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CANADIAN ARMED FORCES 25% WOMEN BY 2026: ATTAINABLE GOAL OR PIPE DREAM?

Lieutenant-Commander Nadia Shields

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INTRODUCTION

Attrition is one of the foremost factors affecting the Canadian Armed Forces' (CAF) expansion plans. Not only does the early departure of trained personnel affect force generation, but it also impacts the long-term stability require to strengthen the CAF establishment.¹ When the personnel departing are members of a minority, as in the case of this paper – women; the impact is even more evident.

The CAF has the goal of increasing the percentage of women from 15.9 percent to 25 percent by 2026 with the majority distributed over eight occupations: human resource administrator, financial services administrator, mobile support equipment operator, cook, medical technician, nurse, and logistics officer; otherwise known as support trades.² While the CAF is concerned with increasing its percentage of female recruits, the existing personnel policies are too general and do not reflect the core issues affecting women in the CAF. Should the CAF aim to meet its objective, it not only requires a woman-specific recruitment strategy, but also a targeted sustainment plan to retain the women already enrolled.

This paper will address the issues and mitigation strategies of recruitment and sustainment of women in the CAF by examining the history of gender equality, followed by the identification of core retention issues related to female members and compare

¹ Department of National Defence, CAF Retention Strategy: 2020-2025 [Draft], (Ottawa: DND Canada, 2020), 6.

² Department of National Defence, "Recruitment of Women in the Canadian Armed Forces", last accessed 06 March 2020, <https://www.canada.ca/en/department-national-defence/services/women-in-the-forces/recruitment-retention.html>.

those strategies with other foreign National Defence Forces. It will then conclude by suggesting potential mitigation strategies aimed to improve the attraction and retainment of women in the CAF to not only support its goal of a composition of 25 percent women, but to be able to consistently maintain that minimum percentage.

BACKGROUND

International Influence

Through the examination of the history of rights and equality, an appreciation of the challenges overcome by Canadian society, as well as the CAF, will be made evident; but so, will the disparity that continues to persist. Canada's human rights laws stem from the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), adopted by the United Nations (UN) in 1948, and provided 30 articles outlining universal human rights to be enjoyed by all persons. The first two articles address equality and freedom of discrimination which formed the basis of the Canadian Human Rights Act of 1977. This Act provides protection to people in Canada from discrimination, and arguably set the parameters for subsequent implementation and acceptance of further mechanisms within Canada that would define equal rights regardless of sex, sexual orientation, gender, race, or other affiliations.

Adopted in 1979 by the UN General Assembly, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) defines acts of discrimination against women and legally requiring States that have ratified the Convention to undertake measures to end all forms of discrimination which target women. Not only did it establish an international set of rights for women, an agenda by

which to guarantee those rights, but also a requirement for national reports to be submitted to the UN on measures undertaken to comply with their treaty obligations.³

This International Convention and all subsequent United Nations Security Council Resolutions (UNSCR) form the cornerstone upon which Canadian and CAF policies have evolved.

Canada and the CAF

From a Canadian perspective, subsequent policies have regulated equality within society by including the 1977 Canadian Human Rights Act (CHRA), stating that “all Canadians have the right to equality, equal opportunity, fair treatment, and an environment free of discrimination on the basis of sex, sexual orientation, marital status and family status.”⁴ Instead of permitting women to join the military following the CHRA, the CAF launched the trial employment of women; Servicewomen in Non-Traditional Environments and Roles (SWINTER) in 1979 and the Combat Related Employment of Women (CREW) in 1985. However, it was not until 1989 when three women, who brought claims before a Canadian Human Rights Tribunal, that the CAF was directed to cease CREW trials and “remove any remaining employment restrictions based on sex, with the exception of submarine duty”⁵ with that restriction being lifted in 2001.

³ Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, “*Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women*,” last accessed 19 May 2020, <https://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/cedaw/>.

⁴ Government of Canada, “Rights of Women,” last accessed 19 May 2020, <https://www.canada.ca/en/canadian-heritage/services/rights-women.html>.

⁵ Department of National Defence, “Women in the Canadian Armed Forces,” last accessed 19 May 2020, <http://www.forces.gc.ca/en/news/article.page?doc=women-in-the-canadian-forces/hnlh1xa3>.

In 1995, Canada enacted the Canadian Employment Equity Act “to achieve equality in the workplace so that no person shall be denied employment opportunities or benefits for reasons unrelated to ability.”⁶ The Act focuses on four main disadvantaged groups; women, aboriginal persons, persons with disabilities and visible minority; which also form the basis of each Defence Employment Equity Advisory Groups (DEEAG) that champion issues related to their specific members.

The timeline and examination of international and national policies, as well as the CAF’s initial reaction to the implementation of these policies, sets the framework by which to analyze which issues hinder the CAF’s attainment and sustainment of 25 percent female employment.

ATTAINMENT AND SUSTAINMENT ISSUES

In order to achieve the diversity target of 25 percent female representation within the designated 10-year period (2016 to 2026), the CAF has implemented new initiatives designed to attract woman. Recruitment, as well as the management of these initiatives are firmly linked to other employment issues such as sustaining interest and motivation. In the Armed Forces, more so than other organizations, “Careful recruitment is at the heart of any strategy to improve retention”⁷ as there is an expectation that personnel will commit themselves to the Organization for a number of years.

Despite the long-term attraction/retention plan, the results have fallen well short of their intended target; women are not joining at a rate commensurate with the CAF’s

⁶ Department of National Defence, *Canadian Armed Forces Employment Equity Report 2012-2013* (Ottawa: DND Canada, 2013), 8.

⁷ Alexandrou, Alex, and Roger Darby, “Human Resource Management in the Defence Environment,” in *Managing Defence in a Democracy* (Milton Park: Routledge, 2006), pp

Employment Equity (EE) goals. Total force percentage increased marginally from 14.6 percent in 2016 to 15.7 percent in 2019⁸; although there was some success from 2017-2019 when women accounted for 25 percent of cadets enrolled in the Regular Officer Training Programme (ROTP) at the Royal Military College.⁹ However, the EE statistics from 2017/18 indicate women accounted for only 20.7 percent of all ROTP officer cadets in the CAF.¹⁰ Not only must the CAF attract an increased percentage of female enrollees, but it must strive to retain those already within its ranks.

Director General Naval Strategic Readiness (DGNSR) convened a townhall with Naval Technical Officers (NTO) to gather feedback from women in the community on real and perceived barriers to recruitment and retention. The group did not discuss all barriers facing women, and the discussion was largely based on the women in attendance's personal experience; although, it could have been applied to most trades/women in the CAF. The following are a summary of two issues frequently contributing to job dissatisfaction and lack of retention.

Support of Family

The primary concern raised during the townhall point to an issue with occupation management both related to career timelines and occupation expectations which impact family planning. There was a general acknowledgement that the one-size-fits-all career path does not work for most people, but likely impacts women to a greater extent.¹¹ CAF

⁸ Government of Canada, *Improving Diversity and Inclusion in the Canadian Armed Forces*, (Ottawa: Report of the Standing Committee on National Defence, 42nd Parliament, 1st Session, 2019), 9.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 10.

¹⁰ Department of National Defence, *Canadian Armed Forces Employment Equity Report 2017-2018* (Ottawa: DND Canada, 2018), Annex A.

¹¹ Department of National Defence, *Record of Discussion – Women's NTO Townhall* (Ottawa: Canada, 2020), 6-7.

women are more likely than men to be dissatisfied with leadership within their occupation and chains of command (13.1 percent versus 9.6 percent) as well as workload demands (12.7 percent versus 9.5 percent).¹²

In a study conducted by Defence Research and Development Council (DRDC) on the perceptions of 335 women in the Regular Force from 12 CAF units and bases over the course of 45 focus groups, participants felt that there currently is little flexibility in work schedules to attend to family needs. “Military Family Resource Centres (MFRC) are not always well-equipped to assist families who need day care services and programs... [and] that family life (e.g. maternity leave) can negatively impact carer progression and impacts mostly women’s careers.”¹³ The issue of lack of adequate child care, as well as the unpaid labour for women have been cited as factors affecting women’s workload in the office and at home.

MFRCs are regionally managed and not all have employed measures to meet the demands on CAF families. The MFRC located in Esquimalt is licensed for 24 spots (from infant to preschool) serving a base of 5000 personnel and resulting in a 2 - 3 year waitlist; conversely MRFCs, with comparable base military populations, located in Trenton, Halifax, Petawawa and Winnipeg are licensed for between 83 – 283 children with a waitlist averaging 6 months.¹⁴ Although the CAF cannot change the labour distribution in members’ homes, nor the priorities associated with the different gender roles; it can, encourage leadership flexibility when employing members to find the balance between

¹² Department of National Defence, *CAF Retention Strategy 2020-25 [Draft]* (Ottawa: Canada, 2020), 9.

¹³ Department of National Defence, DRDC-RDDC-2017-L228, *Perceptions of Women in the Regular Force on Recruitment and Employment in the CAF: Top-line Findings* (Ottawa: DND Canada, 2017), 5.

¹⁴ Shields, N.L., “Inadequate Access to Day Care in CFB Esquimalt,” Briefing Note for Commander Royal Canadian Navy, RDIMs 454837 v3., (Ottawa: DND Canada, 24 July 2019).

their work and family, as well as monitor child care availability in areas where members are posted.

Support to Service Couples

The management of service couples and their respective careers is an important point to consider in the retainment of women in the CAF. As of 2019, 78 percent of married or common law CAF women were in service couples.¹⁵ If the military achieves its projected target of 25 percent women, and assuming no change to the disposition, 40 percent of the total CAF force will be composed of service couple members. This is a concerning point for CAF retention writ large. Of the Flag and General Officers who are women, BGen Carigan and LGen Whitecross, whom are both married with children, also had service spouses who released from the military to support their respective wife and family.¹⁶

Although women serving in high ranks can be utilized as a powerful messaging tool for recruitment and retention; these women have been unable to achieve professional success by balancing their work and family lives. “They have done it by eliminating and delaying the issue or taking on the traditional “breadwinner” gender role while their spouses took on the traditional “home and child-care” role.”¹⁷ Provisions need to be made on how service couples are managed and supported throughout both members’ career

¹⁵ Department of National Defence, *Record of Discussion – Women’s NTO Townhall* (Ottawa: Canada, 2020), 8.

¹⁶ Maurice, T.H., “Stopping the Talent Drain: Setting the Conditions for Female Retention in the Canadian Armed Forces” (Joint Command and Staff Program Directed Research Paper, Canadian Forces College, 2017), 43.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

paths. Otherwise, the CAF risks attrition of one or both members, with the likelihood being higher of the women seeking alternative employment to support their spouse.

STRATEGIES OF OTHER DEFENCE ESTABLISHMENTS

When analyzing the strategies employed by other defence establishments, focus will be placed on Australia, Britain and the United States of America as their populace and values most closely align with those of Canadian society and CAF culture. Additionally, they are identifiably the most similar countries to compare with women contributing to a similar proportion of the total workforce; 48 percent in Australia, 45 percent in Britain, 46 percent in the United States, and 49 percent in Canada.¹⁸ Although the context is different for each country, the challenges being experienced by defence establishments in each country is similar, as are the goals in each organization to attain greater female membership.

Australia

Commencing in 2011, the Department of Defence prioritized increasing female participation in the Australian Defence Force (ADF), “lifting restrictions on employment categories in 2013 with all ADF employment categories open to current serving ADF women since 2014.”¹⁹ Similar to Canada, Defence has introduced targets for women in the ADF, aiming for 25 percent in the Navy, 15 percent in the Army, and 25 percent in the Airforce by 2023. As of 2018, they have been able to achieve women in 17.9 percent

¹⁸ Scoppio, Grazia, “Diversity Best Practices in Military Organizations in Canada, Australia, the United Kingdom, and the United States,” *Canadian Military Journal* 9, no. 3 (2009): 23-26.

¹⁹ Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, “*Landmark Moment for Women in the ADF*,” last accessed 21 May 2020, <https://www.pmc.gov.au/news-centre/office-women/landmark-moment-women-adf>.

of their total permanent force (21.2 percent Navy, 14.3 percent Army, and 22.4 percent Airforce)²⁰ an increase from the initial 13 percent in 2009.²¹

By implementing a focus on recruitment of women, in combination with adapting existing policies to make the forces more appealing to women, ADF was able to achieve success where CAF has not. The ADF impetus, “is not necessarily to be ‘reflecting society,’ but to have a defence force that is fully manned.”²² By providing flexible working arrangements, maternity/paternity leave, and ‘on hold’ career options²³ they have been able to attract, retain, and grow women within their organization.

Britain

In the British Ministry of Defence (MoD), there is a Unified Diversity Strategy for all the MoD as well as two directorates that deal with diversity-related legislation, of which, the Director of Service Personnel Policy oversees the implementation for service personnel. However, women were under-represented in the armed forces, “female employment in Britain, as of 2002 was 45 percent, one of the highest in the European Union (EU) ... serving female armed forces personnel was 9.1 percent.”²⁴ Until 2016, women were excluded from participating in combat roles, and by 2018, all barriers to

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ Scoppio, Grazia, “Diversity Best Practices in Military Organizations in Canada, Australia, the United Kingdom, and the United States,” *Canadian Military Journal* 9, no. 3 (2009): 23.

²² *Ibid.*

²³ Department of Defence, “*Women in the ADF*,” last accessed 21 May 2020, <https://www.defencejobs.gov.au/about-the-adf/women-in-the-adf>.

²⁴ Scoppio, Grazia, “Diversity Best Practices in Military Organizations in Canada, Australia, the United Kingdom, and the United States,” *Canadian Military Journal* 9, no. 3 (2009): 25.

women applying for combat occupations within the British Armed Forces were removed.²⁵

In 2015, Shared Parental Leave was introduced for members of the Armed Forces, “allowing parents to share the care of their child’s first year following birth or adoption and is designed to give parents more flexibility in deciding how to best care for their child.”²⁶ Based on this change in policy, as well as availing all occupations to women, has resulted in an increase in female representation to 11.6 percent of the total force.²⁷ Although UK Armed Forces has implemented some improvements with respect to encouraging diversity amongst its Force, it has made consistent, albeit, marginal improvements in attracting women within its ranks.

United States of America

In 2007, the Office of the Secretary of Defense held its first Diversity Summit with the initial direction being to increase diversity amongst the general/flag officer ranks.²⁸ Given the relationship between career progression and combat experience, it became necessary to rescind the Direct Combat Exclusion Rule (2013), and the military was ordered to conduct a “Women in the Serve Review” (seminar to Canada’s

²⁵ Dearden, L., “Women now allowed to apply for Royal Marines and all other frontline military roles, defence secretary announces,” last accessed 21 May 2020, <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/women-soldiers-army-military-sas-defence-government-infantry-frontline-gavin-williamson-female-a8601371.html>.

²⁶ Ministry of Defence, *UK Armed Forces Biannual Diversity Statistics: 1 October 2019*,” last accessed 21 May 2020, https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/851974/UK_Armed_Forces_Biannual_Diversity_Statistics_-_1_October_2019.pdf.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ Scoppio, Grazia, “Diversity Best Practices in Military Organizations in Canada, Australia, the United Kingdom, and the United States,” *Canadian Military Journal* 9, no. 3 (2009): 25.

SWINTER and CREW) between 2013-2015.²⁹ Even with the opening of combat trades in 2015, the composition of women has increased marginally from 14.5 percent in 2009³⁰ to 16.5 percent in 2018.³¹

The marginal increase has less to do with a desire for women to join the combat trades. Since lifting the restrictions, women have demonstrated an increased interest to join, allowing the Army to integrated female officers in infantry and armour brigades in three additional bases in 2018.³² The marginal increase has more to do with the attitude of senior Department of Defense personnel. While speaking at the Virginia Military Institute, then Defense Secretary Mattis told the students that, “the jury is out on whether women can succeed in combat.”³³ His argument was predicated on the basis that the sample size of women who had completed selection, training, and who were now employed in combat roles was not substantial enough to make any determination on women’s future within those same positions. It also illustrates that transitional policies need to be supported by everyone within the organization in order to succeed; one person in the right position has just as much power to encourage diversity, as to stifle it.

RECOMMENDATION

²⁹ Swick, A. & Moore, E., “*The (Mostly) Good News on Women in Combat*,” last accessed 21 May 2020, <https://www.cnas.org/publications/reports/an-update-on-the-status-of-women-in-combat>

³⁰ Scoppio, Grazia, “Diversity Best Practices in Military Organizations in Canada, Australia, the United Kingdom, and the United States,” *Canadian Military Journal* 9, no. 3 (2009): 25.

³¹ Department of Defense, “*2018 Demographics Profile: Active Duty Members*,” last accessed 21 May 2020, <https://download.militaryonesource.mil/12038/MOS/Infographic/2018-demographics-active-duty-members.pdf>.

³² Moore, E., “*Women in Combat: Five-Year Status Update*,” last accessed 21 May 2020, <https://www.cnas.org/publications/commentary/women-in-combat-five-year-status-update>.

³³ Baldor, Lolita, “Mattis: The jury is still out on women succeeding in combat jobs,” last accessed 22 May 2020, <https://www.militarytimes.com/news/your-military/2018/09/25/mattis-jury-is-out-on-women-succeeding-in-combat-jobs/>.

Heterogenous/Homogenous Review of Policy

The main factors that can be gleaned from the analysis of Australia, Britain, and the United States is that when diversity is made a priority, a true priority of a defence establishment, targets can be achieved. This requires targeted attraction and recruiting programmes, policies that meet the need of the target group, and strong retention plans. Studies have shown that when children are introduced into relationships, it is the mother that is often absorbing the extra labour, based on a study by the Carsey Institute, "...74 percent of working mothers had stayed home from work to care for a sick child compared to 40 percent of working father."³⁴ When it comes to women in the CAF, those who have or want to have families, the ability to manage their competing demands in both personal and professional aspects of their lives require strong support from the CAF. This support system is a factor in both attraction and retention of women.

Although the CAF acknowledges that a holistic approach is required, it has been unable to apply this approach which has resulted in fragmented policies, programmes and incentives;³⁵ and strategic level documents which are too generalized to be applicable to members. For example, the British Armed Forces developed their Armed Forces Overarching Personnel Strategy (AFOPS), which is similar to CAF 'The Journey', designed to manage personnel from 'cradle to grave'. The weakness with the CAF policy is that it is still in its infancy and has not been translated from the strategic to the operational level. Within the British policy, each stage from attraction, to recruitment, to retention, to sustainment, and to departure; acknowledges that service members require

³⁴ Sterndale, Amy, "Carsey Institute at UNH: Lack of Sick Leave to Care for Children Creates Tough Choices for Parents," *University of New Hampshire*, 6 December 2012

³⁵ Department of National Defence, *CAF Retention Strategy 2020-25 [Draft]* (Ottawa: Canada, 2020), 3.

different and unique support. Within servicewomen membership, there are single women (with and without dependants), married women (within and without dependants), service couples, and divorced/separated women (with and without dependants).³⁶ The current CAF personnel policies are not flexible enough to be applied in a variety of situations, whereas AFOPS has flexibility built into its policy.

The National Defence Compensation and Benefits Instruction (CBI) for members, defines a dependant as someone who “occupies the principal residence on a full-time basis.”³⁷³⁸ However, this definition does not apply in cases where members, whom are divorced/separated with shared custody arrangements, incur additional living expenses as a result of being separated for service reasons.

In a 2017 General Social Survey conducted by The Vanier Institute of the Family, it was determined that 9 percent of the Canadian population were divorced or separated.³⁹ Assuming that, at a minimum, 9 percent of military members are divorced or separated, then the CBI is not applicable to the majority of members in this demographic and should be updated to include situations of shared dependant custody.

The same policy is an impediment for members whom are married with children and are relocated for service reasons. Due to a variety of reasons, these members, as the primary parent, may choose to relocate with their children but not their spouse; however, ‘Reverse Imposed Restriction’ is not a situation that is covered by either publication.

³⁶ Alexandrou, Alex, and Roger Darby, “Human Resource Management in the Defence Environment,” in *Managing Defence in a Democracy* (Milton Park: Routledge, 2006), 165.

³⁷ Department of National Defence, *Compensation and Benefits Instructions for the Canadian Forces* (Ottawa: DND Canada, 2017), 208.997(3)h, 69.

³⁸ Department of National Defence, *Canadian Military Personnel Instructions 01/17 – Imposed Restriction*, (Ottawa: DND Canada, 2017).

³⁹ The Vanier Institute of the Family, “*Divorce, Separation, and Uncoupling in Canada*,” last accessed 22 May 2020, <https://vanierinstitute.ca/facts-and-stats-divorce-separation-and-uncoupling-in-canada/>.

Members expect the CAF to honour certain principles that include providing, “...the member and their family a standard of living and/or quality of life that approximates the norm for those of similar professional/work status in Canadian society.”⁴⁰ This includes ensuring that, when required to relocate, families are afforded a relatively consistent level of community functions or, when required to/opting to be separated, appropriate additional support. Even though both the CBI and CF Mil Pers Instr were reviewed in 2017, they both fail to reflect the current and real familial situations of military members, as well as unfairly disadvantaging servicewomen; whom, as research has indicated, are responsible for the bulk of unpaid work in the household, including work related to childcare.

If the CAF is committed to a “holistic approach” to streamline and align its personnel policies; the review of process should include the members of the CAF to whom it applies. This would ensure it meets Gender Based Analysis (GBA+) but also does not unfairly disadvantage certain members of CAF.

⁴⁰ Okros, Alan, “Becoming an Employer of Choice: Human Resource Challenges within DND and the CF,” in *The Public Management of Defence in Canada* (Toronto: Breakout Education Network, 2009), 175.

CONCLUSION

With retention being a CAF priority, and the retention of women being necessary to attain the CAF's objective; the imbalance between recruiting and attrition of women must be addressed holistically. A specific and targeted attraction plan, combined with supporting policies, are both required in order to increase the percentage of women within the CAF.

It is important to formulate policies that assist in the retention of skilled and experienced military personnel⁴¹ while being transparent in its demands on personnel and viewed as 'equitable' by all members. Policies that support military families, support women. It is equally important to acknowledge that not every woman wants to have a family and children, but their ultimate progression within the CAF should not force them into a 'this or that' situation. Through flexibility of leadership, focus revision and/or introduction of policies that support military families, as well as members' careers, the CAF can attain its target of 25 percent women membership, albeit, not by 2026.

⁴¹ Brown, T.M., "Changing the Unchangeable – Recruitment and Retention of Women in the Canadian Military" (Joint Command and Staff Programme Paper, Canadian Forces College, 2015), 10.

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