

*Agata Pietrzykowska*

Higher School of Banking in Chorzów

*Aleksandra Sus, Associate Professor*

Military University of Land Forces

# Selected commandery distinguishing features of women in the army in the opinions of other soldiers

## Introduction

The results of literature research indicate that nowadays the interactive female style of management is more valued, mainly due to their focus on human capital and consideration for the sphere of motivation to work. Moreover, factors that are important are the conditions for its implementation and other features that make up the range of distinguishing features, including competencies, distinguishing both sexes. In addition, women perform better than men in assessing managerial competencies, thus emphasizing the need to include women in management processes [Niechoda 2019:21-30]. In literature, there are arguments that women bring business qualities and talents specific to their sex developed from their previous life experiences. This may mean that the traditional model of hard male management, based on authoritarianism, rivalry, and lack of empathy, is no longer relevant [Różycka 2019]. In business organizations, the lack of understanding by top management of the values that women bring, ranging from networked, systemic, and contextual thinking [Dźwigoł-Barosz 2016:129-140], all the way to linear thinking, is a big problem. Perhaps it is an oversimplification to say that women use "management by love" and men "management by fear" [Rubin 2016:136], but it certainly indicates the extent of the differences. The situation becomes even more complicated when analyzing in detail the competencies of women and men in military structures. Is it also necessary to look for the features of androgenic leadership here? It seems possible that women in command positions

have taken over some masculine traits and directed a command-and-control style, with a focus on quantitative parameters, acting aggressively, and determining unambiguous, strategic directions of action [Niechoda 2019:24]?

The aim of this article is to present the results of research carried out on a sample of 80 soldiers (women and a man) in selected areas related to command by female soldiers. The assessment was given by respondents who were both led by women and led without gender division. The main research problem of this study is determining perception of women's leadership competencies by soldiers, which is presented in the specific questions:

1. In the opinion of the soldiers, are there gender-related command competencies?
2. How do soldiers assess the command competence of women soldiers?

The research was based on a quantitative methodology, using targeted sample selection and a standardized research tool (survey questionnaire). The methodology used in the article is descriptive statistics, due to the size of the research sample, as well as the preliminary nature of the research. The research is also used to identify the thesis which could be the basis for further empirical investigation and the planned doctoral conception in the analyzed area.

The article consists of four main parts. The first part describes the theoretical basis and presents selected results of empirical research on the command characteristics of women in the army. In the second part, attention is paid to presenting the research sample, while the third part concentrates on the results of the research. The last part presents con-

clusions highlighting the pilot nature of the research and pointing out its weaknesses, thus presenting a discussion of the results.

## **Theoretical foundations and selected studies of the command characteristics of women in the army**

Command competencies have always played a large role in army development in the world. For this reason, the armed forces undertake various types of activities to shape those competencies among soldiers occupying command positions. Regardless of the gender represented, there are qualities and predispositions that are vital in the performance of duties in this position. So what characterizes the command process and what qualities distinguish an exemplary commander? Finding the answer to this question is not easy, mainly due to the uniqueness of various armed forces.

In literature it is often emphasized that command is a specific form of directing, which should be understood "as an action on someone or something so that it causes someone to behave according to the will of the executive. In an organization, management is associated with the direct relationship and contact of the supervisor with the team, or its members managed by him" [Kręcikij, Wolejszo 2007:12]. On the one hand, the command task is to inform soldiers, and on the other hand, to lead them in specific battlefield conditions [Koziej 1993:114]. In terms of normative acts functioning within the Armed Forces of the Republic of Poland, *command* should be understood as preparing military operations and directing them [Regulamin 1996:5]. From the point of view of psychophysical predispositions, this process is a "directed and controlled influence on the behavior of other people (subordinates) to evoke the commander's intention. Command is an art that is the area and skill of the commander and requires, in addition to knowledge and skills, appropriate predispositions. As an art, it also contains immeasurable elements as well as leadership, motivation, and risk" [Jarecki, Sołoduha 2000:24] and control [Pigeau, McCann 2002:55-56]. The definition of *command* used in this study emphasizes that it is a process of achieving valuable results with a fair, caring, and respectful approach to all people involved in the implementation of the set goals [Blanchard 2007:15-16]. It is identical to the

American approach to command, according to which an exemplary commander should [Sinder, Nagl, Paff 1999:36-38]:

- be aware that he or she serves society,
- put the interests of the military service above their own, as well as group interests over individual ones,
- be characterized by a high level of knowledge and skills and constantly expand them,
- demonstrate honor and courage,
- remain faithful to the superiors and the Constitution, and be loyal to them,
- represent high personal culture and be an example to others.

Command, therefore, is characterized by soft features that are currently categorized as feminine. This conclusion is confirmed in the research carried out by B. Drapikowska. According to respondents in the author's research, a good commander should take care of the well-being of 33 of their soldiers, the integration of the group, and relations in the military units.

In 2010, at the request of the representative of the Minister of Defense for the Military Service of Women within the Military Bureau of Social Research, M. Baran-Wojtachnio and J. Branicka conducted research on the specificity of women's service in command positions in conditions harmful to health. The research aimed to determine the specifications of the service of female soldiers serving in command positions and the development of their service. It was a study that used the technique of animalization, which consists of designing and imagining someone or something. Respondents were asked what women associate command with. It turned out that to a large extent they associate it with strength, courage, and teamwork, but also with superiority and dominance, connected to responsibility. Therefore, responsibility is one of the most important aspects of command. The research also highlighted the differences between the command style of women and men [Baran-Wojtachnio, Branicka 2010].

Soldiers of different ranks from the basic level commanders (team and platoon commanders), as well as two company commanders took part in the interview. The majority of 95% consisted of men and 5% of women. The research authors did not use the gender division in terms of belonging to personal corps, but it is known that the most numerous groups participating in the research were soldiers from the non-commissioned officer corps (44%) and private corps (38%), and the least numerous representatives of the corps of senior officers (4%) [Baran-Wojtachnio, Branicka 2010].

The results indicate that the female style of command features cooperation based on partnership rather than a typical military hierarchy. In addition, research shows that the female command style could be described by distinguishing features [Baran-Wojtachnio, Branicka 2010]:

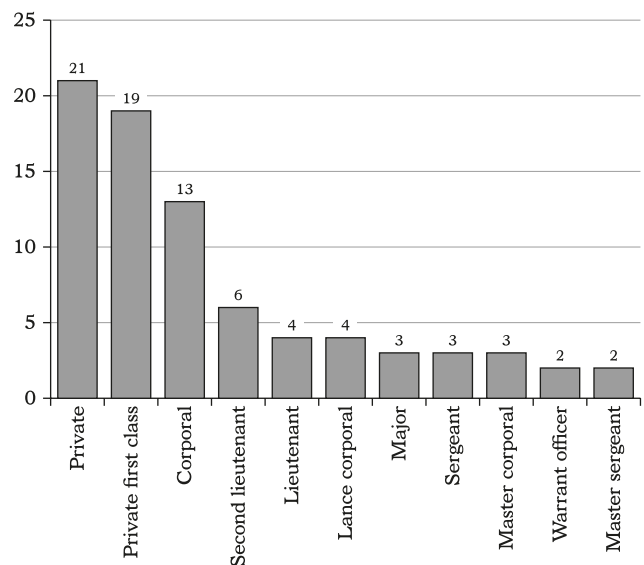
- command by women is based on the idea of cooperation-partnership; mutual commitment and assistance are essential elements, although formally the structure of the hierarchy is preserved.
- the important thing is to earn respect and build authority among subordinates.
- women soldiers in command positions can depend on the support of co-workers and superiors; most of the survey participants mentioned that they have experienced support from the beginning and can count on it to this day.

During the research, soldiers of various ranks were also asked to evaluate the service of women in command positions concerning professional preparation and performance of official duties. The old school grading scale was used for this, starting from 2 – insufficient to 5 – very good. The average rating was 3.4. It is worth emphasizing that the military environment evaluates female performance as sufficient with a plus. Interestingly, the service of women as commanders was assessed by the corps of senior officers by the highest range. About one third of respondents have not worked with women in command positions. Good ratings were given by soldiers from the corps of privates, who are potential subordinates of the mentioned group of commanders. In conclusion, women can also be good commanders, having authority among their subordinates.

## Research sample

The research method was used in the form of a diagnostic survey carried out using a questionnaire posted on the survio.com portal. The survey contained fifteen closed questions, where respondents were asked to indicate one answer, and nine open-ended questions, where respondents were asked to elaborate on their statements. The research was carried out in May 2022, and the research sample was selected deliberately. The research group consisted of women soldiers (31% - 25 people) and men soldiers (69% - 56 people), serving in military units of the Land Forces, Air Force, Special Forces, and Navy. At the time of the survey, the soldiers from the study group were of different military ranks (Figure 1).

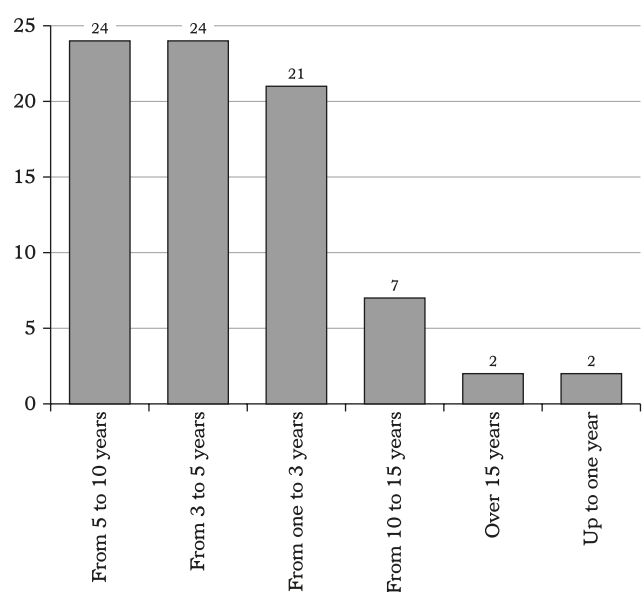
**Figure 1.** Military ranks of respondents (numbers)



Source: own research.

Most of the surveyed soldiers (79%) serve on a permanent contract, and a small portion (21%) serve on a contract agreement. The soldiers participating in the research were asked to specify the time of their service. Most respondents suggested a range of between five and ten years of service (Figure 2).

**Figure 2.** Years of service of respondents (numbers)



Source: own research.

In Poland, the history of women in the army begins in 1988. This year, the Armed Forces began recruiting graduates of selected fields of civilian studies, most often in the field of medicine. Since 1988, the number of women in all corps has increased systematically every year (Table 1).

**Table 1.** Registration data by gender of soldiers in the Polish Army; 31.12.2021

|          | Number of soldiers | Percentage share in the Polish Army |
|----------|--------------------|-------------------------------------|
| Women    | 9 373              | 8.3%                                |
| Men      | 104 214            | 91.7%                               |
| Together | 113 586            | 100.0%                              |

Source: <https://www.gov.pl/web/obrona-narodowa/sluzba-wojskowa-kobiet-w-silach-zbrojnych-rp-wczorai-i-dzis> [access online: 25.04.2022].

However, for women to be able to apply for admission to the Officers' Academy, it took another ten years. Since 1999, women have had the opportunity to study at military schools – in military academies, higher officer schools, and non-commissioned officer schools [Rotter 2012]. As of 31.12.2021, 9373 women soldiers were serving in the Polish Forces, which at that moment accounted for 8.3% of the status record of professional soldiers. Among soldiers, 16.4% of women (1534 females) served in command positions, as well as managerial positions at various levels of command (table 2).

**Table 2.** Number of female soldiers in command and management positions at different levels of command; 31.12.2021

| Full-time degree                | Number of women |
|---------------------------------|-----------------|
| Colonel                         | 9               |
| Lieutenant colonel              | 34              |
| Major                           | 150             |
| Lieutenant/Captain              | 350             |
| Second Lieutenant/Lieutenant    | 435             |
| Senior NON-COMMISSIONED OFFICER | 36              |
| Non-commissioned officer        | 66              |
| Junior NON-COMMISSIONED OFFICER | 454             |
| Together                        | 1 534           |

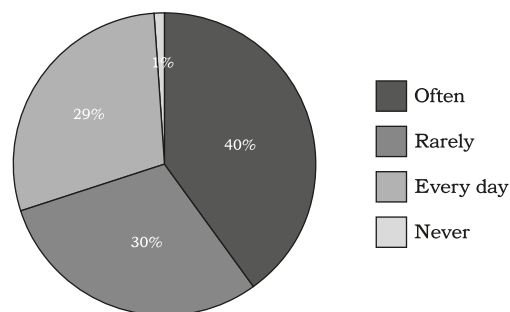
Source: <https://www.gov.pl/web/obrona-narodowa/sluzba-wojskowa-kobiet-w-silach-zbrojnych-rp-wczorai-i-dzis> [accessed 25.04.2022].

For comparison, according to the data of the Ministry of National Defense from March 18 2021, 45,417 men served in the private corps, 37,783 in the non-commissioned officer corps, and 18,667 in the officer corps [Woźniak 2021]. Current data due to the military situation in Ukraine is not available.

## Selected gender-related leadership distinguishing features – results of empirical research

A significant portion of 40% of respondents indicated that they regularly work with women who hold command positions, 30% that they rarely work with women who hold command positions, 28.7% that they do so every day, and 1.3% not at all (Figure 3).

**Figure 3.** Frequency of working with female soldiers in command positions



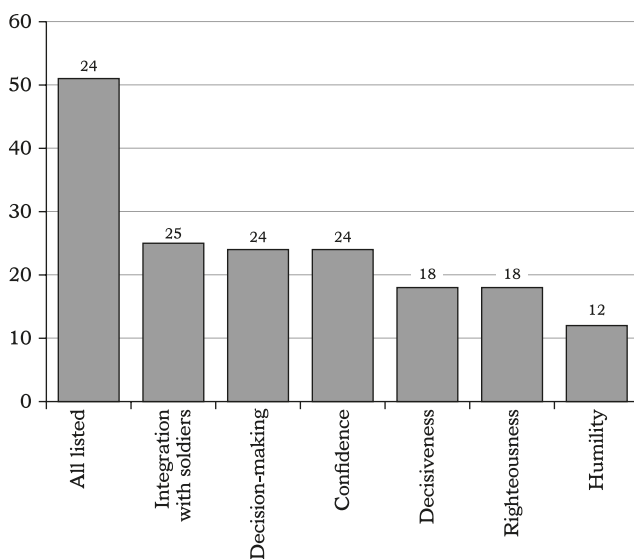
Source: own research.

The participants were asked who reviewed greater leadership predispositions – 85% of respondents suggested male representatives, 12.5% did not have an opinion on this subject, and 2.5% said women. These results highlighted that women are still not appreciated for their competencies in military organizations, probably due to historical circumstances or the inability to respond to this issue - prosaically due to the lack of women in the army. Of all those surveyed, 81.3% were commanded by a female commander during their service.

The duties of a commander are accompanied by responsibility for people who are exposed to danger in everyday working conditions. For the tasks that have been assigned to a commander to be performed at

the highest level, they are required not only to have strictly commanding competencies, i.e., charisma and the ability to attract people, but also high knowledge of the military. In this research area, the surveyed soldiers were asked to indicate the characteristics of a good commander. Respondents were asked to choose from six features that they associate with a good commander, they also had the opportunity to indicate the answer “all the listed qualities” (figure 4).

**Figure 4.** Features of a good commander according to respondents (number of indications)



Source: own research.

Most of the respondents highlighted that a good commander should have all of the listed features but is interestingly more than 20% of respondents pointed to integration with soldiers, decision-making processes, and confidence equally.

The service of women in the Polish Army is radically different from the service of women in other armies of the world. In Poland, most women soldiers still serve in the Military Health Service, logistics, justice, and training centers, as well as at Military Universities.

Even though the positions in the Polish Army are constantly expanding to include new female soldiers, still promotion, with an overwhelming number of command positions, is tougher for women soldiers. This is due to informal reasons, because according to the law they can apply for all positions [Wolska-Liškiewicz 2015:57]. The low ratio of women in command positions is caused by their devotion to other

aspects of life, e.g., motherhood, which limits their possibility of promotion [Drapikowska 2013:68-84].

The aspiration for women's professional development, in a way, destroys conservative opinions about possibilities and gender roles. The public considers masculine traits, not stereotypically feminine traits, i.e., shyness, emotionality, and sentimentality, to be attributed to command. According to the public, a person possessing these qualities is not suitable for command positions. However, according to psychological meta-analyses, gender is important in the context of command and does not determine the quality of performance of a commander. It turns out that both women and men can perform command duties properly and be successful in this area. According to a study by A.H. Eagly and B.T. Johnson published in 1990, women are more oriented toward intragroup relationships, representing a democratic style, while men perform their duties in a task-oriented way and prefer an autocratic style. In the presented surveys, according to the majority of respondents, women present a 'prescriptive' style of command, which contradicts the results of the research of A.H. Eagly and B.T. Johnson. In addition, only seven respondents indicated that the prescriptive style represented by women is democratic. Such conclusions were also reached by the already cited M. Baran-Wojtachnio and J. Branicka, who developed research on the specificity of women's service in command positions in conditions harmful to health [Eagly, Johnson 1990]. However, the soldiers participating in the author's research believed otherwise, as they indicated that women represent the prescriptive style (31 soldiers indicated this style of command, and seven a democratic style) (figure 5).

Responding to the question *Does gender matter in shaping command competencies?* most of the soldiers said that it does, but when asked for a reason – the majority of respondents pointed not to a predisposition related to gender, but to character traits that are not closely related to gender [Królikowska 2011:389].

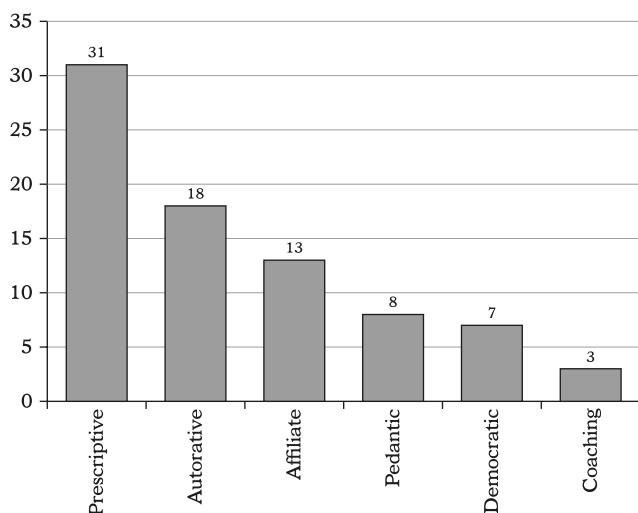
The respondents gave the following reasons for their opinions:

*I believe that gender does not matter in shaping command competencies, because a good commander is a charismatic commander regardless of gender.*

*It all depends on the mentality and not on gender, I believe that such a statement itself is prejudice.*

*Yes. What counts are character, skills, and decision-making.*

**Figure 5.** The style of command of women in the opinion of the surveyed soldiers (number of indications)



Source: own research.

This may indicate that gender is irrelevant in the formation of these competencies, unlike the personality traits of a candidate for a commander.

The next question was about the characteristics of a good commander associated with the female sex. Among the 80 respondents, none of them was able to indicate a characteristic related to gender, as all of them could also be attributed to the male sex as well. J. Sztumski very rightly noted that: "Not every officer performs command functions, but each of them can perform them. Therefore, the officer – as a current or potential commander – should have adequate preparation to perform command functions, which consist in a special way of directing people in any situation, including those associated with extreme conditions and threats to life" [Sztumski 2005:131]. For this reason, it is worth considering how women's command competencies should be shaped and whether they are shaped in men. Responding to the question: *how should women educate and improve their commanding competencies?* respondents gave the following answers (Table 3).

The most frequently proposed answers were to increase the ability to shape their command competencies through exercises, e.g., team building, as well as coping with situations requiring increased tolerance to stress from soldiers. Another important aspect is to enable women to become leaders so that they can develop their competencies in a way that is parallel to male soldiers. A very important aspect in shaping command competencies is also a high

**Table 3.** Selected statements of respondents constituting suggestions for actions to improve the education of women's leadership competencies

|   |
|---|
| In my opinion it is a physical predisposition and knowledge. These must be combined because knowledge itself without taking the opportunity to apply it in practice is just empty words.  |
| Engage in military activities and assume the role of leader, even in small groups of people.  |
| Team-building exercises, but not related to typical military activities to improve leadership skills, and at the same time presenting such features to the team, which in turn will translate into the team's trust in the commander in more difficult (military) situations. |
| Exercises enabling the commander to observe the strengths and weaknesses of members of their teams combined with the exercise of providing all team members (commander and subordinates) with feedback on their skills and competencies (including command).                  |
| Exercises to develop skills in coping with stressful situations.  |

Source: own research.

level of ability to communicate (convey information and one's expectations for the implementation of the tasks set). The types of exercises that should be mandatory in the process of educating command staff of both sexes are also extremely important, because a high level of these skills is important in every command position held, regardless of whether it is held by a woman or a man.

## Conclusion

The aim of the article was to present the evaluation made by soldiers (both men and women) of the command competencies of women soldiers based on their experience. Being a good commander is a problematic matter, especially as, to represent a high level of command, not only predispositions and character traits are needed, but also strong competencies in this field. In any situation, a commander must remember that every soldier has the right to be commanded well. Soldiers mostly present opinions that gender is a determinant of command predispositions. However, it is character traits that influence the formation of command competencies. The soldiers did not notice in women commanders any qualities that would help in fulfilling their command roles. What is more, the soldiers do not confirm the generally observed trends in personnel

management, according to which women represent the democratic style.

Although the surveyed soldiers could not indicate the problems with which women struggle (in terms of their command potential), they realized that proper preparation of women for these functions will significantly affect the quality of duties performed. Therefore, a practical goal of this study emerged, which is to give training recommendations. That would supplement the knowledge and create new competencies - dedicated to women.

According to current information, a minority of women serving in the Polish Army perform command functions, while most do not reach a position beyond the function of a company commander. The results of the research indicate that the role of women in the army may not be depreciated, but it is certainly minimized. Perhaps taking the actions indicated in the study will change the position of women in the military shortly.

It might seem that women do not occupy a special place in the army, at least due to the modest numbers testifying to their activity. This is the case in Poland, but in the world, the situation is completely different, especially in the United States, where women's service is more developed [Nagel, Spears, Maenza 2021]. The perfect example is also the Israeli Army, where about 30% of soldiers are women, and in officer positions, the gender ratio is equal [Parfieniuk 2016].

A significant disadvantage of the conducted research is the lack of representativeness of the research sample, which does not allow the results to be applied to the entire population. Nevertheless, they constitute important pilot studies and the foundations of the concept of work in this area.

## Bibliography

- Baran-Wojtachnio M., Branicka J. [2010], *Specyfika służby kobiet na stanowiskach dowódczych i w warunkach szkodliwych dla zdrowia. Sprawozdanie z badań*, Wojskowe Biuro Badań Społecznych, Warszawa.
- Blachard K. [2007], *Przywództwo wyższego stopnia. Blanchard o przywództwie i tworzeniu efektywnych organizacji*, PWN, Warszawa.
- Drapikowska B. [2013], *Kompetencje dowódcze – własne oraz innych kobiet – w opiniach kobiet – żołnierzy*, „Obronność – Zeszyty Naukowe Wydziału Zarządzania i Dowodzenia Akademii Obrony Narodowej”, 4(8): 68–84.
- Dźwigoł-Barosz M. [2016], *Wpływ kobiet na biznes*, Zeszyty Naukowe. Organizacja i Zarządzanie/ Politechnika Śląska, z. 93: 129–140.
- Eagly A.H., Johnson B. [1990], *Gender, and leadership style: A meta-analysis*, “Psychological Bulletin”, 108(2): 233–256, <https://doi.org/10.1037/0033-2909.108.2.233>.
- Jarecki Cz., Sołoucha M. [2000], *Dowodzenie artylerią*, SGWP, Warszawa.
- Kręciński J., Wojeński J. [2007], *Podstawy dowodzenia*, Akademia Obrony Narodowej, Warszawa.
- Koziej S. [1993], *Teoria sztuki wojennej*, Bellona, Warszawa.
- Królikowska S. [2011], *Rola stereotypów płci w kształtowaniu postaw kobiet i mężczyzn wobec zdrowia*, „Nowiny Lekarskie”, 80(5): 387–393.
- Nagel R., Spears K., Maenza J. [2021], *Culture, Gender, and Women in the Military: Implications for International Humanitarian Law Compliance*, Georgetown Institute for Women, Peace, and Security, [https://giwps.georgetown.edu/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/Culture\\_Gender\\_Women\\_in\\_the\\_Military.pdf](https://giwps.georgetown.edu/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/Culture_Gender_Women_in_the_Military.pdf)
- Niechoda L. [2019], *Płeć a kompetencje menedżerskie w opinii podwładnych*, „Kobieta i Biznes”, 1–4: 21–30, <https://doi.org/10.33119/KiB.2019.1-4.3>.
- Parfieniuk A. [2016], *Kobiety w światowych armiach. Jaka jest sytuacja żołnierek w poszczególnych krajach*, <https://wiadomosci.wp.pl/kobiety-w-swiatowych-armiach-jaka-jest-sytuacja-zolnierek-w-poszczegolnych-krajach-6036579193484417a>
- Pigeau R., McCann C. [2002], *Re-conceptualizing command and control*, „Canadian Military Journal”, Spring.
- Regulamin [1996], *Regulamin pracy organów dowodzenia w Siłach Zbrojnych RP*, Sztab Generalny WP.
- Rotter T. [2012], *Służba zawodowa kobiet w Wojsku Polskim (problemy psychologiczne)*, „Bezpieczeństwo. Teoria i Praktyka” 4(IX): 85–92.
- Różycka M. [2019], *Wartości kobiece w biznesie*, Seria: Rozprawy i Studia, tom 1049, Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Szczecińskiego, Szczecin.
- Rubin H. [1997], *The Princess. Machiavelli for Women*, Harriet Rubin, New York.
- Sinder D.M., Nagl J.A., Paff T. [1999], *Army professionalism, the military ethic, and officership in the 21st century*, The Strategic Studies Institute, Carlisle.
- Sztumski J. [2005], *Czy humanistyczne wykształcenie jest przydatne dla oficera?*, w: *Humanistyczne kompetencje oficerów wobec wyzwań współczesności*, red. S. Jarmoszko, R. Stępień, AON, Warszawa.
- Wolska-Liśkiewicz E. [2015], *Dlaczego w polskiej armii nie ma kobiet-generałów?* „Bezpieczeństwo. Teoria i Praktyka”, 2: 47–59.
- Woźniak A. [2021], *Ilu jest żołnierzy w Polsce?* <https://prawniknapoligonie.pl/ilu-jest-zolnierzy-w-polsce-sprawdz-to/>, dostęp: 25.04.2022.