

Final report form

Date of sending out the form:

Tuesday, April 28, 2020

Contact person/applicant:

Olena Burlaka

Country

Ukraine

E-mail

burlakaolena@gmail.com

Title of the granted project

Actual issues of contraception and reproductive health of Ukrainian military women in the zone of armed conflict

Amount granted by the ESC (in euro)

7.250

Project number:

P-2018-A-03

Allocated mentor:

Dr. Sarah Randall

Date project actually started:

Saturday, December 1, 2018

Date of completion:

Thursday, October 31, 2019

Please provide a report of your findings and data.

According to the analysis of literary sources, the participation of women in military action increases the risks of developing severe physical injuries, post-traumatic stress disorders, and disorders of reproductive health. At the same time, the number of research on military gynecology in current conditions is significantly limited.

As the professional roles of Ukrainian women-

soldiers in the area of armed conflict expand, the potential for the adverse effects of military service and military conditions on women's reproductive health is expectedly increasing.

507 military women serving in the Joint Forces Operation Zone in eastern Ukraine and 100 civilian women from the frontline region participated in the survey while conducting the project. The survey was focused on the awareness and use of different methods of contraception and preventing of STDs by military women in the current war zone. According to the obtained data, at the time of the conducting of the survey $48.3 \pm 2.2\%$ (245/507) female soldiers used different methods of contraception. Data are presented as frequency \pm representative error.

The number of women using contraception before their military service is $87.6 \pm 1.5\%$ (444/507) ($\chi^2 = 15.7$, $p = 0.001$). Within the age group up to 25, methods of contraception were used by $53.2 \pm 4.7\%$ (59/111) of military women; 25-34 years – $49.3 \pm 4.3\%$ (68/138); 35-44 years – $48.8 \pm 3.8\%$ (83/170); older than 44 years old – $48.6 \pm 5.9\%$ (35/72).

Compared to civilian women; $70.0 \pm 4.6\%$ (70/100), at the moment of distributing the questionnaire, the military woman practiced contraception methods 1.5 times less (RR = 1.5; 95%CI: 1.2 – 1.7) with a statistically significant difference ($p = 0.001$). Within the age group up to 25, methods of contraception were used by $81.8 \pm 11.6\%$ (9/11) of civilian women; 25-34 years – $70.6 \pm 6.4\%$ (36/51); 35-44 years – $71.0 \pm 8.1\%$ (22/31); older than 44 years old – $42.9 \pm 18.7\%$ (3/7). The frequency of use of contraception did not have a statistically significant difference between different female age groups ($p = 0.05$).

Issues of menstrual regulation and suppression are of particular importance to military women in relation to the professional need for support of physical form at the level of male colleagues without periodical menstrual bleeding, cyclic complaints, and complications, what is especially relevant during military deployments.

Despite the apparent advantages of using different methods and regimens of hormonal contraception to prevent unplanned pregnancies and menstrual suppression in the military women, the frequency of use in their group was $4.0 \pm 0.9\%$ (20/507) versus $12.0 \pm 3.2\%$ (12/100) in civilian women.

Among those who reported using contraception, hormonal methods were used by $8.2 \pm 1.8\%$ (20/245) military and $17.1 \pm 4.5\%$ (12/70) civilian women ($\chi^2 = 4, 8$, $p = 0.03$). Thus, the survey results indicate that military women have chosen hormonal contraception 2 times less than civilians (RR = 2.1, 95% CI: 1.1 - 4.1). At the same time, in the age group up to 25 years, hormonal contraception was used – $0.9 \pm 0.9\%$ (1/111) of

military women; 25-34 years – 5.1±1.9% (7/138); 35-44 years – 7.1±2.0% (12/170); older than 44 years old - 0.0±5.1% (0/72).

According to the survey results, determination of low-level of awareness and use of hormonal contraception in the age group up to 25 years, especially among military women from the eastern region, may be associated with their rather young age (15-20 years) and limited access to gynecological care at the beginning of the combat conflict in the area of their residence.

With regard to emergency contraception, we must note that the percentage of the military women who have never used this method - 84.3 ± 1.8% (337/400), is statistically significantly higher than of the civilian women, which is 60.4 ± 5.0% (58/96) ($\chi^2 = 15.7$, $p=0.001$). According to the data obtained, civilian women used emergency contraception 1.4 times more often than military (RR = 1.4, 95% CI: 1.2 - 1.6).

The use of coitus interruptus and male condom in the military and civilians were not significantly different. For military coitus interruptus: 44.1 ± 3.2% (108/245), civilians - 36.5 ± 5.8% (26 / 70). A condom was used in 35.6 ± 3.1% (87/245) of the military and 39.7 ± 5.8% (28/70) for civilian women. The frequency of IUD use among military women was 1.5±0.8% (4/245), while among civilians, the index was 28.6 ±5.4% (20/70) ($p=0.001$).

Concerning the use of STIs' prevention methods, barrier methods were more commonly used, with condoms used by 38.9 ± 2.2% of military women and 30.0 ± 4.6% of civilians. Regarding the use of spermicides, 49.0 ± 5.0 % of civilians and only 2.8 ± 0.7% of military women reported its use. The most common causes of non-use of STIs preventions by military women were the absence of sexual activity, marital status, and pregnancy planning.

The percentage of pregnant women among the interviewed military women was 3.9 ± 4.5% (20/507), 31.6±17.6% (6/19) of them have not planned pregnancy.

Addressing the problems of unplanned pregnancies, access to contraception and prevention of STDs in military women are needed to ensure gender equality in defense forces, effective performance of military women's responsibilities, and the maintenance of women's health in the following years.

Please provide a final detailed budget on how much you have spent. Was any money not spent? Receipts may be requested.

As has been claimed, ESC funding, was adopted for launching and managing the project: 1000€; for conducting a survey and ensuring the consultations in the zone of armed conflict: 3800€; for the development of the database and conducting the statistical analysis: 1600€, for ensuring relevant reference materials: 200€, for text editing and printing cost covering: 650€. Total: 7250€.

Our project was not supported by any other partners as has been planned earlier.

How will your findings be presented?

Publication in journal

The results of the study will also be applied in the training of military doctors at the Military Medical Academy.

Was your paper published? Indicate journal and acceptance date

We plan to finish the manuscript and send it to the ESC journal in the first instance.

Add any other information you feel we should have

Thanks to the ESC support, we were able to conduct questionnaires and vitally important consultations for military women in the area of active military conflict. The results obtained will serve as a basis for further researches on military women's Reproductive health.

Please let us know whether having a mentor has been helpful or not

Absolutely! The communication was smooth and quick, which contributed to the quality and timing of the project's launch.

Full Name

Olena Burlaka

Date

Tuesday, April 28, 2020

Questions? ESC Central Office: info@escrh.eu

Type a question

info@escrh.eu