

A screenshot of a web browser displaying the ABC website. The browser's address bar shows the URL: https://www.abc.net.au/radio/programs/pm/discrimination-against-females-in-the-defence-force/10435106. The website header includes the ABC logo, a search bar, and navigation links for 'Log In' and 'Search'. Below the header, the program 'PM with Linda Mottram' is featured, with navigation tabs for 'Overview', 'Episodes', 'Archive', 'Contact Us', and 'Radio'. A video player is embedded on the page, showing two women in military camouflage gear. To the right of the video player, there is a list of news segments under the heading 'Friday PM'. The segments include: 'Farmers react to the drought funds: We need it now' (4mins 14secs), 'The Australian dollar slides into a 32 month low' (3mins 53secs), and 'Qantas shareholders vote against bid to review asylum seeker deportations' (5mins 23secs). A 'Show more segments' link is also visible.

Discrimination against females in the Defence Force

By Linda Mottram on PM

Duration: 4min 53sec

Broadcast: Fri 26 Oct 2018, 6:43pm

Transcript

EMMA ALBERICI: All roles in the British armed forces, including the Royal Marines and elite special forces known as the SAS, have for the first time been opened up to women.

Gender restrictions on the employment of women in all Australian Army combat-related roles including special forces were removed on the first of January 2016.

Currently, though, there are no female snipers in the Australian Defence Force but there are a growing number of women in defence science and technology roles.

Three years ago, an analysis of the more than 2,000 staff at DST showed only 17 per cent of the science, technology, engineering and maths related jobs were held by women.

So the chief scientist at defence, Alex Zelinsky tried something different in recruitment to see what role discrimination was actually playing that might provide some clues as to why jobs weren't being filled by women.

He asked HR to remove all the names and anything else that would identify potential job candidates as female. The results revealed that bias had indeed stopped women getting in to and progressing through his organization.

I spoke to the chief defense scientist earlier.

Alex Zelinsky, welcome to PM. What's the background to this bold experiment you've undertaken?

ALEX ZELINSKY: Well, I think one of the things that is well known there is just not enough women participating in science, technology, engineering and math's and in my own organisation, DST, we have a small number of women, 22 per cent overall of the whole workforce but actually only 17 per cent own what we call these STEM roles and so we recognised we must address this imbalance.

EMMA ALBERICI: How did you go about de-identifying the people applying for jobs?

ALEX ZELINSKY: It was a manual intensive piece of work, but we felt that needed to be done. So that meant literally going through there and removing names and titles etc. and we also gave the panel some training in what we call unconscious bias, you know, just to be aware of that and how that can affect people's decision making.

What does unconscious look like? It is things like not being aware that people may have families and calling meetings when people could be dropping off or picking up kids at school. You know, without having that understanding and quite often, even though we do have males doing a lot more work in, you know, terms of family caring etc and sharing responsibilities in the home, still a lot of that responsibility does tend to fall on women and then you call meetings when they can't come.

It immediately stops them from participating, potentially missing out on an opportunity to volunteer or do some work.

We've also done a lot of mentoring as well. Generally, males are very adapted to putting themselves forward, you know, and saying they did a task or a job. They will tell you how great it was and it almost changed the world, the thing that they did.

While the women were much more downplayed the significance of the work they'd done so their CV's were, in the sense, appeared to more modest and so we also —

EMMA ALBERICI: Not that their achievements were more modest?

ALEX ZELINSKY: That's exactly right. They were just modest in their way of talking about their achievements and what they had done.

EMMA ALBERICI: So, tell us about the numbers? What was the outcome of this trial?

ALEX ZELINSKY: Well, it's not a trial. We're actually, we're doing it. It has actually been in place now for three years.

254 candidates were invited to submit, make applications for early career researchers.

26 per cent of those 254 were females and when we looked at it, out of 180 people that had got an offer, 28 per cent of them were female.

So real data showing the program is working.

EMMA ALBERICI: Dr Zelinsky, why was this important for you?

ALEX ZELINSKY: Please call me Alex.

EMMA ALBERICI: Why was this important to you?

ALEX ZELINSKY: Well, I just felt that we just weren't, you know — when you look at any organisation, the ones that do the best are the ones that have the greatest diversity and diversity is, you know, in terms of not just gender diversity, it could be intellectual diversity, culture, the whole lot.

That's where innovation happens - when you bring different people together to do the best, you know, to do great things, to do great science for Australia and if you're missing out on, half the population is not really contributing to this effort, you're not going to be as successful if everybody, all the best people, have the opportunity to come and join and that's what we think and certainly, I've got a daughter whose been studying science and the idea of her not being able to have a career or less opportunities, I just felt it wasn't right and we had to fix it.

EMMA ALBERICI: Alex Zelinsky, it has been a fascinating conversation, thank

you.

ALEX ZELINSKY: Thank you Emma, I really enjoyed that.

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