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tently say during surveys conducted by the military that they won't enlist or won't encourage their children to enlist when asked if the war on terrorism has influenced their perception of joining the military.

As for the idea that blacks are more likely to pay for their service with their lives — that's a myth.

Brian Gifford studied casualties of the war in Iraq by race for the Berkeley School of Public Health. Even though his findings went against the conventional wisdom placing the poor and minorities on the front line, Gifford said he was not surprised by his findings.

"Historically, African-American casualties have tended to be low," he said. "Overall, the casualties were distributed among whites and Hispanics."

During Vietnam, he said, blacks were a disproportionate number of casualties in 1965 and 1966. But the Pentagon responded immediately by pulling blacks back from the danger areas.

"By the end of Vietnam, their casualties looked like their representation in the ranks," he said.

Blacks died at a rate of 21 percent in 1965 and 1966, but only 12 percent of total service members in the Marines and Army were black.

From March 19, 2003, to April 8, 2004, Gifford found that 69 percent of those who died were white, 14 percent were black, and 11 percent were Hispanic. During that same period, whites made up 68 percent of the Army and Marines, blacks stood at 15 percent, and Hispanics made up 10.7 percent of the total.

Gifford said those percentages have remained stable as the war has continued.

But Gifford, a former enlisted Army infantryman, was surprised to see how many whites and Hispanics now volunteer for the Marines and the infantry.

"Hispanics are underrepresented in the military," he said. "However, within the military itself, they tend to be overrepresented in the Marines and combat arms, which puts them in high-risk situations."

In 2001, one of eight blacks was in a combat-related specialty in both services, compared to one in five whites, Gifford found. And, he said, 18 percent of all Hispanic recruits try to join the Marines.

There may be other factors at work keeping minority enlistment numbers down.

"Black enlistment has been high and overrepresented for a number of years," said Maggi Morehouse, a historian who has written several books and articles about blacks in the military. "And I have been expecting a corrective. I have been expecting black enlistment to drop significantly below the 23 to 24 percent numbers that represent the all-time high."

Morehouse said there are probably a combination of reasons, including the fact that the percent-

age of black, male high school graduates is lower than that of whites, and the number of blacks going to college — and not into the military — has increased since the 1970s.

Overall strength numbers for minority women in the officer ranks, however, have gone up. Morehouse said that might be because first-generation college women may be

choosing ROTC as a way to pay for their schooling. In 1998, 19.9 percent of commissioned officers were black women, and 4.10 percent were Hispanic women. In 2005, 23 percent of commissioned officers were black women, and 5.8 percent were Hispanic women.

In the enlisted ranks, the number of blacks has dropped from 46.6 percent of women in 1998 to

40.1 percent in 2005, while Hispanic women have grown in the ranks from 6.8 percent to 12.8 percent. Asian-Americans have risen from 3.8 percent of enlisted women in 2003 to 4.6 in 2005.

The demographics report also showcased a new trend: The percentage of prior service members enlisting in the Army has risen almost 5 percentage points.

In April 2006, Training and Doctrine Command reported that 2,456 prior service members had enlisted under the new rule — as well as 853 non-prior service recruits.

The report, which is usually released by the end of the fiscal year, was delayed several months this year because the Army had to recheck the numbers. □



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