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CHALLENGES OF MEETING RECRUITING TARGETS FOR WOMEN

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CHALLENGES OF MEETING RECRUITING TARGETS FOR WOMEN

AIM

1. The new defence policy, Strong, Secure, Engaged, laid out the goal of the Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) to increase recruiting of women by 1% annually for the next 10 years to reach a target of 25% women by the year 2026.¹ The aim of this paper is to look at potential impediments and solutions to achieving this goal.

INTRODUCTION

2. The report of the Royal Commission on the Status of Women in 1970 made note of the low number of occupations in which women in the CAF were employed and made six recommendations to provide a climate of equal opportunity for women.² By 1971, women were still not allowed admittance to military colleges, but most of the other recommendations were acted upon, with the exception of some occupations still being closed to women. Although this was a step in the right direction there was still progress to be made. In 1989, the Human Rights Tribunal ruled that women were to be fully integrated into all occupations except service on submarines. This final occupation was opened to women in 2001 and now there are no restrictions on the employment of women in the CAF.

¹ Department of National Defence. *Strong, Secure, Engaged: Canada's Defence Policy* (Ottawa: DND, 2017), 12.

² Canadian Human Rights Commission, *Tribunal Decision 3/89 Between: Isabelle Gauthier, Joseph G. Houlden, Marie-Claude Gauthier, Georgina Ann Brown (Complainants) And Canadian Armed Forces (Respondent)*, Ottawa, Decision rendered on 20 February 1989

3. Increasing recruitment targets for women is not a new idea. Over the past two decades various targets have been set, all with the purpose of increasing female representation within the CAF to approximately 25%. However, enrolment has only risen about 5% in that time, going from approximately 10% in 1998³ to approximately 15% in 2016.⁴ Although this may not seem like much it should be noted that women accounted for less than 2% of the total force in 1970.⁵

DISCUSSION

4. The goal of reaching 25% female enrolment by 2026 is ambitious and there are some issues that need to be examined if we are going to be successful in meeting this goal. There are two aspects to be considered in meeting this target: recruitment and retention. This paper will look solely at the issue of recruitment.

5. In order to meet the target of increasing enrolment, intake of female personnel will have to be approximately 2,600 this fiscal year and increase to approximately 3,300 in 2025/26 for Regular and Reserve force combined.⁶ These numbers do not account for the proposed increases in the new Defence Policy and would have to be adjusted once the new positions are created. In 2016, the CAF successfully recruited 111 women.⁷ This indicates that substantial work needs to be done to increase the recruitment of women.

³ Marcia Kovitz, "The enemy within: female soldiers in the Canadian forces," *Canadian Women Studies* 19, no. 4 (Winter 2000): ; Karen D. Davis, "Sex, Gender and Cultural Intelligence in the Canadian Forces," *Commonwealth & Comparative Politics* 47, no. 4 (2009): 438, doi: 10.1080/14662040903375091.

⁴ NATO, 65.

⁵ Karen D. Davis, "Understanding Women's Exit from the Canadian Forces: Implications for Integration?" in *Wives and Warriors: Women and the Military in the United States and Canada*, ed. Laurie Weinstein and Christie White (Westport, CT: Bergin & Garvey, 1997), 180.

⁶ Defence Research and Development Canada, *Recruiting Research in Support of the Strategic Operations Planning Group (SOPG) on Recruiting* (Ottawa: DND, 201), 6.

⁷ North Atlantic Treaty Organization, *Summary of the National Reports of NATO Member and Partner Nations to the NATO Committee on Gender Perspectives 2016*, 66.

Personality, Gender and Career Interest

6. Increasing the number of women recruited in to the military faces some significant challenges. This is true of any non-traditional occupation. Despite the fact that women have been in the work force for a number of decades, the majority are still employed in areas that are considered traditionally female occupations, such as health care, education, and administration.⁸ It seems that recruiting women to non-traditional occupations is a challenge that exists in society as a whole.

7. Although society has come a long way from the idea that there are women's occupations and men's occupations, there may still be a bias in society against women in certain jobs. History and cultural norms have reinforced the idea that soldiers are male and therefore the CAF needs to overcome this idea if it is to recruit more women. It may be that women are not aware of the variety of occupations available within the CAF and therefore have not even entertained the idea of a career in the military. The military has opportunities for employment in the traditional female occupations. Statistics indicate that women are still heavily drawn to these types of occupations. Therefore this aspect should be highlighted to bring awareness to potential recruits that there are more employment opportunities available than just those within combat roles.

8. People are looking for careers that are interesting and fulfilling. There are many reasons people are drawn to certain types of employment. It could be the pay, benefits, hours, type of work, etc. One influencing factor is interest in a particular field, which is largely influenced by the person's personality. Guymer examined three models of personality and suggested that the

⁸ B.L.H. Guymer, "The Hidden Diversity: Why the Canadian Forces Will Not Meet Its Employment Equity Targets" (master's thesis, Royal Military College, 2013), 31.

CAF is more resonant with certain personality traits that are more commonly aligned with traditional male dominated traits.⁹ This is not to say that all men have certain personality characteristics or that certain characteristics are only found in one sex over the other as both sexes have a representation of all personality characteristics. It is just that certain ones are more commonly found in one sex over the other.

9. There is no denying that men and women are different, but it is more than just the difference of having an X or Y chromosome. Evolution, environmental, and cultural differences over hundreds of thousands of years has resulted in the sexes having different strengths that go beyond the physical differences such as strength and speed. Men and women had different roles to perform in order to ensure the survival of their family and this created differences in their abilities and strengths which are still seen today. The differences were based on necessity with neither being better than the other.¹⁰ This has led to the differences in personality traits. Men tend to be more analytical and women tend to be more empathetic. It is important to note that these are trends and not absolutes.

10. However, trends can help in analyzing the current situation. The military with its hierarchical organization, regulations, logical and predictable patterns with authorities to ensure accountability and control appeals to those who are more analytical thinkers, a trait more commonly found in men¹¹. This could help explain why it is that there are not as many women as men applying to the military. The question then is how do we attract more women?

⁹ *Ibid.*, 3.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 22.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 48.

11. One way to solve the problem would be to change the organization so that it becomes more attractive to those with personality traits that are traditionally female dominated. This is perhaps not a realistic solution. The military has developed over time making adjustments to society's wishes and in order to become more effective at what it does, namely war fighting. That is not to say that the ideal organizational structure has been realized and further changes are most likely going to happen in the future. However, it is unlikely that significant enough changes would be made to make it a more attractive career for those with traditional female personality traits.

12. Another option to attain the enrolment goal would be to attract women into the occupations within the military that appeal to those empathetic personality traits. The majority of women in the military are already employed within the Chaplaincy, Medical / Dental, and Logistics fields. Highlighting these opportunities may assist with meeting the recruiting goals. Of course care would have to be taken to ensure that there is not a message being conveyed that the CAF is trying to pigeon-hole women into specific occupations.

Opportunity Awareness

13. Ensuring that there is an awareness of the opportunities available for women within the CAF is the first step for increasing enrolment of women. Over the past decade or so, the CAF has tried to increase its portrayal of a diverse population through the Canadian Forces Recruiting Group (CFRG). They have made changes to the website and recruiting posters and commercials.¹² These efforts have not yielded much in the way of results by looking at the

¹² Chantal Fraser, "Diversity Recruiting: It's Time to Tip the Balance," *Canadian Military Journal* 13, no. 4 (Autumn 2013): 31.

statistics. A study by Earncliffe in 2016 indicated that although perceptions of the CAF were positive, familiarity and knowledge with a career in the CAF was very limited in the survey group of 18-34 year old Canadian women.¹³

14. According to the 2016 Analyses of the Annual Canadian Armed Forces Recruiting Survey, women are more influenced by family, friends and recruiters in making their career choices than men are.¹⁴ As well, more than half of the respondents to the survey (both sexes) indicated that their preferred method for interacting with recruiting staff was face to face. This has a couple of implications. First, the CAF should leverage women currently enrolled to share their experiences in order to increase interest. Second, ensuring that recruiting centres have female representation would be beneficial. In addition, with the closure of a number of smaller recruiting centres in the recent past, face to face communication has become difficult for some. Ensuring that technological solutions are leveraged to allow for face to face communication over distance would likely improve the recruitment process. Of course, involvement at career fairs needs to continue or even be increased. Few of the participants in the Earncliffe study recalled having seen the CAF at career fairs.¹⁵

15. The Women in Force Program recently launched is a step in the right direction to increase awareness for women who may be interested in a career in the military. The program exposes potential recruits to different facets of military life including fitness training, hands-on demonstrations of occupations and tactical skills, living on base, and the ability to talk with

¹³ Earncliffe Strategy Group, *The Recruitment and Employment of Women in the Canadian Armed Forces: Research Report* (Ottawa: DND, 2017), 26.

¹⁴ Glen T. Howell and Glen Budgell, *Analyses of the Annual Canadian Armed Forces Recruiting Survey* (Ottawa: Human Resource Systems Group, Ltd, 2016), 23.

¹⁵ Earncliffe Strategy Group, *The Recruitment and Employment of Women . . .*, 26.

current CAF members. All with the view to enable them to make an informed decision about a career in the military.¹⁶ As the pilots were only just completed in the fall of 2017, it is too early to tell if they will have made any effect. However, in one session indications were that only three women were interested in a career in the military at the beginning of the program but 17 indicated an interest at the end.¹⁷

16. Another group to be made aware of opportunities in the military are those who influence women in their occupation choices. In December 2017, a group of women from the prairie provinces went to Edmonton Garrison for two days to learn about what it would be like to join the military. The goal was that after their visit they would be able to confidently speak about what the CAF has to offer. They were all teachers, guidance counsellors or bloggers. All of the women successfully completed the fitness test.¹⁸

Considerations

17. It was already mentioned that one way to increase the percentage of women in the CAF was to focus recruiting on those occupations that already have a high percentage of women in them such as support and medical fields. This would result in women being in those traditionally female occupations. Although this would mirror Canadian society as there is a large proportion of women in these fields, it would perpetuate the idea of "women's occupations" both within the military and society as a whole. As well, given the CAF structure and culture, there tends to be

¹⁶ Department of National Defence, "The Women in Force Program, a new Canadian Armed Forces initiative for women," last modified 31 May 2017, https://www.canada.ca/en/department-national-defence/news/2017/05/the_women_in_forceprogramanewcanadianarmedforcesinitiativeforwom.html.

¹⁷ Sarah Boesveld, "Marketing the Military to Women." *Chatelaine*. Accessed 1 February 2018. <http://www.chatelaine.com/marketing-the-military-to-women>.

¹⁸ Kim Smith, "Canadian Armed Forces pushes for more women: 'I'm a woman in the military and I love it,'" last modified 5 January 2018, <https://globalnews.ca/news/3923213/canadian-armed-forces-women-military/>.

more promotions in operator occupations. Focussing on recruiting women to support occupations would lessen their chances for promotion and selection to key positions. This may have consequences on the retention of women later on.

18. The idea of appropriate occupations for women has already been discussed. By trying to increase numbers of women in non-traditional occupations, the CAF is essentially trying to get ahead of Canadian society. Although this is admirable, and likely beneficial), it will take time and money to get there.

19. With such aggressive targets for the recruitment of women, there may be a tendency on recruiters to persuade women to join occupations they may not actually be interested in. This could result in higher attrition and perpetuate the stereotype that women should not be in certain occupations. Both of these aspects would undermine the process of recruiting more women in the long run. There is evidence that this has already been the case. Current female CAF members who participated in a survey about recruiting, indicated that their perception was that it was more important to fulfill quotas than steer women towards their career of choice or other occupations that may be of interest and many indicated they were pushed into occupations that did not match their strengths and skills.¹⁹

20. Finally, one further area that should be considered is the possibility of the perception of preferential treatment for women. This may not be as important when it comes to recruiting as it would be for promotions. However, there is still the possibility that it could be perceived that

¹⁹ Barbara T. Waruszynski, Justin Wright, and Eric Ouellet, *Perceptions of Women in the Regular Force on Recruitment and Employment in the Canadian Armed Forces: Top-Line Findings* (Ottawa: DND Canada (DRDC), 2017), 3.

women are not qualified for the position or occupation they are being recruited into. This could have backlash through harassment and stress which could lower the retention of women.

Allegations that were heard during the integration process of lowering the standards to allow women entrance may resurface. This would further complicate the process of increasing the number of women in the CAF.

CONCLUSION

21. The target of increasing the representation of women in the CAF to 25% by 2026 is ambitious and it will not be easy to achieve. There appears to be a trend that women are more interested in pursuing careers in traditional occupations. As society's ideas about appropriate occupations for women continues to mature and change, this problem may be a thing of the past. However, this type of cultural change takes time and in order to remain viable the CAF cannot leave this to chance. It needs to ensure that there is an awareness of the variety of occupations that are available for women in the military in the hopes of increasing interest in a career in the CAF. This needs to be made known to not only potential recruits, but also those who may be influencing women as they make career decisions.

22. The target may be ambitious and the CAF may not get there because of factors beyond its control but every effort should be put into meeting the target.

RECOMMENDATIONS

23. It is recommended that recruiting methods that have been successful in the past should be continued and expanded. Increased visibility at career fairs with female representation should be explored. The Women in Force Program should be analyzed to determine if there is any benefit to be gained by continuing to offer it. Influencers, such as guidance counsellors and teachers, should be exposed to the opportunities available so they can speak confidently about them to young women. Finally, the reasons women are staying in the military should be investigated to determine if any of them can be leveraged as recruiting tools.

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