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## CANADIAN FORCES RECRUITING: UPLIFTING WOMEN

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## CANADIAN FORCES RECRUITING: UPLIFTING WOMEN

### AIM

1. The aim of this service paper is to provide insight into the recruitment and retention of women in the Canadian Armed Forces (CAF), and provide understanding on the difficulties in meeting projected recruiting targets. This paper will also highlight the potential barriers and provide recommendations in achieving the goals as laid out in the new defence policy.

### INTRODUCTION

2. In Canada's 2017, Defence Policy entitled, *Strong, Secure, Engaged; Canada's Defence Policy* (SSE), the government has laid out its objectives for the next 10 years. A top priority outlined in the new defence policy is to have a military that "looks like Canada;"<sup>1</sup> this translates into the recruitment of visible minorities, and specifically the objective of recruiting more women. The Canadian labour force is roughly 50 percent women<sup>2</sup> where the CAF percentage of 15.1 enrollment is considerably less.<sup>3</sup> Moreover, these numbers are inclusive of both the regular and reserve force. Since the 1989 Canadian Human Rights Tribunal where the CAF was ordered to fully integrate women into all occupations, including the combat arms<sup>4</sup>; there has not been a

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<sup>1</sup> Canada. Dept. of National Defence and Canada, *Strong, Secure, Engaged: Canada's Defence Policy* (Ottawa, Ont.: National Defence,[2017]), 20.

<sup>2</sup> Kareem Negm. "Women in Military Uniforms: Looking Beyond the Numbers," *Canadian Military Journal Vol 16, No 2* (Spring 2016): 18.

<sup>3</sup> Director Human Rights and Diversity, *Perceptions of Women in the Regular Force on Recruitment and Employment in the Canadian Armed Forces: Top-line Findings*, DRDC-RDDC-2017-L228, July 2017, 1."

<sup>4</sup> Dr Angela R. Febraro. "Gender and Leadership in the Canadian Forces Combat Arms: Perspective of Women Leaders." in *Women and Leadership in the Canadian Forces: Perspectives and Experience*, ed. Karen D. Davis (Canadian Defence Academy Press, 2007), 93.

significant increase to women joining the military regardless of occupation. Successive governments have attempted to address this deficiency without any notable and sustained results.

3. In order to address the imbalance of women in the military, the defence policy set a goal stating that the Department of National Defence “aspires to be a leader in gender balance in the military by increasing the representation of women by 1 percent annually over the next 10 years to reach 25 percent of the overall force.”<sup>5</sup> This would constitute a significant increase to female representation throughout the military, where there has been very little change over the past decade.<sup>6</sup> To achieve this goal, it is imperative that research continues to better understand what makes the profession of arms attractive to women and what barriers or impediments are keeping women from considering a career of choice in the CAF. This focus should be expanded to include females in underrepresented populations such as new Canadians and those from large urban areas.

## DISCUSSION

4. A study was conducted for the Director Human Rights and Diversity into the perceptions of women in the regular force on recruitment and employment in the CAF; which, could be used as a benchmark considering the validation of low enrolment numbers for women.<sup>7</sup> The main themes found in this study were; (a) managing family expectations, (b) their experience at the

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<sup>5</sup>Canada. Dept. of National Defence and Canada, *Strong, Secure, Engaged.*, 23.

<sup>6</sup>Negm, "Women in Military Uniforms..." no. 2 (2016), 17.

<sup>7</sup>Barbara Waruszynski, Justin Wright and Capt Eric Ouellet, *Perceptions of Women in the Regular Force on Recruitment and Employment in the Canadian Armed Forces: Top-line Findings.* (Director Human Rights and Diversity, 2017), 1.

recruiting center and the process to join, (c) work-life balance, and (d) separation from family support structures whether it is for training or deployments.<sup>8</sup> Throughout the various research approaches whether, inclusive of focus groups, surveys, or interviews the themes were reoccurring. This study also highlighted participant recommendations; which, included working on the profiles of serving women and having them act as role models, it also highlighted that women can be employed in all occupations that the military has to offer.<sup>9</sup> In other words, research focused on the marketability of female experiences in uniform thereby providing rich and useful data for recruiting purposes. Overall, the recommendations called for implementation in how the military deals with human resource issues such as flexible work schedules, betterment of maternity policies, and career counselling. To compete with civilian employers, this study found that predictability of employment that included geographic moves and localized spousal support were important considerations for serving females.

5. Various focus groups have occurred across Canadian military installations in order to gain insight from serving female members on what they believe are barriers that exist in preventing women from joining the CAF.<sup>10</sup> Some of the feedback received from these focus groups involved the military not having flexible timings for childcare and familial responsibilities, negative views in the workplace surrounding maternity leave, long separations from family for training and operational reasons, and the lack of women in senior positions.<sup>11</sup> As

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 2.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 2.

<sup>10</sup> Diane Riddell, "On the road to greater representation of women in the CAF," *Army News Article*, Project 17-0095(April 2017): 2.

<sup>11</sup> Barbara Waruszynski. *Recruitment and employment of Women – CAF Member Perspectives*, (Director Human Rights and Diversity, 2017), 4.

an example, 2016 witnessed the promotion of Canada's first female combat arms general, Brigadier General Jennie Carignan, a combat engineer officer.

6. The focus groups produced ancillary information concerning the perception of a highly sexualized workplace and an overwhelming sense that women were being sexually assaulted.<sup>12</sup> This sentiment was not isolated to one element or base; rather, similar comments were received from coast-to-coast. After some diligent investigation, the resultant outcome was a forces wide approach to combat this unacceptable behavior.

7. With the implementation of Operation HONOUR, there is an increase in media reporting with regards to allegations and proceedings involving sexual misconduct. While the objective of setting a zero tolerance for sexual misconduct has been achieved, it has also put serving men and women in the spotlight to defend their personal safety and reassure their families that they working in a supportive environment. Well the intent of Operation HONOUR was to rid all sexual misconduct from the workplace; due to the heightened reporting it could be misinterpreted by the Canadian public.

8. Another study conducted by the Director General Military Personnel Research and Analysis (DGMPRA) focused on women in the general Canadian population that found that although the majority of civilian women have positive opinions of the military, 83 percent stated

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 5.

they would not consider a career in the CAF.<sup>13</sup> Reasons cited included distance from immediate family, perception that they would not be well-treated by those co-workers in uniform, not wanting to be associated with a militarized profession of aggression, and a concern with the possibility of being diagnosed with mental health issues such as anxiety, depression, and Post Traumatic Stress disorder.<sup>14</sup> Researchers involved in these focus groups felt that once they obtained more information on perceived barriers, the CAF could be in a better position itself to make changes to their current recruiting strategies. While this study was conducted in 2016, the time elapsed in trying to discover a gender-specific employment attraction solution continues to underscore the challenges and complexities of targeted recruiting.

9. Recruiting is one part of the successful military employment triad. Retention and release are also being studied to better present a holistic employability approach that can be leveraged for attraction purposes. Research has been conducted to outline the systemic barriers, release statistics, performance review rating comparisons, and award nominations.<sup>15</sup> The expected outcome will contribute to the overall recruiting strategy of the CAF. Initiatives implemented to address the systemic barriers involved the creation of employment equity groups for women in the military that gives a voice to their concerns with outstanding issues; which, may be able to be resolved at the lowest level. The Canadian Forces Recruiting Group (CFRG) has also made efforts in getting involved in outreach activities with civilian women's professional associations, educators, and students in an effort to bring awareness of opportunities available within the

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<sup>13</sup>Diane Riddell, "*On the road to greater...*," 3.

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

<sup>15</sup>Women in the Canadian Forces, *Canadian Armed Forces News*, Feb 21 2012, (Project Number BG 12.002), 3.

CAF.<sup>16</sup> In regards to family support, two new initiatives were developed in 2011. First, a specialized website, found on the internet at FamilyForce.ca, and, secondly, the Family Information Line that was launched to connect families with resources and services.<sup>17</sup> The creation of these easily accessible resources demonstrate that the military is reacting to the creditable comments provided by its' members coupled with developing strategies to bridge gaps that make a career in the military desirable as compared to similar civilian options. A tertiary benefit of implementing such measures is the demonstration that CAF leadership welcomes input from the greater military community.

10. The Women in Force Program involves an opportunity for civilian women to integrate with female soldiers while experiencing different “facets of military life, including fitness training, hands-on demonstrations of occupations, and tactical skills.”<sup>18</sup> This program was launched in the fall of 2017, and is showing a high success rate as it allows women to be introduced to aspects of military life while simultaneously gaining the confidence needed to realize that they possess attributes required for a career in the Canadian Armed Forces. The immediacy of the program’s success has already demonstrated an intuitional reason for continued exploration of these types of initiatives. Initial numbers have shown that the the recruitment of women rose by 0.3 percent; a direct result of this program. Further underscoring this upward trend, Commander CFRG remarked that this is the first positive growth in over a decade.<sup>19</sup> As noted earlier, such an increase should be met with a sense of optimism as this 2017

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 4.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 6.

<sup>18</sup> A new program well-suited for women considering joining the Forces, *The Maple Leaf*, 2017, 2.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 3.



recruiting rise translates roughly into 420 females. With the high success rate of the Women in Force Program, this signals that in order to target the female population with the various occupations offered within the CAF, effort needs to continue to provide opportunities for women to have a hands on experience while emphasizes their abilities.

## **CONCLUSION**

11. The CAF has heavily invested in research by seeking input from both civilian and serving females in an attempt to discover what military employment barriers may exist. Examining female specific recruiting issues through both a civilian and serving lens provides actionable data. When consolidated, this civilian-military dual approach to research identified reoccurring themes that need to be addressed such as the recognition that flexibility may be required for family obligations, that constant geographic moves may not support families especially when considering schooling options, first official language needs, and spousal employment. The Canadian Armed Forces have come a long way since the 1989 Canadian Human Rights Tribunal that led to the opening of all occupations to women, however, continued evolution needs to occur to recognize that the needs of all employees are important and adaptations to military settings will allow for more women to feel that a career choice with the CAF is highly attractive. This evolution will further consider the recruitment efforts of marginalized groups, which includes those who identify with the female gender.

## RECOMMENDATION

12. In order for the CAF to increase its goal of reaching 25 percent of women serving, they need to optimize their marketing and recruiting strategies. The military needs to control the narrative surrounding female recruiting by using its' vast resources within the public affairs realm, leveraging civilian engagement opportunities by senior leadership, and highlighting the success stories of serving women and veterans. In doing so, the CAF can reinforce the positive recruiting message for members of Canadian society.

13. Admittedly maintaining an expeditionary mindset is challenging, even more so when considering the aggregate of employment factors. However, specialized recruiting strategies may be considered for the spouses of current serving members. In doing so, there may be an acceptance of employment conditions that are already resident within the family. While there are geographic implications associated with a service couple these challenges are not insurmountable. The synchronization of the careers of military service spouses may contribute to overall retention of service members.

14. The manner in which sexual harassment has been dealt with should continue to be used as an example of transparency and responsiveness. The institutional reaction to a wide range of harassment, manifested through the release of Operation HONOUR, is an example of how senior leadership rapidly addressed the concerns of military members. By pledging to look after its' members, the CAF continues to demonstrate that it is an employer of choice. This evolutionary

approach should be implemented throughout the chain of command thereby strengthening the overall ethical center of the force.

15. Much of the research indicated that recruiting centers need to have a stronger presence of women who can speak to the various employment opportunities. Suggestions include that females from all experience levels, ranks, environments, and cultures be challenged with community engagement opportunities. This could translate to creative arrangement from having female mentors locally assigned to school boards, colleges or universities where the next generations are making career decisions. This type of partnership moves beyond sex-related recruiting strategies and into a greater community outreach between members of the CAF and society.

16. The Canadian Armed Forces continues to promote dedicated programming for other minority groups, most notably, the Aboriginal Leadership Opportunity Year (ALLOY), the Canadian Forces Aboriginal Entry Program (CFAEP), and the Bold Eagle program all of which have introduced the military experience to a specific element of Canada's population. Conceptually, a similar approach could be investigated on behalf of females. More specifically, all-female groups within the Cadet Organizations Administration and Training Service (COATS) or the primary reserve as a vehicle by which an extended career in the regular force may be introduced. All female programming can be tailored based on the needs articulated in large metropolitan centers or more rural areas of the nation, thereby, increasing the military appeal in a more regionally applied manner. In other words, where a briefing and an exhibition may form

the basis of female recruiting other areas may be better suited to a more dynamic or immersive recruiting experience.

17. The complexities of balancing a family and career are not limited to service in the military. By showcasing the successes of women from junior non-commissioned member to general officer in having them discuss how they were able to balance both a family and a career would dispel many of the myths. Allowing discussions where potential recruits could explain their concerns would permit the serving female members to share how they have dealt with similar experiences. CFRG should also consider an ongoing campaign where they highlight female heroes or success stories. It would be important to include their hometown, family status and years served in order to humanize these women. These stories could be shared on media platforms where the target audience would see them. This could include movie theatre advertisements, social media, and sporting events. Profiling mothers, daughters, women from different ethnic backgrounds, sexual orientations, and cultures allows for a feeling of commonality to occur, and a potential for interest in a career that they had not considered.

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