights have broad relevance for other militaries and organizations where women increasingly serve in high-stakes operational environments.

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Frontline Physiotherapy – Change of Perception

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Background:

The day-to-day of physical and occupational therapy department of the IDF-MC is within military outpatient clinics and military bases throughout Israel. During wartime, firstly done on Operation Cast Lead, the physical therapy department treats patients in assembly areas alongside the day-to-day practice, this practice was also used during Iron Swords war, with constant improvement of treatment methods and modalities and on a significantly larger scale than before. During the war, physical therapists crossed into an active combat zone for the first time to provide treatment for troops.

Purpose:

The purpose of this study is to examine the work conducted during the first six months of war and to share findings and insights.

Methods:

A review of actions and decisions taken during the first months of the war and a retrospective study of computerized medical records throughout this period.

Results:

During those months, 13 thousand treatments were provided by 44 physiotherapists in all fronts, while maintaining day-to-day care.

Quick adaptation, continuous changes, and a solid framework for handling requests enabled the team to provide effective care. Factoring in limited information about the operators' future activities, considered both placebo and nocebo effects, and maintained a clear indicator for returning to the mission—assessing whether they could operate with their MSK injury.

Conclusions/ possible implementations:

The physical therapy department is a core component in the IDF-MC. There is a need for constant re-assessment and improvement of triage and treatment modalities, and operating with multiple entities to schedule treatment is redundant. Implementing a clear chain of command is essential.