Reproductive and sexual health issues amongst servicewomen and veterans of the armed forces

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Abbreviations

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<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Definition</th>
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<tr>
<td>CINAHL</td>
<td>Cumulative Index to Nursing and Allied Health Literature</td>
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<td>NHMRC</td>
<td>National Health and Medical Research Council</td>
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1. Introduction
There is increasing recognition for, and the importance of, research evidence to inform health care policies and practices. The move towards evidence-informed health care has been driven by the need for quality and safe health care practices, which may ultimately result in the right patient provided with the right treatment by the right health professional at the right time. Currently much of health care policies and practices are not informed by research evidence which often results in underuse, misuse and overuse of health care services.

In order to underpin health care policies and practices with research evidence, the first step involves mapping the current research evidence base around a topic of interest. An important component of evidence mapping involves a systematic approach to accessing and collating research evidence. A systematic approach is integral in this process as it eliminates bias, promotes transparency and ensures replicability of the review processes. Evidence-mapping is therefore an efficient, rigorous and timely approach in understanding the current research evidence base around a topic of interest. This evidence-mapping report centres on reproductive and sexual health issues amongst servicewomen and veterans of the armed forces.

This evidence-mapping review sought to answer the following questions:

1. What are the reproductive and sexual health issues faced by servicewomen and female veterans of the armed forces?
2. What are the current evidence gaps on the impact of participation in the armed forces on female reproductive and sexual health?

2. Methods

2.1 Systematic search
A systematic search of key library databases (Embase (OvidSP), Medline (OvidSP), Web of Science, Cumulative Index to Nursing and Allied Health Literature (CINAHL) (EbscoHost) and Cochrane Database) was conducted in March 2013, using the terms reported in Table 1. These terms were searched in the title, abstract and keyword fields, with limits applied to identify only studies published in English, from 1990 to present. Related terms were searched where possible. Variations to truncation/wildcard symbols, proximity operators and fields were made to accommodate the differences between the databases.
Table 1: Search terms utilised during evidence-mapping

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Search term constructs</th>
<th>MeSH^</th>
<th>Other</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Women</td>
<td>Female*; wom$n*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Military</td>
<td>Military personnel; military medicine; naval medicine; veterans; military nursing</td>
<td>Military*; defen$e; “armed force*”; army*; “air force*”; navy*; naval; peacekeep*; veteran*; reservist*; submariner*; sailor*; soldier*; marine*; “coast guard*”; “returned service*”; (service P2 wom$n*)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reproductive or sexual health</td>
<td>Reproductive health; menstruation; menstruation disturbances; menopause; menopause, premature; fertility; contraception; contraception behavior; pregnancy; female urogenital diseases; pregnancy complications; obstetric surgical procedures; hydatidiform mole</td>
<td>“sexual health”; “sexual issue*”; “reproductive health”; “reproductive issue*”; <em>menstruat</em>; <em>menorrhea</em>; menorrhag*; <em>menopaus</em>; fertility; <em>fecund</em>; contracept*; (inhib* N2 fertili$sation); <em>birth</em>; parturition*; <em>natal</em>; <em>partum; labo$r; pregnan</em>; gestation*; miscar*; obstetric*; “hydatid* mole*”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

^MeSH terms will be exploded and only searched in Medline, *Truncation symbol used, $ indicates a wildcard of 0-1 characters, “” indicates phrases will be searched, P2 indicates the terms will be searched in order, with up to 2 other words permitted between them, N2 indicates the terms will be searched in any order, with up to 2 words permitted between them.

To broaden the search, the reference lists of all included studies were searched to identify any other potentially relevant studies (secondary searching or pearling). This process was continued until no further studies were identified.

2.2 Study identification

All studies obtained were exported into EndNote X6 where duplicate studies were excluded. The title and abstract of all remaining studies was screened, before the full texts were obtained and screened. Studies were excluded if they:

- were not published in English,
- were published prior to 1990,
- were not published in peer-reviewed journals,
- were editorials or correspondence,
- did not involve service women or female veterans (including women in the armed forces, peacekeepers, reservists and veterans), or
- did not report reproductive or sexual health issues.
2.3 Assigning levels of evidence
The study designs of included studies were identified and assigned to the National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) [1] hierarchy of evidence (Please refer to Appendix 1).

2.4 Data extraction
Data was extracted from the included studies using a purpose built date extraction sheet. The categories covered included country of origin, study aim(s), population, sample size and key findings.

3 Results
Due to the nature and scope of this review, following advice from the funders, studies pertaining to pregnancy, contraception and menopause were selected for the data extraction stage. Following this process, ninety six studies were selected (Please refer to Figure 1 for the overview of the literature selection process), and data extracted. A customised Microsoft Excel database was created where data extracted from studies reporting on pregnancy, contraception and menopause were stored. An electronic copy of the Microsoft Excel database is included as part of this report.

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**Figure 1: Flow chart of study inclusion and exclusion**

- Studies obtained from the database searches
  - n=8344
  - Embase n=1728
  - Medline n=2155
  - Web of Science n=3763
  - Cochrane n=138
  - CINAHL n=560

- Duplicates removed n=3367

- Unique studies n=4977

- Full text studies screened n=135

- Studies excluded based on title/abstract n=4842

- Studies excluded based on full text
  - n=39
  - Not military personnel n=31
  - Not females n=3
  - Not relevant to the topics investigated n=4
  - Not in English n=1

- Included studies n=96
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Reference


Bibliographic details of included studies


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### Appendix 1: National Health and Medical Research Council hierarchy of evidence[1]

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level</th>
<th>Intervention</th>
<th>Diagnostic accuracy</th>
<th>Prognosis</th>
<th>Aetiology</th>
<th>Screening Intervention</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I</td>
<td>A systematic review of level II studies</td>
<td>A systematic review of level II studies</td>
<td>A systematic review of level II studies</td>
<td>A systematic review of level II studies</td>
<td>A systematic review of level II studies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II</td>
<td>A randomised controlled trial</td>
<td>A study of test accuracy with an independent, blinded comparison with a valid reference standard, among consecutive persons with a defined clinical presentation</td>
<td>A prospective cohort study</td>
<td>A prospective cohort study</td>
<td>A randomised controlled trial</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III-1</td>
<td>A pseudorandomised controlled trial (i.e. alternate allocation or some other method)</td>
<td>A study of test accuracy with an independent, blinded comparison with a valid reference standard, among non-consecutive persons with a defined clinical presentation</td>
<td>All or none</td>
<td>All or none</td>
<td>A pseudorandomised controlled trial (i.e. alternate allocation or some other method)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| III-2 | A comparative study with concurrent controls:  
- Non-randomised, experimental trial  
- Cohort study  
- Case-control study  
- Interrupted time series with a control group | A comparison with reference standard that does not meet the criteria required for Level II and III-1 evidence | Analysis of prognostic factors amongst persons in a single arm of a randomised controlled trial | A retrospective cohort study | A comparative study with concurrent controls:  
- Non-randomised, experimental trial  
- Cohort study  
- Case-control study |
| III-3 | A comparative study without concurrent controls:  
- Historical control study  
- Two or more single arm study  
- Interrupted time series without a parallel control group | Diagnostic case-control study | A retrospective cohort study | A case-control study | A comparative study without concurrent controls:  
- Historical control study  
- Two or more single arm study |
| IV    | Case series with either post-test or pre-test/post-test outcomes | Study of diagnostic yield (no reference standard) | Case series, or cohort study of persons at different stages of disease | A cross-sectional study or case series | Case series |