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SECURING OUR FUTURE: RECRUITING AND RETENTION OF WOMEN IN THE CANADIAN ARMED FORCES

Maj Alexandre Forest

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**SECURING OUR FUTURE: RECRUITING AND RETENTION OF
WOMEN IN THE CANADIAN ARMED FORCES**

Maj Alexandre Forest

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AIM

1. While the Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) has recently renewed its commitment to increase the percentage of serving women from 15% to 25% by 2026,¹ it has been an ongoing goal for many years with mixed results.² The aim of this service paper is to discuss the potential impediments and solutions available to achieve this goal as the CAF moves forward. This analysis will look at the recruiting and retention challenges facing the CAF, and propose solutions based on scientific research, similar initiatives from our allies and other non-traditional industries.

INTRODUCTION

2. Over the last 50 years, the role of women in Canadian society has changed significantly and the CAF has attempted to capitalize on this new workforce. This was not only done to help maintain the manning levels, but most importantly to benefit from the women's strengths in the workforce and remain relevant within Canadian society. Should the CAF succeed in this endeavour, it will not only reap benefits from having a mixed workforce, but could also enjoy the secondary effect of a higher retention rate overall. Studies have shown that in a mixed work

¹ Department of National Defence, *Strong, Secure, Engaged - Canada's Defence Policy.*, 2017, 12.

² Auditor General of Canada, "Report 5—Canadian Armed Forces Recruitment and Retention—National Defence," 2016, 5.25, http://www.oag-bvg.gc.ca/internet/English/parl_oag_201611_05_e_41834.html.

environment where women represent 25-90% of the workforce, there was a slight increase in retention for both gender as the proportion of females increased.³

3. As recommended by defence scientist Lynn Bradley, when increasing the percentage of women in the CAF, the organization must be careful to steer away from the easy solution to direct women towards CAF employments where they are already represented in high numbers. By concentrating women in fewer trades, it could affect their ability to achieve senior positions, as they would be competing against one another. If we intend to create a critical mass to influence the CAF culture, the female presence must be increased throughout, especially in non-traditional trades as they offer more senior positions across the CAF.⁴

DISCUSSION

4. The discussion will first look at demographic trends affecting our target population of interest, which are women between the ages of 18 to 34. It will then look at some of the recruiting and retention opportunities that have been identified by studies conducted by the CAF, foreign militaries and other industries where women are under-represented.

5. Demographics. The difficulty in understanding the demographics in this case is related to the fact that while many studies exist, most lack the depth of representation for the target pool, affecting our ability to draw definite conclusions based on various points of view.

³ Mary Sue Hay, Charles H. Middlestead, and U.S. Army Research Institute for the Behavioral and Social Sciences, *Women in Combat : An Overview of the Implications for Recruiting*, vol. 1568, Book, Whole (Alexandria, Va: U.S. Army Research Institute for the Behavioral and Social Sciences, 1990), 17.

⁴ Lynn Bradley, "Research and Evidence-Based Advice to the SOPG Recruiting," August 16, 2017, 2.

6. Between 1976 and 2014, the number of families with at least one child has remained constant at around 2.8 million. On the other hand, the number of families with dual income has increased from 1 million to 1.9 million.⁵ In 2015, Tinsley, Howell, and Amanatullah determined that in the majority of couples, the consensus was that it was still expected that the male be the bread winner and that the women's career would be given a secondary role.⁶ From this, it can be said that the CAF is attempting to be a trailblazer by expecting to retain more women, while the society is still not seeing it as the norm to place the women's career ahead of the man's.⁷ This must be understood if the CAF wishes to create retention policies which support women to remain in the forces while they face pressures at home.

7. In 2017, Earnscliffe Strategic Group, on behalf of the CAF, conducted a two part study of Canadian women aged 18 to 34.⁸ The study found that joining the military was the second least interesting field of employment women considered. Once explained that they could pursue a career in the CAF which matched their desired career field, the number of women who would consider joining tripled. This pointed to a misunderstanding of the CAF career options and the military profession.⁹ The survey identified that the most common reasons for not wanting to join were the discomfort of being employed in a combat environment, the need to move away from home and the perceived lack of work-life balance. Overall, the knowledge of the CAF was very

⁵ Victoria Fraser, "Work-Family Decision-Making Processes in Dual-Income Couples: A Look at the Male Dominated Work Environment" n.d., 5.

⁶ Ibid., 7.

⁷ Bradley, "Research and Evidence-Based Advice to the SOPG Recruiting," 2.

⁸ Earnscliffe Strategy Group, "The Recruitment and Employment of Women in the Canadian Armed Forces: Research Report," January 2017, 1.

⁹ Ibid., 6.

limited.¹⁰ Since the response was initially low and the results point to the fact that Canadian women know very little about the CAF, there is a need to provide additional information targeting this demographic, potentially tripling the pool of potential applicants.

8. From the CAF Recruiting Survey and the Earncliffe study, it was determined that women were showing more interest in joining the Reserve Force (ResF) than males.¹¹ The ResF offers a more attractive option since it allows for a more flexible schedule, the choice to deploy and more control over the geolocation of postings. While the ResF was never intended to become a primary feeder pool for the Regular Force (RegF), should the CAF decide to capitalize on this reality, it could potentially attract a higher number of women by initially putting more emphasis on ResF employments. Then, as women become more comfortable with the realities of military service in the ResF, a separate component transfer initiative could be put in place to facilitate their transfer to the RegF.

9. Various surveys have also demonstrated that women aged 18-34 are heavily influenced by their parents and school councillors at first.¹² Young women start making career decisions at age 14-15 and have responded that they did not feel like they had the necessary tools and knowledge at the time.¹³ Therefore, by implementing a high school outreach program which

¹⁰ Ibid., 4; Barbara T. Waruszynski and DRDC, "Female Regular Force Member's Perceptions on Recruitment and Employment of Women in the CAF Top-Line Findings Presentation," n.d., 1.

¹¹ Glen T. Howell and Glen Budgell, "Analyses of the Annual Canadian Armed Forces Recruiting Survey," March 25, 2016, 24; Earncliffe Strategy Group, "Recruitment and Employment of Women in CAF Report," 8.

¹² Earncliffe Strategy Group, "Recruitment and Employment of Women in CAF Report," 3; Howell and Budgell, "Analyses of the Annual Canadian Armed Forces Recruiting Survey," 23.

¹³ Earncliffe Strategy Group, "Recruitment and Employment of Women in CAF Report," 3.

includes information sessions for parents,¹⁴ teachers and councillors, the CAF could help demystify the military service and provide the tools needed to guide teenagers to make appropriate choices.¹⁵ Of note, this program must be carefully tailored to ensure it is not perceived as a recruiting drive aimed at children.

10. Finally, the CAF has always taken great pride in being a gender neutral organization, thinking it would promote a better integration of women amongst its ranks. However, understanding the gender differences that exists naturally, having gender neutral policies can also have adverse effects towards one of the other gender.¹⁶ Consequently, the CAF should consider developing recruiting and retention policies which allow for gender considerations.

11. Recruitment. When looking at recruitment strategies, the CAF is faced with the challenge of balancing the need to meet its goal, while also protecting the integrity of the organization. There could be a perceived or actual pressure on the recruiters to entice undecided female applicants to join beyond their level of comfort. While it may result in successful statistics at the recruiting centre, it will most likely cause a high level of attrition within the first year.¹⁷ The US Marine Corps (USMC) experienced this situation and realized that quotas led to a higher dropout rate, even though they had not lowered their admission standards.¹⁸ In trying to increase the women's representation and maintain the overall manning level, the CAF cannot afford to waste

¹⁴ Ibid., 5.

¹⁵ Douglas Yeung and Rand Corporation. National Security Research Division, *Recruiting Policies and Practices for Women in the Military: Views from the Field* (Santa Monica, Calif: Rand Corporation, 2017), 47.

¹⁶ Fraser, "Work-Family Decision," 10.

¹⁷ Bradley, "Research and Evidence-Based Advice to the SOPG Recruiting," 2.

¹⁸ Lynn M. Stow, "Recruiting Enlisted Women," *Marine Corps Gazette* 101, no. 3 (2017): 32.

recruitment and training positions which could be given to willing men or women. Not counting the issue above, the frustration experienced by these women leaving the CAF feeling betrayed, may result in a significant public backlash.¹⁹ Therefore, the CAF must be ready to accept deviations from recruiting goals to ensure it recruits the right women who will stay committed to the organization. Through their positive experience, the CAF's reputation as an employer of choice will grow which should then allow it to catch up and meet its goal.

12. When asked, serving women reported that the current recruiting material for women is not representative of their experience in the CAF and should instead portray women in all types of occupations, within realistic environments, working alongside their male counterpart.²⁰ As well, the women portrayed should be allowed to show that they can be feminine and do not have to look like men.²¹ When selecting women for the recruiting material, the CAF should pick both younger serving members so potential candidate can relate, as well as high ranking women so they can feel empowered about their future.²² Finally, the recruiting material should dispel myths and negative stereotypes by communicating how service life has become more flexible than before.²³

¹⁹ Bradley, "Research and Evidence-Based Advice to the SOPG Recruiting," 2.

²⁰ Earncliffe Strategy Group, "Recruitment and Employment of Women in CAF Report," 5; Barbara T. Waruszynski and DRDC, "Perceptions of Women in Reg F on Recruitment & Employment Top Line Findings - Cover Letter," July 2017, 4.

²¹ Barbara T. Waruszynski and DRDC, "Female Regular Force Member's Perceptions on Recruitment and Employment of Women in the CAF Preliminary Findings" (DSpcSci, May 4, 2017), 14.

²² Yeung and Rand Corporation. National Security Research Division, *Recruiting Policies and Practices for Women in the Military: Views from the Field*, 34.

²³ Deborah Howe, "FW: New US RAND Report - Recruiting Policies and Practices for Women in the Military," 1 Nov 17.

13. Recruiting campaigns should focus on social media platforms as the use of traditional media like TV and newspapers is declining within our target group.²⁴ Through the use of online ads and social media, the CAF will have the ability to target specific demographics and achieve better results. When the Michigan state police made use of targeting ads, they quickly noticed an increase in their number of women applicants. Also, they found that one of the most useful tool that applicants appreciated was the access to serving women biographies, as well as messages the serving women believed would persuade a potential recruit to join.²⁵ Through those, potential recruits got a better glimpse of what they should expect and felt that the messages were more truthful than normal recruiting messages. Recently, the Australian Defence Force (ADF) conducted a trial with a mobile recruiting company which made use of targeted advertisement. Their initial observations were that this method had returned 10 times more applicants than all of their previous methods combined.²⁶ The CAF should look at publishing similar material as part of the recruiting material as well as investigate the use of a job recruiting company to increase the reach of the recruiting centres.

14. When civilian and serving women were asked what method of recruitment they preferred, the majority indicated that they preferred face to face interaction with another female.²⁷ This was due to the fact that they felt female recruiters were better positioned to answer their concerns

²⁴ Howe D. and Mombourquette C., “2008-2016 Trends Challenges with the CAF Tracking Study” (DRDC, 2016), 1.

²⁵ Denise Powell, “Recruiting Women Into Law Enforcement,” *WomenPolice*, no. Journal Article (2016): 1, 19.

²⁶ David Swan, “Defence Force Uses Job Recruiter Found to Find Women,” News, *The Australian*, (July 25, 2017), <http://www.theaustralian.com.au/business/technology/defence-force-uses-job-recruiter-found-to-find-women/news-story/248ac65dc326b7e54897da3a275dd1b6>.

²⁷ Earncliffe Strategy Group, “Recruitment and Employment of Women in CAF Report,” 4; Clinical Trials Administrator, “When Recruiting Women, Targeted Methods Work Best,” *AHC Media LLC*, no. Journal Article (2008): 2.

from a female's perspective.²⁸ A challenge with this requirement is that dedicating more women to recruiting positions will potentially affect their career progression and take them away from other units where they are needed. An option would be to investigate the re-hiring of retired RegF women to work at recruiting centres as reservists. This could offer a quick solution to this problem without having a direct impact to the RegF manning levels.

15. Retention. When looking at the retention problem, there are three aspects where the CAF could improve upon. First during basic training, following the first period of service and finally for women pursuing a long-term career.

16. As the CAF is now attracting older Canadians who are already well established, it leads to the deduction that the CAF should also adapt its training environment to meet their needs.²⁹ When surveyed, the majority of recruits voluntarily leaving Basic Training answered that it was for family related reasons.³⁰ While the voluntary survey was mostly completed by men, it is safe to assume that this answers extend to women as well. The CAF should investigate whether allowing greater access to families during basic training could reduce this trend. Obviously, this will need to be balanced with the need to create group cohesion amongst the recruits and their inculcation into the military.³¹ Another option would be to extend Military Family Resources Centre services to the recruit's families. This could prove beneficial in reducing their sense of

²⁸ Waruszynski and DRDC, "Female RegF Perception Top-Line Cover Page," 3.

²⁹ Kathy Michaud, "Voluntary Attrition during Basic Military Qualification (BMQ) and Basic Military Officer Qualification (BMOQ) Focus Groups Findings," August 2010, 20.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, iii-iv.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 20.

guilt towards abandoning their family, and increase their focus by knowing that they family have a support mechanism in place while they are away.³²

17. Looking at the problem of female attrition following the initial period of service, the higher level of female attrition has potentially been linked to the lack of support network available compared to serving men.³³ By instituting a formal support and mentoring program for CAF women, this situation could be mitigated. A similar program was implemented by the Michigan State Police and they have found it to be very successful.³⁴

18. When looking at retention concerns for women serving long-term careers, the CAF and ADF determined that there was a perceived disadvantage for women at career boards caused by a lack of transparency and perceived fairness.³⁵ The ADF found that ensuring a mixed representation at career boards could ensure that one gender is not disadvantaged over the other.³⁶ Modifying the construct of the CAF promotion and succession boards to ensure gender representation could lead to greater transparency, help serving women feel treated fairly and more likely to continue serving.

³² Ibid.

³³ Hay, Middlestead, and U.S. Army Research Institute for the Behavioral and Social Sciences, *Women in Combat: An Overview of the Implications for Recruiting*, 1568:17.

³⁴ Powell, "Recruiting Women Into Law Enforcement," 1.

³⁵ Meg Trucano et al., "Foreign Military Strategies to Recruit and Retain Women," March 2017, 11; Waruszynski and DRDC, "Female RegF Perception Top-Line PPT," 1.

³⁶ Trucano et al., "Foreign Military Strategies to Recruit and Retain Women," 11.

CONCLUSION

19. To make the goal of 25% women serving by 2026 sustainable, the CAF must continue to be open-minded in changing its culture and steer away from easy solutions which could be detrimental to serving women. By being willing to accept deviations from yearly goals initially, the CAF will build strong foundations which will pay dividend in the long run. When provided accurate information regarding the conditions of employment and quality of life, Canadian women were willing to consider a career in the Forces. Therefore, it is possible to achieve the goal if the CAF makes concerted efforts to reach out and make organizational changes that will increase retention.

RECOMMENDATION

20. Below is a summary of all proposed recommendations:

- a. Conduct outreach visits in high schools to meet with parents, teachers and councillors
- b. Keep recruiting standards unchanged to protect the integrity of the organization and be willing to accept lower enrolment rates than directed in the first few years.
- c. Assess the CAF policies to determine where gender biases exist.
- d. Promote the ResF as a career option for women with a view to use it as a stepping stone towards the RegF.

- e. Increase the number of female recruiters, potentially re-hiring retired RegF women as reservists to fill recruiting jobs.
- f. Develop recruiting material which is less gender neutral and which shows females in all types of employment working alongside their male counterparts.
- g. Establish a formal support and mentoring program for CAF women.
- h. Ask serving women of all ranks to provide written and video testimonies to help with recruitment initiatives.
- i. Provide greater access to families during basic training to reduce family related stress on the recruits.
- j. Look at family support services available to reduce the burden on military families during basic training.
- k. Change the structure of the promotion and succession board to ensure a mixed representation.

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