

## Attitude towards Women in Fighter Flying Among Aircrew of IAF: A Pilot Study

Dr Ajay Kumar<sup>1\*</sup>

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Indian Air Force (IAF) has been pioneer in the Indian Armed Forces which accepts new technology and concepts readily. Accepting women in fighter flying was the last male bastion in IAF waiting to be demolished which finally happened in 2015. The first batch of women fighter pilots have been inducted into IAF and have started operational flying in the Squadron. It has been shown that at times policy decision leads to change in attitude of a cohort. However, this can be proved only if there are objective data available prior to policy decision and after considerable time of its implementation so that the change can be investigated scientifically. This pilot questionnaire was designed to understand prevalent attitude towards women in fighter flying in IAF. In addition, Attitude towards women Scale was used on the same subjects to understand their attitude and answer of the pilot questionnaire. The aim of this pilot study was to obtain a baseline data for use in the future for evaluating any change in attitude towards women due to change in policy by allowing women in fighter flying. This pilot study was a part of bigger study planned on the subject.

### MATERIAL AND METHOD

A questionnaire was prepared in-house to understand acceptability of women in fighter flying in IAF. The pilot questionnaire had fifteen set of questions where thirteen of them (except question no 9 and question no 15) had responses in the form of 'yes', 'no' and 'can't say'. Respondents were asked to tick one of the options without revealing their identity. This was tested on ten transport and helicopter aircrew of IAF who without revealing their personal particulars answered all the questionnaires. However, one questionnaire was declared invalid due to multiple responses. Hence, only nine set of data was available for analysis. Further, twenty five fighter aircrew were given short version of attitude towards women scale along with the pilot questionnaire on similar lines where they were required to answer all the questions without revealing their identity. Author believed that anonymity would allow overcoming any inhibition in answering gender based questions freely. The short version of

<sup>1</sup> Department of Acceleration Physiology and Spatial Orientation, Institute of Aerospace Medicine Indian Air Force, Karnataka-560017, India

\*Responding Author

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Attitude towards Women Scale contains twenty five questions, each to be answered on four point scale ranging from 0- Strongly Agree to 3- Strongly Disagree. Of the twenty five questions twelve are reverse scored. All the participants were male. The data thus obtained were analysed on Microsoft Office Excel 2007. The participants were free to answer all of the questions or leave some of them if they wished to for the pilot questionnaire. Hence, number of responses for each question (n) varied in the pilot questionnaire analysis. However, they had to answer all the twenty five questions in the short version of Attitude towards Women Scale (AWS) where they had to respond to only one option provided out of four. Any incomplete AWS response was declared invalid and was not included for further analysis in the study.

### RESULT

The total thirty four Pilot questionnaires and twenty five Attitude towards Women Scale (AWS) were analysed. The six AWS questionnaires were incomplete and hence were not considered for further analysis. The result is presented as Figure 1 to 7. The mean AWS score (MAWSS) for the study was 58.84 (78.7%). A high score on AWS indicates a profeminist, egalitarian attitude of IAF Aircrew tested. Fig 4 and Fig 5 shows mean AWS score (MAWSS) plotted with the responses for question no 9 and question no 15 of the pilot questionnaire. Fig 6 shows bar diagram of MAWSS and response to the pilot questionnaire (except question no 9 and 15). Fig 7 shows line-chart of AWSS with the responses for Pilot Questionnaire (except question no 9 and 15). Table 1 shows correlation factor matrix for responses and AWSS. The correlation for 'Yes' response to the questionnaire was 0.54, 'No' response was 0.86 and 'Can't Say' was 0.41.

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Fig 1. Bar diagram of responses received in 'Yes, No and Can't say' of the pilot questionnaire. Figures shown are in percentages (n=34).

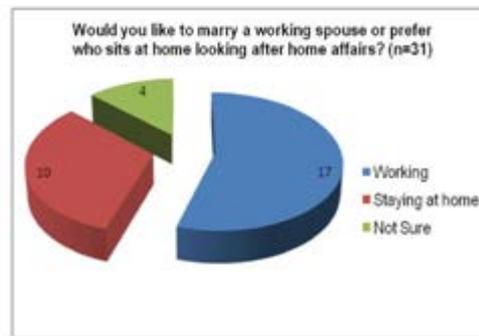
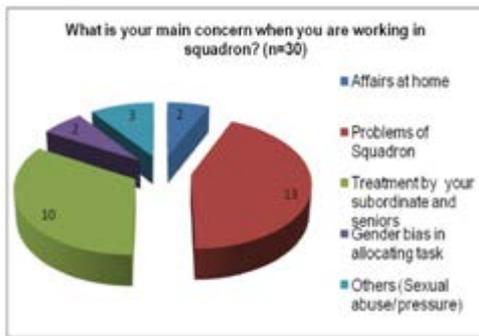
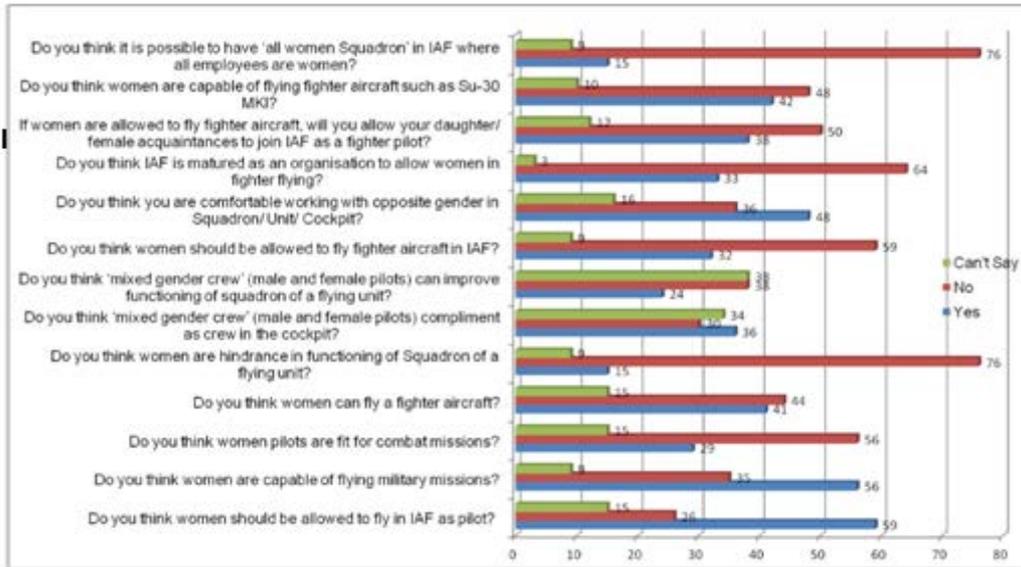


Fig 2 & 3. Pie-chart showing responses to question no 9 and 15 of the pilot questionnaire respectively. No of responses received is shown as 'n'

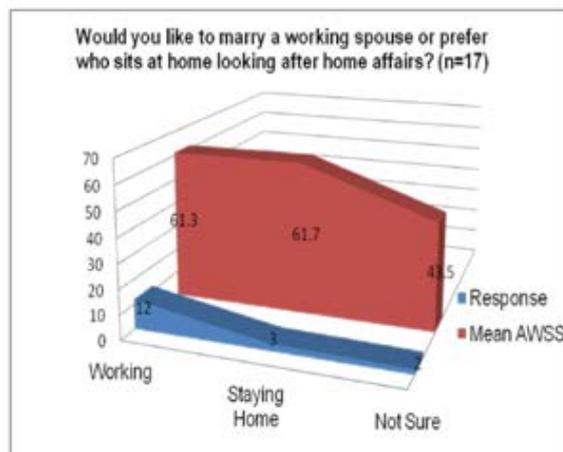
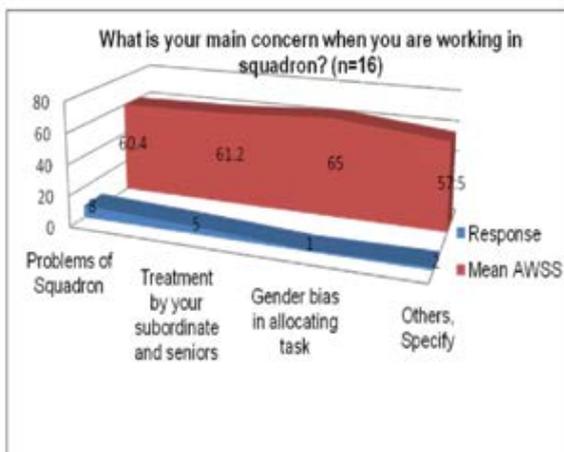


Fig 4 & 5. Area Plot depicting responses (n) vs mean AWS Score (MAWSS) for question no 9 & 15 of the pilot questionnaire respectively.

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Fig 6. Bar diagram showing responses (n) for pilot questionnaire (except Q 9 and Q 15) and mean AWS Score for such respondents

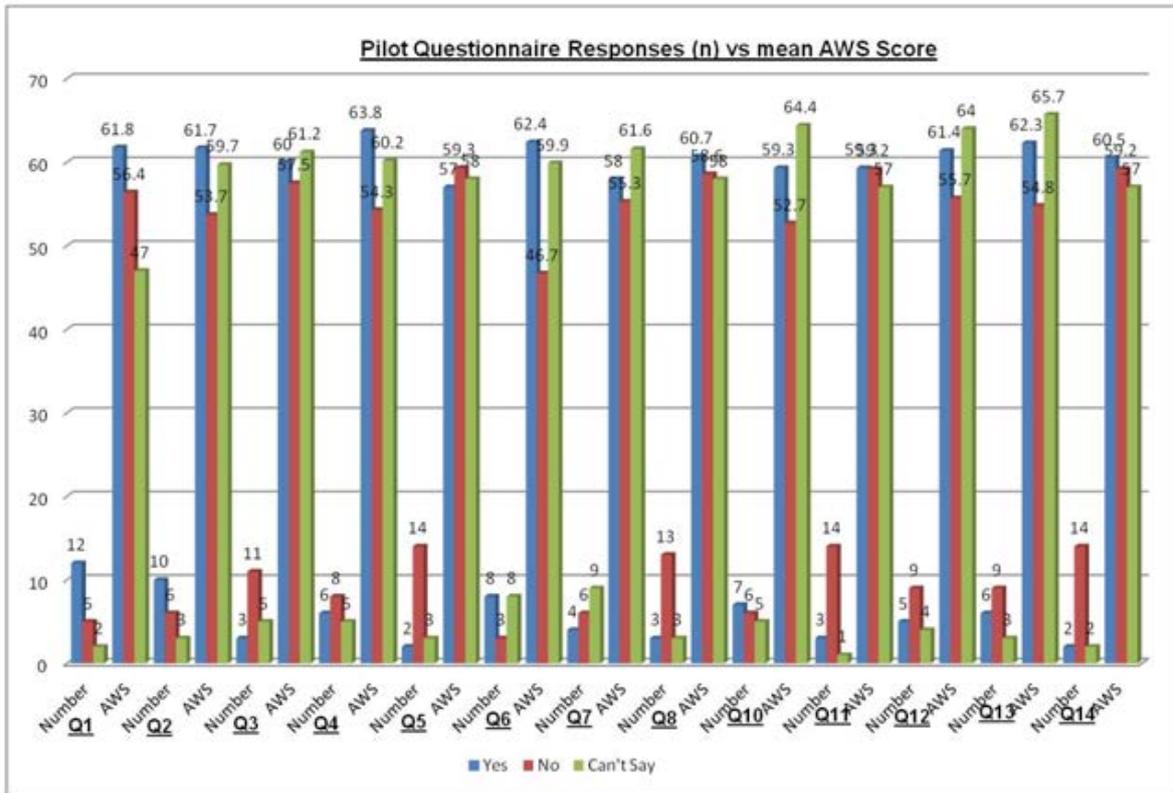
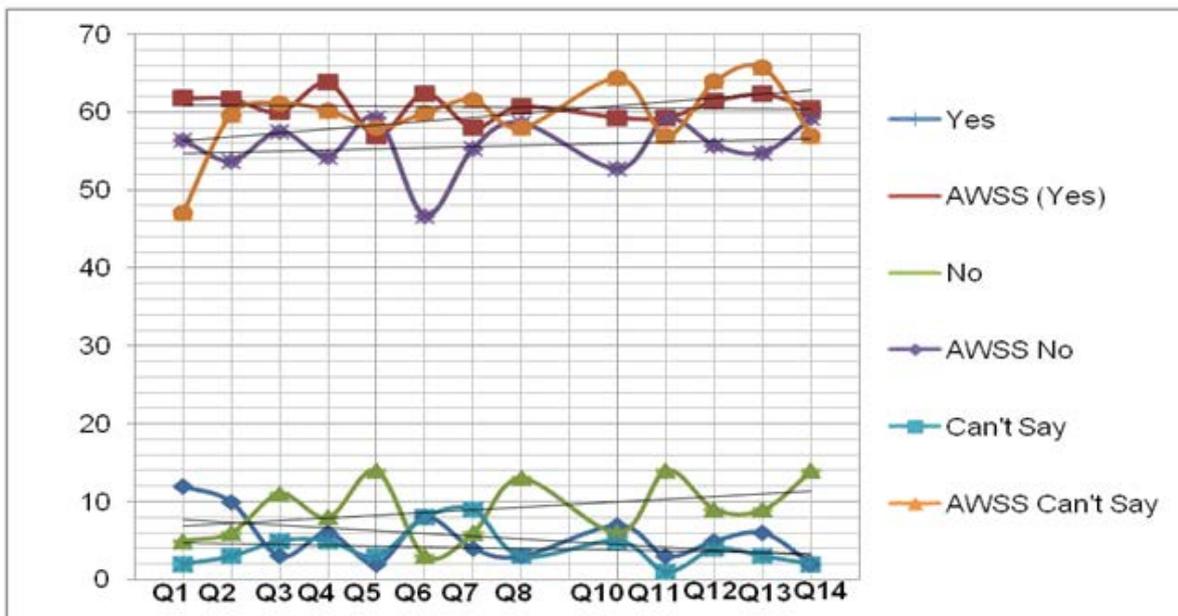


Fig 7. Line- chart of response and Attitude towards Women Scale Score (short version) for Pilot Questionnaire (except Q9 & 15).



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**Table 1. Correlation Factor analysis for responses of the pilot questionnaire and their respective Attitude towards Women Scale score (except Q9 & 15).**

Factors	Yes	AWSS (Yes)	No	AWSS (No)	Can't Say	AWSS Can't Say
Yes	1					
AWSS (Yes)	0.54	1				
No	0.82	-0.42	1			
AWSS (No)	0.59	-0.47	0.86	1		
Can't Say	0.05	-0.04	0.60	-0.65	1	
AWSS (Can't Say)	0.31	-0.02	0.05	-0.30	0.41	1

### DISCUSSION

The thirty four respondents of the pilot questionnaire have brought out an interesting insight to their views on women in Indian Air Force. Fifty nine percent of the respondent believed that women should be allowed to fly in the IAF as pilot. Fifty six percent of respondent believed that women are capable of flying military missions. However, only twenty nine percent believed that women are fit for combat missions and fifty six percent believed that they are not.

Though forty one percent thought that women can fly fighter aircraft and equal number (44%) believed that they can't. The Seventy six percent of respondent believed that women are not hindrance in functioning of a fighter squadron. This response is not surprising as women officers are already working in Accounts, Logistics, Medical and Technical branches of IAF. On the question of whether mixed gender crew compliment as crew in the cockpit, the opinion was equally divided among the respondents (Thirty six percent for Yes, thirty percent for No and rest responded as Can't say). Twenty four percent believed that mixed gender crew can improve the functioning of a squadron of a flying unit. However, thirty eight percent believed that it can't and equal number of respondents (38%) was not sure about it (Can't Say). Fifty nine percent opined that women should not be allowed to fly fighter aircraft in IAF (only thirty two percent responded in favour and rests were not sure). This response is significant as they same percentage of respondents (59%) had welcomed women in flying in IAF. This is noteworthy as women pilots are already flying helicopters and transport missions in IAF. Forty eight percent of respondents thought that they were comfortable in working with women in squadron/unit/cockpit and thirty six percent thought they were not. This figure of thirty six percent is very high keeping in mind that women are sharing most of the workplace in the civil world and now in IAF as well. Besides, Armed Forces traditionally pay immense respect to women and they should be comfortable sharing their workplace with them. Factors contributing to this need to be investigated further. Sixty four percent of the respondents believed that IAF is not matured as an organisation to allow women in fighter flying (only thirty three percent responded positively). However, despite

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this fifty percent responded that they will allow their daughters/ female acquaintances to join IAF as fighter pilot. Forty two percent believed that women were capable of flying fighter aircraft like Su-30 MKI and equal number responded in negative (48%). This response is consistent with previous responses of related questions. There was big 'No' (76%) for possibility of 'all women squadron' in IAF where all employees are women. However, fifteen percent still believed in this distant dream whereas nine percent were not sure.

The short version of Attitude towards Women Scale has been widely used validated tool for assessing attitude towards women in a cohort. There is no known study on Attitude towards Women in IAF. A high score indicates a profeminist, egalitarian attitude while a low score indicates a traditional, conservative attitude (1). However, there's no objective cut-off to distinguish between these two attributes. A high score of AWSS (58.84 or 78.7 %) for our cohort shows that the respondents have profeminist, egalitarian attitude. This is not surprising as IAF is known to be progressive and modern. However, this study objectively proves that perception about our cohort. Since the sample size is very small, no extrapolation can be made for IAF as a whole. The IAF Cohort is more egalitarian than male college going urban youth as mean AWS score for IAF cohort is 78.7 and male college going urban youth of an Indian metro is 68.1.

The responses received for the pilot questionnaire further, validates the applicability of AWS score as most of the responses are pro-women. The responses to pilot questionnaire do not correlate with AWS Score except for the negative responses (correlation coefficient-0.9). This could be because of the small sample size. Further, large scale study needs to validate finding of this study.

### CONCLUSION

The IAF cohort participated in the study is pro-feminist and have egalitarian attitude towards women. They are open to idea of women in fighter flying, however, majority of them believe that IAF as an organisation has not matured enough to allow women in fighter flying as of now. There is a need for large scale study to validate findings of this study.

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