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RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION OF WOMEN IN THE CANADIAN ARMED FORCES: WHAT ARE THE NUMBERS TELLING US?

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REFERENCES: A. Employment Equity Act (1995, current to 18 January 2018)

AIM

1. On 17 February 2015, the Chief of the Defence Staff directed the commander of Military Personnel Command to increase the number of women in the Canadian Armed Forces (CAF), through recruitment and retention initiatives.¹ The target percentage of women was set to at least 25.1% by 2026, equating to 1% per year over the following 10 years.² In support of this employment equity target, the CAF has engaged some partners in research, reviewed its recruitment process and trialed a new recruitment initiative, targeting women. It is envisioned, that the refinement of the CAF's marketing strategy, the implementation of additional recruitment initiatives and the review/amendment of several policies and guidelines within the CAF will achieve the desired goal. To that end, the purpose of this service paper is to highlight some of the updated research and initiatives in relation to the recruitment and retention of women in the CAF. This service paper will also highlight some of the trends of Canadian women in the work force in general and attempt to identify potential impediments and possible avenues for success in reaching this end state.

¹Bruce Campion-Smith, "Canada's Top General Launches Push to Recruit Women," *Toronto Star*, 19 February 2016.

²Privy Council Office. *Increasing Recruitment of Women into the Canadian Armed Forces – Behavioural Insights Project* (Ottawa: The Innovation Hub, 2017), 3.

INTRODUCTION

2. If the CAF aspires to increase the number of women it recruits and retains in its ranks, it must examine the population from which it draws and the nature of work entailed. Most recent statistical data in relation to women and paid work indicates that “82% of women in the core working ages of 25 to 54 years participated in the labour market in 2015” and 88.1% of those women were paid employees rather than self-employed.³ In 2015, there was an 8.9% gender participation gap, defined as “the difference between the labour force participation rates of men and women,” which continues to remain the lowest gap among Canada’s G-7 peers.⁴ However, when considering the geographical location in Canada, the gap was greater in census areas that also had higher day-care fees. The most notable example was seen in the Ottawa-Gatineau area where the gap was 2.6% in Gatineau and 7.3% in Ottawa, likely reflecting Quebec’s universal low-fee childcare program and the higher refundable provincial tax credit for daycare expenses.⁵ Lastly, the gap appears to narrow as levels of educational attainment increases from 18.2% among men and women with less than high school to 6.6% to 6.8% among those with postsecondary education.⁶ Furthermore, since 1990 the proportion of women with a university degree has grown twice as much as compared to men, “such that women outnumbered men among university-degree holders by a sizeable margin,” 6.5% in 2015.⁷ In addition to labour participation rates, some other characteristics of Canadian women in paid labour were also identified and should aid to inform the discussion of this topic.

³Melissa Moyser, “Women and Paid Work.” In *Women in Canada: A Gender-based Statistical Report*, 7th ed. (Ottawa: Statistics Canada, 2017), 3, 19.

⁴Ibid., 4-5.

⁵Ibid., 6.

⁶Ibid., 8.

⁷Ibid., 8.

3. There are other statistical trends in relation to Canadian women in paid labour that are worth examining, particularly regarding family issues. First, the association of marriage with reduced employment among women has weakened significantly compared to historical numbers and “nearly equivalent proportions of married and single women were employed” since 2010.⁸ Single female parents have the lowest rate of employment compared to all other groups, but employment rates of all mothers increases with the age of their youngest child.⁹ Furthermore, since the beginning of data collection on this area in 1976, mothers whose youngest child was under the age of 6 consistently demonstrated the lowest employment rates.¹⁰ In addition, only 5.3% of working women worked long hours, defined as 50 hours or more per week, compared to 18.1% of men, a statistic that has only gone up by 0.5% since 1976.¹¹ This trend continues with respect to the number of work hours performed by women over the same period. Also, women tend to work fewer hours of paid work per week on average compared to men; the average number of work hours increased from 34.5 hours in 1976 to 35.5 hours in 2015.¹² Similar to employment rates, the presence and age of the youngest child had a notable effect on the work hours of women, generally increasing as children age.¹³ In fact, women most frequently cited caring for children as the reason for reduced working hours as well as for choosing part-time work, defined as less than 30 hours per week.¹⁴ Finally, women’s careers were interrupted more frequently than men’s careers and for longer periods. In 2015, 30% of women were absent from work during the reference week compared to 23.9% of men; furthermore, 21.7% of those women attributed their absence to family or personal responsibilities, compared to only 9.3% of men.

⁸Ibid, 9-10.

⁹Ibid., 11-13.

¹⁰Ibid., 11.

¹¹Ibid., 13-14.

¹²Ibid., 13.

¹³Ibid., 14.

¹⁴Ibid., 16.

With respect to maternity or parental leave, considering total work history retrospectively of the census group, 46.8% of women took at least one maternity or parental leave with a combined average of 15.2 months over the period as compared to only 3.8% of men with a combined average of 3.7 months.¹⁵ In addition to these characteristics of women in the labour force, trends in the nature of their work can also contribute to the discussion of women working in Canada.

4. Historically, the nature of work in which women have been employed tended to differ from those of men, being shaped to a greater extent by women's caregiving roles and/or the presumption of these gender roles by employers.¹⁶ This trend seems to persist in the Canadian labour market, which consists of two broad sectors: the goods-producing sector and the services-producing sector. The goods-producing sector yields tangible products and consists of industries related to exploitation of natural resources, utilities, construction and manufacturing. The services-producing sector produces intangible goods and consists of a diverse range of industries from wholesale and retail, finance, business, education, culture and recreation, health services, and public administration to name a few. The goods-producing sector has historically been the domain of men, while women significantly outnumber men in the services-producing sector.¹⁷ Most notably, women were concentrated in industries that parallel their traditional gender roles at more than double the rate of men.¹⁸ In 2015, 41% of women were concentrated in three industries: 82.4% of workers in health care and social assistance, 69.3% of workers in

¹⁵Ibid., 18.

¹⁶Giuseppe Martinegro, Jenet I. Jacob, and E. Jeffery Hill, "Gender and the work-family interface: Exploring differences across the family life course," *Journal of Family Issues* 21, no. 10 (2010): 1363-1390; Joan Acker, "Hierarchies, jobs, bodies: A theory of gendered organizations," *Gender and Society* 4, no. 2 (1990): 139-158.

¹⁷Moyser, *Women and Paid Work* . . . , 21.

¹⁸Ibid., 22.

educational services, and 58.5% of workers in food services.¹⁹ This trend has not changed since 1976.²⁰ In addition, in 2015, women were underrepresented in leadership positions in the private sector (25.6%), but not in the public sector (54%).²¹ In either sector, in the case where a woman left their job, a woman was twice as likely as a man to cite personal or family reasons as the explanation.²² There are some inferences that can be made from this data and with all of the above in mind, the discussion can focus more on women employed in the CAF and the CAF as an employer.

DISCUSSION

5. Although there is a long history of women in the Canadian military going back to 1901 when the Army Nursing Service was formed, there have been numerous barriers to employment equity for women in the CAF.²³ These have included enrolment criteria, pension benefits, enrollment fixed ceilings, attendance at military colleges, marital status, childbirth, and closing occupations to women.²⁴ Since 1970, these barriers have been systematically removed over the years, culminating in a 1988 Canadian Human Rights Tribunal ruling to integrate women into all aspects of the CAF including combat roles. However, since that time, the CAF has never been able to meet its targets for the recruitment and retention of women. Have all the barriers been identified and removed? Presently, there are women employed in diverse roles across the CAF, but there appears to be a concentration of women in particular occupations similar to those mentioned previously. Although the percentage of women in the CAF has grown to

¹⁹Ibid.

²⁰Ibid., 23.

²¹ Ibid., 26.

²²Ibid., 32.

²³DND, "Historical Milestones of Women in the Canadian Armed Forces," Last accessed 23 January 2018, <http://www.forces.gc.ca/en/news/article.page?doc=historicalmilestones-of-women-in-the-canadian-armed-forces/ildciaqg>.

²⁴Ibid.

approximately 15%, from 1989 - 2014, the representation of women in the combat arms has only grown 2.2%.²⁵ Consequently, when all aforementioned statistics are considered, one must consider that an enduring challenge to increasing the number of women in the CAF is Canadian culture itself. Another challenge might be the work itself, or even the perception of employment in the CAF, in addition to any barriers that might be hidden there.

6. The CAF offers a range of occupations and environments for employment, all of which can be both challenging and rewarding. One enduring tenet of military service is the concept of service before self and the importance of the mission over all else, including the members themselves. This is a necessary code of military service. However, has it permeated too much in all aspects of the CAF, not just operations? Hewett and Luce introduced the concept of 'extreme jobs,' identifying a number of characteristics and asking whether there was a gender barrier there. They argued that beyond extended work hours, the combination of 5 or more of the following characteristics constitute an extreme job: unpredictable flow of work; fast-paced work under tight deadlines; inordinate scope of responsibility that amounts to more than one job; work-related events outside regular work hours; availability 24/7; responsibility for profit and loss; responsibility for mentoring and recruiting; large amounts of travel; large number of direct reports; and physical presence at the workplace place at least ten hours a day.²⁶ Consider these characteristics in military training, military postings and military deployments, but also during the regular workday. It is very easy to reach the conclusion that a military career constitutes an extreme job. Although, not all men are career-focused and not all women are family-focused,

²⁵DND, "Women in the Canadian Armed Forces," Backgrounder, March 6, 2014, Last accessed 23 January 2018, <http://www.forces.gc.ca/en/news/article.page?doc=women-in-the-canadian-armedforces/hie8w7rm>.

²⁶Sylvia A. Hewlett, and Carolyn B. Luce, "Extreme Jobs: The Dangerous Allure of the 70-Hour Workweek," *Harvard Business Review* 84, no. 12 (2006): 50.

extreme-work models create instability on family health and well-being. In order to embark on a military career, or to excel and progress in one, a service member must make personal choices that may impact greatly on their families. Statistics and surveys suggest that women tend to choose family over their career, and Gascoigne et al. postulate that this ‘personal choice’ in the working practices of extreme jobs perpetuates gender inequality.²⁷ Even though many of these extreme characteristics and nomadic aspects of a career in the CAF are often necessary, even imperative to the success of a mission, are they becoming ingrained into military culture all the time? Even if they haven’t, are they being perceived to be? If so, how does this perception impact women considering the CAF as an employer and those already in the service?

7. It is unclear to this author, how women perceive the CAF from the outside. Certainly, the recent attention to inappropriate sexual behaviour in the CAF does not help. However, the CAF’s fervent response with Operation Honour and the resulting initiatives have demonstrated the leadership’s commitment to a safe and equitable workplace free of all forms of sexual harassment. In addition, on an even more rudimentary level, it appears that many women do not believe that they can even complete basic training; however, “data reveals that an equal percentage of women and men successfully complete basic training.”²⁸ This would be a valuable fact to promote in marketing for recruitment purposes. The Innovation Hub study also suggested other changes in the recruiting strategy and process to include gender-neutral job titles, defining key terms, personalizing communication, and sending reminders to aid applicants to meet deadlines as well as other changes to simplify the process.²⁹ The study did suggest mandating

²⁷Charlotte Gascoigne, Emma Parry , and David Buchanan, “Extreme work, gendered work? How extreme jobs and the discourse of ‘personal choice’ perpetuate gender inequality,” *Organization* 22, no. 4 (2015): 457-475.

²⁸Privy Council Office. *Increasing Recruitment of Women into the . . .*, 6.

²⁹Ibid.

gender disclosure on the application form pending the results of the Sex and Gender Designation Policy Exploration Project; however, that project has recently been focused on removing unnecessary sex and gender identifiers on CAF forms.³⁰ Additionally, there are other issues that can affect women's willingness to pursue a career in the CAF.

8. The Innovation Hub study identified five broad areas in CAF policies, guidelines and programs that are recommended for in-depth review, these include: deployments and relocation; leave without pay; childcare support; long-term commitment/ability to resign; and culture/diversity.³¹ The study also recommended recruitment strategies such as 'try-before-you-buy' programs, such as the 'Women in Force' program that the CAF implemented in Aug-Nov 2017.³² Gender integration remains a priority for the CAF, evidenced by its continued efforts to support the United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 on 'Women, Peace and Security' and initiatives related gender perspectives.³³ Further research and assessment will need to be conducted on the effectiveness of these initiatives as well as the other CAF policies, guidelines and programs to determine if and what barriers exist to women and how to adequately support all members the CAF and their families.

³⁰Ibid. The author participated in the Sex and Gender Designation Policy Exploration Project until a recent posting to the Canadian Forces College in August 2017.

³¹Ibid.

³²DND, "The Women in Force Program, a new Canadian Armed Forces initiative for women," Last accessed 23 January 2018, https://www.canada.ca/en/department-national-defence/news/2017/05/the_women_in_forceprogramanew_canadianarmedforcesinitiativeforwom.html.

³³DND, "Canadian Armed Forces hosting Gender Perspectives Conference," Last accessed 23 January 2018, https://www.canada.ca/en/department-national-defence/news/2017/05/canadian_armed_forceshostinggenderperspectivesconference.html.

CONCLUSION

9. The CAF has made tremendous progress since 1970, actively working towards gender integration, cultural diversity and employment equity for all its members. Service in the CAF offers many benefits that make it an employer of choice in the Canadian labour market. However, recruitment and retention strategies have not yet resulted in increased proportions of women in the CAF nor have they stemmed the high attrition rates in general for some occupations, which may be tied to the same issue of work-life balance. The purpose of the Canadian Employment Equity Act (ref A) is “to achieve equality in the workplace so that no person shall be denied employment opportunities or benefits for reasons unrelated to ability.”³⁴ However, what if the discourse is no longer about ability and it is about willingness. If the demands of service in the CAF are not counterbalanced with the flexibility, support programs and compensation required to provide the necessary stability to military families, should the CAF really be surprised that women, as well as men, decide to seek employment opportunities elsewhere in their chosen occupation or otherwise. Perhaps one of the final barriers to women serving in the CAF is not an overt or explicit barrier but more of a defacto barrier. In addition to choosing gendered roles in employment, it has been demonstrated that Canadian women have a tendency to prioritize family over their work. How often does the CAF put women in this position, or any service member for that matter? Does it need to? Frequent, and often lengthy absences, whether due to extensive daily workloads, military training or military deployments, are often necessary and part of the service to the CAF. It is unavoidable. However, these demands and the nomadic lifestyle take a toll, particularly on families, and especially when it begins to create a situation of the absentee parent or spouse.

³⁴Department of Justice, “Employment Equity Act,” 1995, c.44, s.2; 2017, c.26, s. 19(E).

10. Service members come from all walks of life, diverse backgrounds, and different family circumstances. The CAF desires to be an institution that reflects the diversity of Canadian society, and in the case of women has set a target of at least 25.1% by 2026. This strikes a balance between statistical representation, where the proportion of women in the military should be equal to that of the whole society, and delegative representation where women are simply represented without setting specific targets. However, some argue, “setting unrealistically high targets . . . can only lead to a situation whereby the CAF will be unable to meet its targets, no matter the effort.”³⁵ So far, that has proven to be true. There is also extensive research that shows employment equity measures, although well-intentioned, can backfire if they are perceived as unfair or undermining merit, by both the beneficiaries and non-beneficiaries of such measures.³⁶ However, if the CAF can adapt its human resource management policies without adverse effects to the organization, modify some of its work practices, provide the resources and structures to meaningfully support its member’s and their families, as ‘the Journey’ espouses to become, perhaps the rest will begin to fall in line . . . and perhaps Canadian women will as well.

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

³⁶Privy Council Office. *Increasing Recruitment of Women into the . . .*, 6.

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