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CHANGING THE UNCHANGEABLE – RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION OF WOMEN IN THE CANADIAN MILITARY

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Exercise Solo Flight

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INTRODUCTION

*If anything is to remain unchanged, it will be the role of women.*¹

- David Riesman, Harvard sociologist.

Over the last fifty years, a number of institutions, including the United Nations and the Canadian Armed Forces (CAF), have introduced various instruments designed to foster equality of rights for women. Looking back to 1967, one could argue that Riesman's prophecy was both right and wrong. In some respects, equality of women's rights has made significant progress; however, in the 21st century, a number of key inequalities remain to be addressed.

The CAF appeals to a unique labour market and provides equal opportunity for all Canadians. That being said, the demographics of Canadian society is changing and with that so too must the recruitment and retention policies. Recruitment of women does not fall within the recommended CAF Employment Equity guidelines and attrition is higher amongst women compared to men. While the CAF is concerned with and making changes to rectify inequality amongst its members, the generalized policies do not address the core issues affecting women within the CAF, and often creates counter effects to the equality it tries to achieve.

This paper will address the issues and mitigation strategies of recruitment and retention of women in the CAF by first examining the history of equality, followed by the identification of core recruitment and retention issues while comparing strategies of other

¹ Ruth Rosen, "The 20th Century's Longest Revolution Still Has Work to Do," Los Angeles Times (31 December 1999), <http://articles.latimes.com/1999/dec/31/local/me-49395>.

National Defence Forces. This paper will conclude with potential mitigation strategies for improved recruitment and retention of women in the CAF.

HISTORY OF EQUALITY

By examining the history of equality, there is an appreciation of the challenges that have been overcome, as well as the identification of the gaps that remain to be addressed. Humanity has made significant advances in the pursuit of equal rights for all persons. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), adopted by the United Nations (UN) in 1948, was a critical benchmark because it was the first internationally recognized document to acknowledge human rights. Additionally, it paved the way for subsequent instruments that would further define and elaborate on equal rights for all persons regardless of race, gender, ethnicity or other affiliations that had been historically discriminated against.

Women have long been recognized by the UN as playing an important role in international peace and stability. Adopted in 1979, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) “establishes not only an international *bill of rights* for women, but also an agenda for action by countries to guarantee the enjoyment of those rights.”² As an enhancement to CEDAW, the 2000 United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1325 was adopted unanimously and acknowledged the need for “increased representation of women at all decision-

² Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, “*Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, 18 December 1979*,” last accessed 06 May 2014, <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/ProfessionalInterest/Pages/CEDAW.aspx>

making levels in national, regional and international institutions.”³ It further stresses the importance of women’s participation in the preservation and advancement of peace and security.⁴ These international instruments have set the benchmark from which Canadian and CAF policies have evolved.

From a Canadian perspective, the 1970 Royal Commission on the Status of Women in Canada made unprecedented recommendations that addressed the need to “ensure for women equal opportunities with men in all aspects of Canadian society.”⁵ The report resulted in 167 recommendations of which the following are most relevant to the perspective of this paper: a person’s gender or marital status should not be discriminated against when seeking employment opportunities; employed women should not be dismissed on the grounds of a pregnancy or maternity leave and they should be granted eighteen weeks of unemployment benefits for maternity leave; additional support for day cares including funding and improved services; and access to educational opportunities including admission to the military colleges.⁶ Though most of the commissioners agreed with the majority of the recommendations in the report, it is interesting to note that Commissioner John Humphrey dissociated himself at the conclusion of the report as he did not agree with some of the recommendations. Albeit a long-standing advocate of women’s rights, he felt that in some cases the recommendations could “introduce new kinds of discrimination, not only between men and women but also between different classes of women.”⁷ In addition, Humphrey

³ United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325, 31 October 2000.

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ Canada. Privy Council Office. Report of the Royal Commission on the Status of Women in Canada. Ottawa. September 1970.

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ *Ibid.*

expressed his disapproval for any imposed quota systems as he viewed them as discriminatory and could potentially “operate against the real interests of women.”⁸ He further criticized the commission’s views on compensatory and special treatment that could also serve to extend rights to women that may not necessarily be provided to men, serving as a means of reverse discrimination.

Subsequent instruments that have shaped and governed the equality policies in Canada include the 1977 Canadian Human Rights Act (CHRA). Enacted from the CHRA were the Canadian Human Rights Commission (CHRC) and the Canadian Human Rights Tribunal (CHRT) that work together to resolve human rights or discrimination complaints. As an administrative tribunal system, the CHRT aims to resolve complaints through mediation or adjudication. In 1989, the CHRT heard a case concerning four female complainants who “alleged that the CAF’s policy regarding employment opportunities was discriminatory”⁹ as women were not permitted the same training opportunities as men and they were excluded from certain combat occupations. The matter in question was whether the CAF requirement of *operational effectiveness* constituted a bona fide operational requirement that justified the discrimination. The CHRT ruled in favour of the complainants concluding that the “CAF policy and practice of excluding women from combat duty is discriminatory on the grounds of sex under the Act.”¹⁰

The purpose of the 1995 Canadian Employment Equity Act is “to achieve equality in the workplace so that no person shall be denied employment opportunities or benefits

⁸ Canada. Privy Council Office. Report of the Royal Commission on the Status of Women in Canada. Ottawa. September 1970.

⁹ Canada. Canadian Human Rights Tribunal. Brown vs Canadian Armed Forces. 20 February 1989.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

for reasons unrelated to ability.” It further aims to correct the discrimination of select groups, namely women, aboriginal persons, persons with disabilities, and visible minority groups. The subsequent CAF Employment Equity Regulations (2002) serve to uphold the purpose of the Act. From that, the CAF has created Defence Employment Equity Advisory Groups (DEEAG) that champion to “provide advice and insight to the leadership on issues relevant to their membership and implementation of employment equity”.¹¹

This examination of equal rights in the broader international and Canadian context sets the framework from which to analyze the recruitment and retention issues that the CAF faces today. We have been witness to “evolutionary changes in a revolutionary time frame;”¹² however, gaps remain that policies do not cover.

RECRUITMENT ISSUES

With international and Canadian employment equity policies in place and a military institution moving forward to achieve the intent of those instruments, the strategies of CAF recruitment has significantly evolved over the years. It is unimaginable now to think that only a generation ago women were released from the military due to pregnancies or marriage. The first female cadets graduated from the Royal Military College in 1984, and combat occupations were first opened to women in 1989. However, with all the equity policies in place and advancements that have rivaled other nations,

¹¹ Canada, Department of National Defence, “Canadian Armed Forces Employment Equity Report 2012-2013,” October 2013, 8.

¹² Patricia M. Shields, “Sex Roles in the Military,” in *The Military – More Than a Job?*, ed. Charles Moskos and F. Wood, 99-113 (Virginia: Pergamon-Brassey’s International Defense Publishers).

there still remain challenges in recruiting women into the military. In fact, a recent foresight study directed by the Chief of Military Personnel (CMP) predicted that “female representation within the CAF is in freefall.”¹³

According to the May 2006 Report of the Auditor General, the CAF has not been successful in achieving its recruitment targets for women. In 2011/2012, the CAF employment equity goal was to recruit 19.5% women, increasing the target to 25.1% in 2012/2013. Although enrollment rates had increased marginally to 14.9% in the reporting period, the numbers fell short of the aim. While the Canadian military has “one of the highest representation rates for women among all NATO countries,”¹⁴ it is not representative of the Canadian society where women make up just over half of the population. Perhaps Commissioner Humphrey’s comments regarding *imposed quotas* are as unrealistic today as they were in 1970.

The British Armed Forces has approached employment equity quotas from two different viewpoints: statistical and delegative representation. Statistical representation holds that the number of women in the military would be proportional to that of the whole society. Whereby, delegative representation holds that women are simply represented as a member of the organization without setting any goals.¹⁵ While statistical representation has the potential for reverse discrimination or over-representation, delegative representation does not reflect the CAF’s intentions of an institution that reflects the face of society. “The setting of unrealistically high targets... can only lead to

¹³ Canada. Department of National Defence. Chief of Military Personnel. “The Employment of Women in the Canadian Forces – Deep Dive.”

¹⁴ Canada, Department of National Defence, “Canadian Armed Forces Employment Equity Report 2012-2013,” October 2013, 5.

¹⁵ Captain (N) Hans Jung, “Can the Canadian Forces Reflect Canadian Society?” *Canadian Military Journal* (Autumn 2007), 30.

a situation whereby the CF will be perennially unable to meet its targets, no matter the effort.”¹⁶ There is a need for a balance between statistical and delegative representation.

Recruitment is also affected by persistent negative perceptions of women in the military. When a 2014 *Maclean's* article reported on sexual misconduct within the CAF, it was not the first of such incidents to make headlines in the media. Consequently, not only has the treatment of women in the military been put to question by society but the military leadership has been scrutinized for not resolving the issue when it had first appeared. Regardless of whether sexual misconduct allegations are true or not, the reports in the media influence women in joining the military. Understandably, the media can sensationalize any topic, however, what woman would not question her decision to join the military when it is reported that “when women start moving into male sanctuaries, some men feel threatened so they strike back by using humiliation or intimidation.”¹⁷ When sexual harassment, including “sexual comments and unwanted advances,” is tolerated in the workplace, there is a higher risk that sexual assault could occur.¹⁸ The CAF has made significant improvements to harassment policies; however, the reemergence of the topic of sexual misconduct calls to question the policies’ effectiveness and even more so the underlying issues.

While sexual assault cases are handled in Canadian military courts, “in many countries, rank and uniform have simply been taken out of the equation. Britain, Ireland, Australia and New Zealand have all handed key aspects of military justice back to

¹⁶ Captain (N) Hans Jung, “Can the Canadian Forces Reflect Canadian Society?” *Canadian Military Journal* (Autumn 2007), 35.

¹⁷ Noémi Mercier and Alec Castonguay, “Our Military’s Disgrace,” *Maclean's*, 16 May 2014.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

civilian authorities.”¹⁹ In 2013, the Australian Army Chief, Lieutenant General Morrison, took his rightful leadership role when he sent a strong message to the members of the Army stating that any sexists who cannot accept the high standards and valued culture of their service should just “get out.” While strong messages from leadership are critical, policy and culture changes are invaluable to the reputation of any Defence Force.

Twenty-five years ago, Canada was ahead of its time. It was one of the first countries to allow women to fight in combat. Even though women make up 15 per cent of the Forces today, a sexist climate persists, and it remains a challenge to recruit more women.²⁰

Recruitment is top priority²¹; however, the CAF must adjust its’ policies to address the changing demographics and military cultural ideologies, otherwise, female representation will indeed “freefall” if the negative perceptions are not mitigated.

RETENTION ISSUES

Similar to CAF recruitment strategies, the CAF has a vested interest in understanding retention challenges. Early attrition is costly as the CAF does not receive a “return on the training investment”²². Retaining a skilled force has also proven to be a challenge for the CAF especially during the Force Reduction Plan of the 1990s that saw approximately 14,000 experienced personnel leave the military. The CAF also faces higher attrition of women compared to men and lower representation at the higher ranks.

¹⁹ Noémi Mercier and Alec Castonguay, “Our Military’s Disgrace,” *Maclean’s*, 16 May 2014.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ Canada. Office of the Auditor General of Canada. “Chapter 2—National Defence—Military Recruiting and Retention.” *2006 May Status Report of the Auditor General of Canada*. (May 2006): 50.

²² *Ibid.*, 47.

The May 2006 Report of the Auditor General evaluated the progress that the CAF had made following the 2002 Report and the 2001 CAF Retention Strategy and Action Plan. It identified that, while the CAF had addressed certain retention issues, the “attrition problems that remain are jeopardizing the success of the Canadian Forces’ planned expansion.”²³ The CAF had put in place policies that addressed its three main retention concerns: higher attrition rates in some occupations; retention of experienced personnel who would soon be eligible for a pension; and, “the need for a better return on training investment.”²⁴ CAF agreed to “continue to identify conditions of military service that affect attrition and focus interventions on those that are amenable to policy/program solutions. A retention strategy will incorporate continuous improvements and therefore will remain flexible.”²⁵

While surveys have identified that attrition is due to lack of fairness, uncertainty, bureaucracy or career concerns²⁶, women are more likely to leave for reasons such as a lack of work-life balance, parental responsibilities, or the need for increased family stability to care for children or aging parents. Clearly, general retention policies will not work for everyone, particularly while women still take on the responsibility of primary caregiver.

While not every woman is interested in juggling a military career, children and a marriage²⁷, the CAF must be flexible in their policies to allow the women who are interested, to reach their full potential in the military. All too often, women leave the

²³ Canada. Office of the Auditor General of Canada. “Chapter 2—National Defence—Military Recruiting and Retention.” *2006 May Status Report of the Auditor General of Canada*. (May 2006): 47.

²⁴ *Ibid*, 63.

²⁵ *Ibid*, 66.

²⁶ *Ibid*, 64.

²⁷ Patricia M. Shields, “Sex Roles in the Military,” in *The Military – More Than a Job?*, ed. Charles Moskos and F. Wood, 99-113 (Virginia: Pergamon-Brassey’s International Defense Publishers).

military for reasons that do not affect the majority of the men in the military. The Employment Equity statistics clearly show a decline in representation at the higher ranks: Junior officers 18.4%, Majors 15.4%, Lieutenant Colonels 9.6%, Colonels 4.8%, and Generals 3.1%.²⁸ Therefore, if promotions are based on merit and not gender, then why are women leaving the forces and how could the CAF retain their experience? “Research has identified several retention incentives that would be beneficial to women [including] mentoring, flexible work arrangements, and affordable childcare.”²⁹

Retention is also a top priority for CAF.³⁰ With an imbalance between recruitment and attrition, it will become more important to formulate policies that will assist in the retention of skilled and experienced military personnel. The generalized policies do not currently address the core issues affecting women within the CAF. The policies must become flexible in order to adapt to the diverse military population.

MITIGATION STRATEGIES

Improving upon the recruitment and retention of women in the military is a seemingly daunting task. Why is it so important and furthermore, why should we even care? Notwithstanding the international and Canadian policies that have mitigated the inequity and discrimination that women have experienced, there are still lingering issues and certainly new challenges that have arisen. Perhaps such a wicked problem can never

²⁸ Canada, Department of National Defence, “Canadian Armed Forces Employment Equity Report 2012-2013,” October 2013, Annex B.

²⁹ Chantal Fraser, “Diversity Recruiting: It’s Time to Tip the Balance,” In *Canadian Military Journal* Vol 13, No. 4 (Autumn 2013): 32.

³⁰ Canada. Office of the Auditor General of Canada. “Chapter 2—National Defence—Military Recruiting and Retention.” 2006 May Status Report of the Auditor General of Canada. (May 2006): 50.

be fully solved. The notion of inequality possesses the attributes of Rittel's application of wicked problems including the premise that "there are no well-defined solutions. You either have many solutions or none. The probability that a wicked problem has one solution is null."³¹ The wicked problem of women's inequality has many solutions, but where does CAF start?

The CAF has actively worked towards employment equity for women. The mitigation strategies include topics such as: improved work-life balance programs, policies and procedures on the administration of pregnancy and maternity leave, and provision of child care services that better support the unique military service.³² While women continue to be underrepresented in the military, it behooves the CAF to further develop work-life balance policies and programs that could include job flexibility through more flexible working hours, better leave without pay policies, or the flexibility to leave and return to the Forces without financial or career repercussions.

While the policies lay the framework, it is in the analysis of the deeper underlying issues where the CAF should redirect their focus. Gender equality is not exclusively a challenge in the CAF; it is a snapshot of the challenges that faces greater Canadian society. Therefore, it is most appropriate to analyze the challenges from both a Canadian and CAF perspective. In 2012, the CMP analyzed that perspective in their "Deep Dive" foresight study. The study elicits a thought-provoking question: "how can the CF position itself as an employer of choice for women in 2022?"³³

³¹ Andrejs Skaburskis, "The Origin of 'Wicked Problems'." *Planning Theory & Practice* 9, no. 2 (2008): 278.

³² Canada, Department of National Defence, "Canadian Armed Forces Employment Equity Report 2012-2013," October 2013, 8.

³³ Canada. Chief of Military Personnel. "The Employment of Women in the Canadian Forces – Deep Dive to 2022." May 2012.

The deep dive study identified numerous environmental trends that would impact women's representation in the CAF including: the changing nature of conflict, changes in population diversity, increasing age when women have children, increasing number of recruited women who have children, and an increasing number of female immigrants, to name a few.³⁴ While the CAF cannot focus on all the dimensions that may have an impact on female representation, CMP needs to focus on the critical factors through an analysis of a range of potential futures. Subsequent insights included: the responsibilities of child bearing and family will continue to “fall more heavily upon the shoulders of women than most men”; an increase in female representation correlates to an improved inclusion of “family friendly policies”; the culture of the organization, including attitudes and practices, has a direct impact on female representation; and the “one-size-fits-all’ system and processes” is no longer the answer.³⁵

Similarly, cultural issues have been identified as the underlying cause of inappropriate sexual behaviour in the military. In 2015, an external review into “Sexual Misconduct and Sexual Harassment” in the CAF was conducted by Madame Marie Deschamps. Her report concluded that there is an “underlying sexualized culture in the CAF that is hostile to women...and conducive to more serious incidents of sexual harassment and assault. Cultural change is therefore key.”³⁶ The consequent CAF “Action Plan on Inappropriate Sexual Behaviour” responded with a strategy that “consists of four major lines of effort designed to *understand, respond to, support*

³⁴ Canada. Chief of Military Personnel. “*The Employment of Women in the Canadian Forces – Deep Dive to 2022.*” May 2012

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ Marie Deschamps. External Review Authority. External Review into Sexual Misconduct and Sexual Harassment in the Canadian Armed Forces. 27 March 2015

victims, and *prevent*.”³⁷ This action plan is consistent with the CAF’s “approach to gender and diversity, which posits that if behaviour changes first, attitudes will follow over the longer term.”³⁸ While the action plan and leadership’s commitment is important to successful change, it does not address the necessity for a shift in the CAF’s cultural intelligence.³⁹ The failure of the CAF to mitigate the recurring issue of inappropriate sexual behaviour through the lens of cultural intelligence has the potential to further impede the representation of women in the military as the trust and respect of the institution will be compromised.

The CAF is a respected institution born from a male-dominated profession with long-standing customs and traditions and slow to transition its discriminatory culture to one of complete gender inclusion and respect and dignity for all persons. The 1985 Parliamentary Committee on Equality Rights established that the CAF “must revise its present policy, a process that has begun but is proceeding all too slowly.”⁴⁰ The CAF consistently supports equal rights and dignity for all of its members; however, there are lingering cultural issues that run much deeper than rectifying the gaps only at the policy level. “The positive impact of past efforts has disappeared and has led to an organization with low innovation, low morale, a cultural climate hostile to diversity, and a failed social

³⁷ Canada. Canadian Armed Forces Strategic Response Team on Sexual Misconduct. “Canadian Armed Forces – Action Plan on Inappropriate Sexual Behaviour.” 30 April 2015.

³⁸ Karen Davis, “Sex, Gender and Cultural Intelligence in the Canadian Forces,” *Commonwealth & Comparative Politics* Vol. 47, no. 4 (November 2009): 448.

³⁹ Cultural intelligence is defined as “the ability to recognize the shared beliefs, values, attitudes and behaviours of a group of people and, most importantly, to effectively apply this knowledge toward a specific goal or range of activities.” (Davis and Wright, 9)

⁴⁰ Canada. Canadian Human Rights Tribunal. *Brown vs Canadian Armed Forces*. 20 February 1989.

contract.”⁴¹ Addressing the underlying cultural issues is key to formulating successful equality strategies.

CONCLUSION

Humanity has overcome significant challenges in pursuit of equality for all persons. Equality advancements for women have been made possible through various instruments, such as the UDHR, CEDAW, and the CHRA. While the CAF is committed to formulating recruitment and retention policies that address equality issues, the current generalized policies do not address the core issues affecting women, and often creates counter effects to the equality it tries to achieve.

The imposed quotas or *guidelines* of recruiting 25.1% women has proven to be consistently unattainable due to current policies and programs in place. In addition, the reemergence of sexual misconduct calls into question the trust and respect that is expected of the institution. The persistent negative perceptions created by this toxic environment will ultimately affect women’s representation in the military. The paradigm of the *one-size-fits-all* systems and processes should be replaced with a more flexible customization of policies and programs that will serve to benefit everyone. The wicked problem of equality can indeed be mitigated. This paper has argued that while new policies are not necessarily the answer; cultural intelligence should be the starting point.

One needs to consider that the underlying questions, why is recruitment and retention of women so important and why should we even care, can be summed up from

⁴¹ Canada. Department of National Defence. Chief of Military Personnel. “The Employment of Women in the Canadian Forces – Deep Dive.”

the foresight study conclusion that “it is possible to foresee how effectively integrating women into the CAF could lay the foundation for an even more effective accomplishment of the mission by a military force representative of the society that it defends.”⁴² Lastly, the CAF should endeavour to consider Gladwell’s pattern of change hypothesis that it only takes a small change to tip the scales:

In the end, *Tipping Points* are a reaffirmation of the potential for change and the power of intelligent action. Look at the world around you. It may seem like an immovable, implacable place. It is not. With the slightest push – in just the right place – it can be tipped.⁴³

⁴² Canada. Chief of Military Personnel. “*The Employment of Women in the Canadian Forces – Deep Dive to 2022.*” May 2012.

⁴³ Malcolm Gladwell, *The Tipping Point: How Little Things Can Make a Big Difference* (New York: Little Brown and Company), 9.

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