





# EQUITY IN THE CANADIAN ARMED FORCES – WHY IT MATTERS

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# **JCSP 44**

# Exercise Solo Flight

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#### EXERCISE SOLO FLIGHT – EXERCICE SOLO FLIGHT

# EQUITY IN THE CANADIAN ARMED FORCES - WHY IT MATTERS

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## **EQUITY IN THE CANADIAN ARMED FORCES - WHY IT MATTERS**

### Introduction

Though not always in an official capacity, women in Canada have a longstanding service to their country and its military. Originally called upon in times of great need often as nursing sisters, their role initially was in support of the men who controlled and fought the war efforts. Since then, the role of women in the Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) has significantly evolved where women not only contributed as leaders but to the overall success of the organization. Despite the above, the CAF continues to struggle with its ability to grow the representation of women in its organization. As a result, Canada's new defence policy Strong, Secure, Engaged (SSE) has reasserted the CAF's commitment to attracting, recruiting and retaining more women across all ranks. This paper will first discuss why equity in the CAF matters both legislatively and in terms of its operational effectiveness. Second, it will examine barriers to integration primarily as a result of culture, recruitment and retention. Lastly, this paper provides recommendations that may enable to the CAF to reach its gender diversity target.

## **Equity in the CAF - Why it matters**

Though the employment of women in the CAF has increased to 15.7% as of January 2019, this fall short of being representative of Canadian society workforce<sup>1</sup>. Specifically, Statistic Canada in January 2019 reported that 80.1% of women ages 25-54 (4,859,900 fulltime and 1,090,700 part-time) were employed in the Canadian labour market<sup>2</sup>. This is nearly equal to

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> National Defence. "Women in the Canadian Armed Forces." Backgrounder. March 07, 2019. http://www.forces.gc.ca/en/news/article.page?doc=women-in-the-canadian-armed-forces/izkjqzeu

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> Statistics Canada: Canada's National Statistical Agency / Statistique Canada: Organisme Statistique National Du Canada.https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/t1/tbl1/en/tv.action?pid=1410028701&pickMembers[0]=1.1&pickMembers[1]=3.1&pickMembers[2]=4.6&pickMembers[3]=5.1.

their male counterparts where men ages 25-54 saw an employment rate of 86.5% (6,004,400 fulltime and 375,700 part-time)<sup>3</sup>. The slow growth of female representation in the CAF can be attributed to the past employment restriction that were imposed on women in the CAF. It wasn't until 1965 when women were permitted to be become members of the CAF which at that time was capped at 1500, representing only 1.5% of the forces.<sup>4</sup> Though opportunities slowly started to be made available to women in the forces afterwards these took decades to occur. It was not until 1989 as a result of a Canadian Human Rights Tribunal decision that all but two occupations were opened to women in the forces, with the final ban of service on submarines being lifted in 2001. It was only in 1991, where Canadian women first took part in operational conflicts. <sup>5</sup> Another key influence on the CAF that should be noted was the introduction of the Employment Equity Act (EEA) in 1995.

The purpose of the EEA is to further supplement Human Rights Codes in protecting the rights of persons and to ensure equality is achieved in the workplace. It was created with the intention to address the inequitable workplace conditions that resulted in the past disadvantaging of four identified groups. The groups identified under the EEA are women, Indigenous peoples, persons with disabilities, and people who belong to visible minority groups. As a department of the federal government, the CAF is legislatively required to establish and implement employment equity programs.

As part of the mandate, the CAF must conduct a workforce analysis which includes identifying the percentage of members who represent the designated groups, and its proportional

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup> Veterans Affairs Canada. "Timeline." Women and War - Remembering Those Who Served - Remembrance - Veterans Affairs Canada. February 14, 2019. https://www.veterans.gc.ca/eng/remembrance/those-who-served/women-and-war/timeline.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>5</sup> Ibid.

contrast to the available population in the labour market. It must also create short and long-term plans that contain clearly identified organizational goals, including numeric targets aimed at creating an equitable work environment. Lastly, it must also provide an annual report to the government on its employment equity activities.

Though SSE expresses the CAF commitment to diversity and employment equity it should be noted that the 25% target of women representing the CAF is not new. In fact, in 2011 as a result of an audit on employment equity, the CAF was encouraged by the Human Rights Commission to set a target of 25%, an increase of 6% of the preciously unmet target set by the CAF in 2009.<sup>6 7</sup> Consequently, as part of their 2011-12 Equity Report the CAF committed to the federal government to increase the representation of women to 25% yet between 2011 and 2016, the representation of women saw little improvement. In 2016, the Auditor General report highlighted the urgent need for the CAF to meet its intended target with specific recommendations. Thus, it is likely that this report is the driving force behind SSE and the CAF's renewed commitment to increase the representation of women by 2026.<sup>9</sup>

As indicated above there is a legislative need for the CAF to be more representative of the society it represents and protects, however it is also important to note that increasing its gender diversity will enable it to increase its operational effectiveness. Reaching representation, as outlined in SSE is important given Canada's contribution to global peace stability. Canada

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>6</sup> Government of Canada, Office of the Auditor General of Canada. "Report 5-Canadian Armed Forces Recruitment and Retention-National Defence." Report 5-Canadian Armed Forces Recruitment and Retention-National Defence. http://www.oag-bvg.gc.ca/internet/English/parl oag 201611 05 e 41834.html.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>7</sup> Reisler, Justine. "Meeting Female Recruitment Targets." NAOC. http://natoassociation.ca/meeting-female-recruitment-targets/.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>8</sup> Canada. Department of National Defence. CANADIAN FORCES EMPLOYMENT EQUITY REPORT 2011-2012.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>9</sup> National Defence. "Strong, Secure, Engaged: Canada's Defence Policy." Strong, Secure, Engaged: Canada's Defence Policy. 2017. http://dgpaapp.forces.gc.ca/en/canada-defence-policy/index.asp., 23. <sup>10</sup> Ibid, 54.

has committed itself to the international stage, gender equality, treatment of all individuals including its personnel, and its operations based on "values of inclusion, compassion, accountable governance, and respect for diversity and human rights". This approach is used to guide the CAF in its support of the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) adoption of resolution 1325 in 2000. Through its national action plan and SSE, the government highlight the important role women play in sustainment of peace and security, as well as conflict resolution processes given that in post-conflict states women are frequently head of household giving them significant influence over their communities Turthermore, it has been established that when women have an active role in peace negotiations, the settlements are more likely to achieve long-term success likely owing to their unique perspective on community needs and possible resolutions.

Given the above and Canada's role on the international stage, a key criterion to this success is the successful integration of women on CAF missions. According to a report released by UN Women (2011)<sup>15</sup>, through their research and analysis of 39 countries, they found that both genders preferred report incidences of sexual violence to female police officers. Furthermore, the UN's research demonstrates that individuals were more likely to report concerns or dangers to female police and military personnel on UN deployments. When taken together it provided

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>11</sup> Ibid, 61.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>12</sup> United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 (2000). https://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view\_doc.asp?symbol=S/RES/1325(2000)

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>13</sup>Global Affairs Canada. "Gender Equality: A Foundation for Peace - Canada's National Action Plan 2017-2022 - For the Implementation of the UN Security Council Resolutions on Women, Peace and Security." GAC. December 18, 2018. https://international.gc.ca/world-monde/issues\_development-enjeux\_development/gender\_equality-egalite\_des\_genres/cnap-pnac-17-22.aspx?lang=eng., 3.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid, 3.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>15</sup> "Progress of the World's Women 2015–2016: Transforming ..." http://www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2015/4/progress-of-the-worlds-women-2015.

support for the UNSC's desire to increase the number of women police officers and military personnel on UN missions.

The importance of women in the CAF is more than just being representative of Canadian society and aligning itself with the EEA. Women bring a unique perspective to the table and have an important role in the CAF both domestically and abroad. Thus, given the importance of women on operations and the longstanding desire to increasing representation, below are likely reasons why has the CAF has not achieved their desired representation over the years.

## **Barriers to reaching representation**

Despite the great strides that have been made over the years, there are still significant changes that need to occur if we are to truly become a fully integrated and diverse military simply stating that representation will increase will not make it so. Specifically, the cultural image of the CAF and militaries in general, recruiting, and retention issues need to be closely examined and changes must occur if the CAF is to reach acceptable representation.

### **Cultural Perception Challenges**

When assessing an organization as to why certain behaviours, events or challenges take place understanding its culture is an important first step as it is the foundation for the organization's social identity. An organization's culture shapes the style, atmosphere or personality of the organization based on the shared values, beliefs and assumptions of its members. Consequently, organizational culture is highly influential on the socialization of its members and can presents barriers to successful integration. It has been argued that militaries as

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>16</sup> Johns, G., & Saks, A. M. (2017). Organizational behaviour: Understanding and managing life at work (10th ed.). Toronto: Pearson.

a function of their traditions, rank structure, uniforms, and insignia create their own cultural identities.<sup>17</sup> Moreover, military culture fosters a sense of unity and exclusivity often centered on the warrior ethos highlighting the war-fighting function of the military. As discussed by Waruszunski et al., this perception is likely the result of the military history which has been consisted made up of mostly males and as a natural consequence been the primary influence on the military culture. As a result, often times there are a number of barriers that women as a result of their gender and limited number must overcome to become a fully accepted and integrated as members within the masculine military culture.<sup>18</sup>

In particular, women in male dominated occupations such as the profession of arms feel the need to adopt male traits in an attempt to become an accepted member of the organization all the while being subjected to a double standard.<sup>19</sup> For example, several female CAF members disclosed how they must adopt male traits such as assertiveness otherwise they are seen as being weak however if they are too assertive unlike their male counterpart who would simply be seen as "crusty", a female would be seen as being that way because of her gender and being a terrible person.<sup>20</sup> Furthermore, female soldiers reported having to work twice as hard as their male counterparts to be accepted in their work environment by having to prove their professional competencies and themselves as women in the profession of arms. Though it should be acknowledged that for some women this reconciliation occurs without any difficulties for others it can be a significant negative experience.

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>17</sup> Waruszynski, Barbara T., Kate H. MacEachern, and Eric Ouellet, Capt. *Women in the Profession of Arms*. Technical paper no. DRDC-RDDC-2018-R182. Defence Research and Development Canada, National Defence., 3. <sup>18</sup> Ibid, 3.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>19</sup> Ibid, 16.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>20</sup> Ibid.

More concerning is some women reporting having to endure significant harassment, sexual assault, and sexist attitudes as highlighted by the Deschamps Report.<sup>21</sup> Though the CAF has instituted Operation Honour as a response to end sexual violence and misconduct in the forces some have stated that it has come at a cost. In particular, some women in the CAF feel that women are now seen as victims, and that the operation has created a further divide between the genders. Moreover, Operation Honour though it should be focused on addresing all types of sexual misconduct (e.g., women on men, women on women, men on men) in the end some feel it has been hyper focused on women in the CAF further marginalizing them<sup>22</sup>. The cultural challenges faced by the CAF as described above creates an image where women question whether this is an organization they want to join.

# Recruiting

The first step in increasing the CAF's diversity is by recruiting and enrolling the population of interest. As part of the employment equity plan, the CAF has dedicated itself to increasing their enrolment targets for women by 1% per year until 2026 with a goal of achieving a steady state annual enrolment of 25% women. According to Waruszunski et al., this is one area that the CAF can greatly improve upon. They found that currently serving female members reported less than desirable exchanges with recruiters in that they were guided towards occupations that where not of interest to them or the combat arms. This resulted in them feeling as though the recruiters were not forthcoming with their intention which often lead to them having the sensation that they were being treated as a quota rather than an individual. This is

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>21</sup> Defence, National. "External Review into Sexual Misconduct and Sexual Harassment in the Canadian Armed Forces." Canada.ca. May 04, 2015. https://www.canada.ca/en/department-national-defence/corporate/reports-publications/sexual-misbehaviour/external-review-2015.html.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>22</sup> Waruszynski, et al., 18.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>23</sup> National Defence. "Strong, Secure, Engaged: Canada's Defence Policy.", 23.

further compounded by the media where a recent article by the National Post misrepresented the CAF's management of files as they relate to employment equity which only serves to further negatively reinforcing the tokenism status of women in the CAF, thereby setting back recruiting efforts and potentially the public's view of women in the CAF.<sup>24</sup> All of this is likely compounded by the fact that across Canada, there are very few women recruiters, a common criticism of the CAF recruiting process.<sup>25</sup> Consequently, women who joining the military or display an interest in joining the forces are unable to get pertinent information or a realistic perspective about what it is like to be a women in military all factors that led to them to feeling uninformed.<sup>26</sup> Furthermore, there was a large consensus that recruiting aids tailored to recruiting women in the CAF were not realistic and often misleading. As highlighted by Yeung et al., female recruits voiced the important influence that female recruiters had with respect to their decision to enroll in the US military. Specifically, their ability to answer unique female-specific questions was invaluable to the recruiting process.<sup>27</sup> Additionally, the lack of female recruiters also negatively impacted the ability to positively influence female recruit influencers who often voiced concerns about the military culture as described above yet due to the lack of female recruiters were unable to get a realistic picture of life in the military for women.<sup>28</sup>

Lastly, a concern frequently shared amongst female prospects is the ability to meet the physical requirements of the military.<sup>29</sup> A recent research conducted in 2016 reported that of the 2,017 Canadian women surveyed more than half indicated that they would not join the forces due

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>24</sup> Blatchford, Christie. "The Canadian Forces Jobs Where Only Women Need Apply." National Post. April 22, 2019. https://nationalpost.com/news/canada/the-canadian-forces-jobs-where-only-women-need-apply.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>25</sup> Waruszynski, et al., 14.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>26</sup> Waruszynski, et al., 15.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>27</sup> Yeung, Douglas, Christina E. Steiner, Chaitra M. Hardison, Lawrence M. Hanser, and Kristy N. Kamarck, Recruiting Policies and Practices for Women in the Military: Views from the Field. Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2017., 29.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>28</sup> Ibid, 26.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>29</sup> Ibid, 21.

to concerns over the physical fitness standards, and possible work-life balance conflicts they believe they would encounters as a serving member of the CAF.<sup>30</sup> It goes without saying that without female recruiters present to share their experiences, and through their presence demonstrating that it is possible for women to meet the requirements and have successful careers in the military female prospects might be left to draw their conclusions. Unfortunately, these conclusion are often based on information from sources such as male recruiters and/or the media all of which cannot capture the true experience of being a women in the CAF.

### Retention

Through SSE, the CAF is mobilizing recruiting efforts centered on diversity, employment equity and increasing the overall number of personnel in the CAF. However, simply increasing the number of diverse personnel who are enrolled into the CAF will not necessarily result in a diverse CAF population if they cannot be retained. With that said, upon investigation it was found that job security, travel opportunity, and the desire to serve one's country are the main reasons women enrol into the forces all of which are the same to that of their male counterparts.<sup>31</sup> They also cited subsidies education and the need for change (e.g., leaving negative home circumstances) as other reasons for their enrolment. However, it was also found that serving female members, despite reporting the enjoyed their time in the service, spend less time in the service as their male counterparts for several reasons.<sup>32</sup>

First, a larger number of women than men identified lack of respect and/or belonging, fair treatment, and supervisor behaviour as a reason for leaving the CAF. For example, poorly fitted

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>30</sup> Waruszynski, et al., 3.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>32</sup> Ibid., 10.

uniforms and equipment not only create a safety concern for female soldiers but is an issue that has been highlighted for decades yet continue to exist. The frequent lack of or limited proper female washroom facilities in the workplace is another source of messaging to service women that they do not belong. Women reported the need to continuously monitor one's social interaction for fear of being too masculine or too feminine as a reality for them which results in isolation of their male counterparts or the ruining of their professional reputation. Thus, for some reconciling their female identity with that of the CAF is not seen as worth the psychological and emotional distress.<sup>33</sup>

The second most significant reason why women leave the CAF is the lack of organizational flexibility with regards to family support and work-life balance management. Research has well established that despite the growing number of women in the work force, women continue to carry the bulk of family responsibilities.<sup>34</sup> This is no different for service women who must be responsive to these obligations while managing a demanding career in the CAF, an environment that is often not receptive to the challenges faced by women as wives and mothers. In particular service women have reported little support in their work schedule allowing them to meet the needs of their families (e.g., children doctor appts) and lack of child care support in their local areas. They report being ostracised when their supervisors learn of their pregnancies or are breastfeeding post maternity leave.<sup>35</sup> Recent research highlights how especially for single mothers in the CAF the managing of family stressors while trying to manage the pressures of surmounting the gender stereotypes in a male dominated work

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid 10

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>34</sup> Moyser, Melissa. "Women in Canada: A Gender-based Statistical Report Women and Paid Work Women and Paid Work." Women and Paid Work. March 09, 2017. https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/89-503-x/2015001/article/14694-eng.htm.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>35</sup> Waruszynski, et al., 19.

environment that often offers little family flexibility or support can lead to significant psychological distress.<sup>36</sup> Moreover, the career management process where individuals are frequently moved within six months of notice by some women has been identified as being a source of stress and frustration once they have children. Independently or combined these are often circumstance that lead to women feeling that they must choose between life as a CAF member or a parent with the later most time taking precedence.

#### Recommendations

If the CAF is serious and committed to retaining women across all ranks in addition to promoting them into senior positions as stated in SSE addressing the aforementioned issues is critical.<sup>37</sup> The first step is a full understanding of the organization's culture and to take action. For decades, women have voiced their concerns over the "old boys network" and the double standard.<sup>38</sup> In order to be successful at effecting organizational culture change, leaders must exemplify the desired changes and mechanisms must be in place to effect change in order to obtain the desired results. Important to note, even if an organization is able to affect a culture change there are no guarantees that a counter-culture will not ensues which will continue to promote beliefs, values, and assumptions that are inconsistent with or that rejected by the larger organization. The stand-up of Operation Honour especially given the leader driven aspect of it is a start however it is critical to ensure that those who foster this positive culture changes are

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>36</sup> Skomorovsky, Alla, Deborah Norris, Ekaterina Martynova, Kendra J. Mclaughlin, and Cynthia Wan. "Workfamily Conflict and Parental Strain among Canadian Armed Forces Single Mothers: The Role of Coping." *Journal of Military, Veteran and Family Health* 5, no. 1 (2019): doi:10.3138/jmvfh.2017-0033., 95.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>37</sup> National Defence. "Strong, Secure, Engaged: Canada's Defence Policy.", 21.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>38</sup> Waruszynski, et al., 16.

rewarded and recognised for their efforts and the much-needed synergy needed to affect the change is sustained long-term.

The ability for women to identify with their gender without fear of repercussion is critically important in the building of a diverse organization. Ensuring women have fitting equipment and uniforms would also go a long way in demonstrating that women are a welcome part of the CAF. Educating members of the CAF on the importance of a healthy work-life balance is an important step in changing CAF culture and as an extension potentially improving long-term retention of women in the CAF. Specifically, given that women are often the primary caregivers a need to revisit policies in order to make them more family friendly for those formative years where mothers may require to be closer to their children for reasons such as breastfeeding or to render childcare.<sup>39</sup> Though it is important to keep in mind that these accommodations should be normalized as part of the organization and not be discriminatory with respect to gender, it must be recognized by those in the organization that these often have the greatest impact on women in the CAF.<sup>40</sup>

Increasing the number of women in recruiting centers will further help with attraction efforts and give a voice to women in the process and likely increase the number of female prospect and with enough time the perception of the CAF and the women who serve in it.

Lastly, the creation of a women leadership mentoring program can create positive synergy where women can see themselves in the organization long term and achieving success that equal to their male counterpart which in turn can have a positive impact on changing the CAF culture and consequently truly making the CAF an employer of choice for women in Canada.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

### Conclusion

The aim of this paper was to discuss the importance of equity in the CAF both legislatively and in terms of the CAF operational effectiveness. As demonstrated despite the intention of SSE, there currently exist significant barriers to the full and successful integration of women in the CAF that is likely to negatively impact the current EE goals of the CAF. By addressing culture, recruitment and retention issues as recommended in this paper, the CAF will better position itself of meeting their intended EEA target, be seen as an employer of choice for women and increase its overall operational effectiveness at home and abroad.

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