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FEMALE RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION ISSUES AND IDEAS

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FEMALE RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION ISSUES AND IDEAS

AIM

1. Recruitment and retention of female Canadian Forces (CF) members is both difficult and necessary. The renewed vigor to increase diversity has highlighted the issue of female recruitment and retention to the very top levels of the Canadian Government. The purpose of this paper is to provide possible options and fresh ideas to increase the retention time of female service members and reduce the difficulty of recruiting female members. This paper is written by a non-CF member and non-Canadian citizen with the perspective of an outsider looking in with foreign experiences. The problem will be explored and fresh ideas to combat the issue will be presented in the recommendations section.

INTRODUCTION

2. The new defense policy, *Strong, Secured, and Engaged* states that the Canadian Forces from 2016 will increase the number of women by 1% a year to attain 25% female representation by the year 2026.¹ The goals of these numbers, in summary, are to improve the diversity of the Canadian Forces and help to reduce the harmful behaviours of harassment, discrimination, and inappropriate sexual behaviour found in the male-heavy CF. Data from 2014 shows that females

¹ Department of National Defense, D2-386/2017E, *Strong Secure Engaged, Canada's Defense Policy* (Ottawa: DND Canada, 2017), 104.

make up 50.4% of the population but only contribute to approximately 15% of the Canadian Forces.²

3. This paper will initially provide discussion points pertaining to the current status and structure of the CF with regards to the female population. Foreign military statistics regarding females will be examined to provide a general understanding of the issue as it pertains to females in general vice singularly Canada. The discussion will continue to the vital statistics regarding the issues and items that female CF members are satisfied with and dissatisfied with and which affect retention. From the satisfiers and dissatisfies, possible solutions will be presented along with reasoning and hypothesized outcomes.

DISCUSSION

4. The new Canadian defense policy, *Strong, Secured, and Engaged*, outlines the necessity to increase the percentage of female representation within the CF to 25% of the total population within ten years of its publication (2016). NATO already recognizes the necessity for higher percentages of female service members as the population in operational areas tends to be 50% female.³ The U.S. military branches average approximately 16% female with the highest number of females in the U.S. Air Force with 19% and lowest in the U.S. Marine Corps at 8% of total

² Canada, Ministry of Industry, *Women in Canada: A Gender-based Statistical Report*. Ottawa: Statistics Canada, 2011, 11.

³ NATO, The Committee on Women in the NATO Forces, "Improving the Gender Balance," Accessed 2 February 2018, https://www.nato.int/issues/women_nato/2008-11-gender_balance.pdf, 23.

population.⁴ The 10% female increase in the CF estimates a 1% increase per year over the ten-year period.⁵ Attrition due to a lack of retention has not permitted these numbers to support the increase that *Strong, Secured, and Engaged* has designated as the goal. To determine the issues affecting female retention (and all retention for that matter) the *2016 CAF Retention Survey: Qualitative Analysis* was completed by Rebecca Lee, Emrah Eren, and Glen Budgell, Ph. D. Rebecca Lee is a talent advocate and professional recruiter.⁶ Emrah Eren is a consultant specializing in advanced statistical methods and occupational analysis.⁷ Glen Budgell is the executive vice president of Talent Management Solutions.⁸ The *2016 CAF Retention Survey: Qualitative Analysis* provides many of the data points that will be discussed in this paper. Additionally, these data points provide that basis of the foundry used to generate the ideas to improve both retention and recruiting practices for female CF members. Any reference referring to “the Survey” throughout this paper are attributed to the *2016 CAF Retention Survey: Qualitative Analysis* unless otherwise specified.

5. The first area that the *2016 CAF Retention Survey: Qualitative Analysis* discusses data regarding the retention and recruitment of females is in the area of the “seven most common areas contributing to a member’s decision to stay in the CF.” The areas that females rated higher than males are “Job Satisfaction,” “Satisfaction with Pay,” “Organizational Identification,” “Satisfaction with Benefits” and “Limited Opportunities.” These are the areas that are the most

⁴ Kim Parker, Anthony Cilluffo, and Renne Stepler, “6 Facts about the U.S. military and its changing demographics,” *Pew Research Center*, last modified 13 April 2017, <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2017/04/13/6-facts-about-the-u-s-military-and-its-changing-demographics/>.

⁵ Department of National Defense, D2-386/2017E, *Strong Secure Engaged*...,104.

⁶ Rebecca Lee’s LinkedIn page, n.d., accessed 30 January 2018, <https://ca.linkedin.com/in/rebeccapylee>.

⁷ HRSG, “Emrah Eren,” accessed 30 January 2018, <https://resources.hrsg.ca/authors/emrah-eren>.

⁸ HRSG, “Leadership Team,” accessed 30 January 2018, <https://www.hrsg.ca/about-us/our-team>.

important to females according to the retention survey data and will be the main areas of focus for female retention and recruiting.

6. The categories of “Job Satisfaction” and “Satisfaction with Pay” are the two most important categories that females consider when deciding to stay in the CF. Females also cited that “Training and Development Opportunities,” “Satisfaction with Pay,” and “Job Variety” were the top satisfiers within the survey. It can be safely assumed that females are satisfied with the current pay system and the training and development opportunities. “Job Variety” is standard and a non-issue due to all fields being open to female CF members. While the current status quo indicates females are satisfied with pay and training and development opportunities, these areas could be considered as places to invest more heavily in with regards to promotion and advertising to potential recruits. Retention opportunities can also be considered in these two fields as there are already lucrative incentives for retention and could be made even better, hence more enticing to females on the fence about getting out of the CF.⁹

7. The *2016 CAF Retention Survey: Qualitative Analysis* also examined the issues pertaining to CF member retention. It should be noted that “Retention” is a separate category from the previous item “Stay with the CF.” The “Retention” category focused on what members felt the CF could do to improve the chances of keeping the CF member in the Forces. The two categories the female response largely outweighed male opinion were in “Advancement and Promotion” and “Workloads and Demands.”

⁹ Rebecca Lee, Eren Emrah, and Glen Budgell, *2016 CAF Retention Survey: Qualitative Analysis*. Final Report, Ottawa: Human Resource Systems Group, Ltd. 2017, 78.

a. Advancement and Promotion: Advancement and Promotion was an area that females thought could be improved. The CF have taken measures to reduce the occurrences of Sexual Harassment, but it likely still occurs, and females feel that they are not considered in the same manner as males for promotion and advancement (the “glass ceiling” effect).¹⁰ This also may be an issue due to females taking more time off for maternal purposes and potentially not competing with males that are not absent for this purpose.

b. Workloads and Demands: Women overwhelmingly cited “Workload and Demands” as a factor that could be improved for retention in the CF. Unfortunately, no reasoning was given in this category. As the disparity between the sexes was apparent in the response levels (7.8% female vs. 5.3% male) this issue should be further researched, and female perspective considered in much greater depth. The male-dominated CF likely does not take into considerations the same aspects of “workload and demands” as the female contingent.¹¹ Retention of female service members will greatly enhance the CF, abide by *Strong, Secured, and Engaged*, and reduce overall cost both in recruitment (of female members) and training of replacements. This topic should be closely monitored and investigated in future research.

8. The survey also indicated the top seven dissatisfiers of service members within the CF. Females ranked the top three dissatisfiers higher than men in all three categories. The top three

¹⁰ Leesa Tanner, Department of National Defense, *The Career Progression of Women in the Canadian Forces - Is There a "Glass Ceiling"?* Directorate of Manpower Analysis, Ottawa: Department of National Defense, 1992, 13.

¹¹ Canada, “Table 1, Population by sex, Canada, 1921 to 2061,” Accessed 31 Jan 2018, <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/89-503-x/2015001/article/14152/tbl/tbl1-eng.htm>.

were, “Advancement and Recognition,” “Leadership,” and “Workloads and Demands.” A common trend can be seen in two of the topics. “Advancement and Recognition” was rated as the number one reason females are dissatisfied with the CF. It was also noted in the previous section on the issue of Retention. “Workloads and Demands” is a similar subject that is highly rated by females in both the Retention and Dissatisfiers categories. “Leadership” is the category within the Dissatisfiers that has the highest disparity between males and females and is the second highest rated category in the top seven dissatisfiers regarding CF retention.¹²

a. Advancement and Recognition: This is a subject that must be addressed for the better retention and recruitment of female members. The large response in multiple categories shows that this subject is an issue at the forefront of the female concerns. Addressing this issue publically, fairly, and with sincere concern will show the females of the CF that leadership is concerned with the subject and taking action to address this top concern.

b. Workloads and Demands: This issue must be researched in-depth and addressed by female leadership. The varying perspectives of males and females on this subject must be taken into consideration and a female centric response and solution be contrived. As the number three dissatisfier and major contributor to consideration for female retention, a palatable solution to this issue that satisfies the female concern will enhance retention and increase the incentives for potential female recruits to join the CF.¹³

¹² Rebecca Lee, Eren Emrah, and Glen Budgell, *2016 CAF Retention Survey: Qualitative Analysis*. Final Report, Ottawa: Human Resource Systems Group, Ltd. 2017, 34.

¹³ *Ibid.*

c. Leadership: This item was the second highest rated dissatisfier and should make all current leadership feel concerned. The largely male dominated leadership of the CF may not adequately appeal to the concerns of the minority female contingent. This lack of concern can be mitigated by select committees of females that can advise leadership on the behalf of the female minority until sufficient numbers of females rise to the appropriate ranks of influence in the CF. An example of this type of representation of a group is already present in the presence of the Sergeant Majors. Sergeant Majors represent the concerns and speak on the behalf of the enlisted members of the CF. An equivalent female representative within units would be a position well utilized and necessary to properly represent the females within a unit.

CONCLUSION

9. The female members of the CF have spoken and indicated what their concerns are regarding satisfaction and retention in the CF. The CF must consider these concerns if the 25% female goal is to be accomplished as dictated by *Strong, Secured, and Engaged*.¹⁴ Leadership, Workloads and Demands, and Advancement and Recognition need to be attacked and put forward as the key factors in recruitment and retention of female CF members. The category of Workloads and Demands requires further study and research to better determine how to improve this aspect of the CF to the female population. The following recommendations address these issues. Additionally, the recommendations provide ideas that should be considered for the benefit

¹⁴ Department of National Defense, D2-386/2017E, *Strong Secure Engaged...*,104.

of the CF females serving currently and in the future as members in the national defense establishment.

RECOMMENDATION

10. The recommendations will include outside-the-box ideas and considerations. Traditional methods of recruitment and retention have failed to produce the required results of *Strong, Secured, and Engaged*.

11. Female retention and recruiting is not just a Canadian problem. Allied and friendly nations throughout the world share similar concerns and considerations with regards to female service members. The U.S. Air Force (which has the highest percentage of females in the U.S. military – approximately 18.4%) has begun a campaign to recruit and retain women at a higher rate.¹⁵ The U.S. military as a whole has stagnated around 16% in regards to female service members over the last 15 years.¹⁶ Canada has the opportunity, as a leader and advocate of gender equality, to increase awareness and cooperation amongst Canada's allies for the nurturing of female service members.¹⁷ Canada should promote the idea of an all-female corps ("corps" is used in the general sense, not as a military unit size). The all-female corps could initially consist of Canadian and American females that would serve the interests of both friendly nations. This program could also be opened to the Five-Eyes community, thus greatly increasing diversity,

¹⁵ Andrea Shalal, Reuters. *U.S. Air Force launches push to recruit more women and minorities*. Accessed February 2, 2018. <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-airforce-diversity/u-s-air-force-launches-push-to-recruit-more-women-and-minorities-idUSKBN0M02CF20150304>.

¹⁶ Department of Defense, *2016 Demographics, Profile of the Military Community*, (Washington, DC: Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Military Community and Family Policy, 2016). 21. <http://download.militaryonesource.mil/12038/MOS/Reports/2016-Demographics-Report.pdf>

¹⁷ Department of National Defense, D2-386/2017E, *Strong Secure Engaged...*,105.

capability, and cooperation amongst the Five-Eye partners. With the support of the Five-Eyes community, this all-female corps could be the champion of female participation in the armed forces of the Five-Eyes nations. A new legacy, history, and most importantly, a female-focused corps would be able to set its own standards and policies to better reflect the particular needs of an all-female force. The corps could serve as its own unit or provide attachments to Five-Eyes missions. Additionally, the negative aspects of mixed-sex units (sexual harassment and assault) would be mostly eliminated thus providing a safe environment for potential recruits.

12. The second recommendation is that the CF create an all-female working group to attack the retention and recruitment problem. Males have historically been the leaders and decision makers within the CF (for the most part). Males do not have the cognisance and awareness of what drives females to join the Forces. While the sexes are equal, they are different. The old adage, “it takes one to know one” likely applies in the issue of retention and recruitment of female service members. In addition to an all-female working group, recruitment of CF females should examine the current social media trends and promote service through the known mediums prevalent to female social media users. For example, Pinterest is trafficked by 42% of female internet users compared to only 13% of males, and is acknowledged as a strong influencer for females, “Pinterest has tremendous reach among women.”¹⁸ A quick search of Pinterest shows that the Canadian Armed Forces’ Pinterest page only has 978 followers. 978 is relatively small

¹⁸ Business Insider Intelligence, “Women dominate most of social media, but men are more active on these two networks,” Last modified 25 Aug 2015, <http://www.businessinsider.com/demographics-of-social-media-by-gender-8-2015>.

considering the approximate population of females in Canada number 18.3 million.¹⁹ Facebook and Instagram also have greater percentages of female users than male.²⁰

13. The final recommendation is that the CF design and implement a limited “troops- to- teachers” program. Females, and males should be allocated as teachers within Canada’s high- school system. A tour length of three years should be applied to the teaching program. Getting service members into schools as teachers and mentors for a tour would benefit the CF as a whole. The benefits from the teaching program would firstly be in the matter of recruitment. Potential recruits would be able to put a face and personality to the CF vice what they see on television or an advertisement. The school program would also provide a period of stability for female (and male members) to attend to family matters and or have children. The time with students as a teacher would help with recruitment and retention, a two-fold victory at the cost of only three years of a member’s career. The added benefit to the troops-to-teachers program would be a greater awareness and respect overall of the CF throughout the Canadian population. The program can initially mimic the U.S. “Troops to Teachers” program that is designed for veterans leaving the service to become public-school teachers.²¹ Encouraging veterans and active-duty members to teach in public schools will increase the overall knowledge and respect of the Canadian public towards the Forces.

¹⁹ Canada, “Table 1, Population by sex, Canada, 1921 to 2061,” Accessed 31 Jan 2018, <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/89-503-x/2015001/article/14152/tbl/tbl1-eng.htm>.

²⁰ Business Insider Intelligence, “Women dominate most of social media, but men are more active on these two networks,”

²¹ United States, “Troops to Teachers – Proud to Serve Again,” Accessed 1 Feb 2018, <http://www.proudtoserveagain.com>.

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