

privilege 101

national service

Female Privilege?

Viewed in isolation, female exemption from NS seems to be a privilege, disrupting the feminist narrative on male privilege in Singapore.

In their 2002 *Remaking Singapore: Views of Half the Nation Report*, AWARE stated that in the name of equal treatment, **women should do NS as well.**

However, instead of limiting NS to military service, AWARE recommends for NS to become a period of **community service and contribution required of both women and men alike.**

Examples of alternative forms of service would be healthcare, social work and civil defence.



The **gender wage gap** is an example of the wider implications female exemption from NS has on other spheres of society. According to an article by The Equality&Democracy project in Yale-NUS, there is anecdotal evidence of companies paying male graduates more than female graduates to “compensate” for their time in NS.

Gendered NS also **reinforces traditional heteronormative gender roles.** Men are perceived as the “independent protector” and women as the “dependent caregiver”.

Jolene Tan, head of advocacy and research at AWARE also believes that female exemption from NS has been used to “**eclipse and perhaps justify all other gender inequalities that women face**”, silencing all conversations on gender inequality.



Racial/Religious Privilege



According to *Men and Masculinities in Southeast Asia* by Lenore Lyons and Michele Ford, NS “actively discriminates against Malay Muslims by **limiting their access to leadership and combat roles**”.

In 1987, Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong expressed concern about putting a SAF soldier in a conflict **“where his emotions for the nation may come in conflict with his emotions for his religion”**.

In fact, certain units in the SAF **do not even have Muslim cookhouses** which cater to Malays and other Muslims’ religious requirements.

Class Privilege

The issue of intersectionality is also at play in the realm of NS. For instance, **men from higher socio-economic backgrounds and more competitive educational institutions stand a higher chance of becoming officers**.

This confers them advantages of cultural capital and higher pay.

According to a NUS Press academic publication *Aristocracy of Armed Talent: The Military Elite in Singapore*, 78% of the highest military elite are SAF Overseas Scholars, 44% of whom come from Raffles Institution.

