

Speaker addresses plight of women veterans

By Kim Buckley

Published: Tuesday, April 13, 2010

Updated: Tuesday, April 13, 2010

Issues facing women veterans was the topic at a lecture from Genevieve Chase, the founder and executive director of the organization American Women Veterans.

Chase focused on the difficulties women soldiers face when they return home from service.

“I think one of the biggest issues of veteran issues and problems in society start at home,” she said.

Men and women are not set apart when they’re police officers, in the medical community or in intelligence, Chase said. This is not the case in the Army, because the Department of Defense has a policy that bans women from combat.

“It’s important to understand on a smaller or a personal level what it means,” she said.

She defined direct combat as engaging enemies on the ground with weapons, in the line of fire or when there is a risk of physical contact with hostile forces.

While women aren’t supposed to be in combat, they often find themselves in dangerous situations, Chase said. Women are attached to infantry units, just under a different administration, she explained.

“They are actually out in direct combat, engaging with hostile forces,” she said.

This policy often leaves women veterans unrecognized, Chase said, which helps prevent them from receiving adequate health care and benefits.

“They are not able to prove they were in combat because the policy states right now they are not in combat,” she said.

It also prevents them from identifying themselves as veterans, she said.

Chase said these issues are problems because of the growing number of women veterans. Currently there are 1.2 million women veterans in the United States in all service branches, she said.

Women soldiers also have higher divorce rates than their male counterparts, Chase said.

“We are more likely to be caregivers or single mothers,” she said.

In addition, women veterans have a significantly higher rate of sexual trauma, Chase said.

“There is a story of a woman who was pulling guard one night and she had decided to take a smoke break. She left her weapon,” she said. “As she was walking back, she was attacked and raped.”

The woman was unable to report the rape because she was told she would be punished for leaving her weapon while on guard duty, Chase said.

Other issues deal with employment. Women get equal pay in the military, but as civilians they might face discrimination or have problems with the availability of childcare, hospital appointments and education, Chase said. Residual effects from combat and service can also lead to depression, suicide and homelessness.

A lot of homeless shelters for veterans don't allow women, Chase said, because of safety concerns.

The Department of Veterans Affairs recognizes these issues, she said, but people don't always take advantage of the solutions the department offers.

“They are waiting for people to come and to use it,” she said.

Chase also spoke about what people can do to help.

“There are many women volunteers who want to give back to the veterans because serving wasn't their calling,” she said.

Thanking veterans for their service can also have a positive impact on their lives.

“You just don't know what it means to thank a service member,” she said.

Michael Heinemann, a senior social studies education major and a member of the Student Veteran Organization, said having Chase speak was a good way to raise awareness of the Student Veteran Group and of issues facing women veterans.

“We can get people to look at what they go through returning home,” he said.

kimbuckley@dailynebraskan.com

© 2010 [Daily Nebraskan](#)