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RECRUITING WOMEN IN THE CAF: THE CHALLENGES OF A 25 PERCENT REPRESENTATION

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**RECRUITING WOMEN IN THE CAF: THE CHALLENGES OF A 25 PERCENT
REPRESENTATION**

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RECRUITING WOMEN IN THE CAF: THE CHALLENGES OF A 25 PERCENT REPRESENTATION

AIM

1. The Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) is seeking to increase the strength of women in the forces by 2026. More specifically, Canada's Defence Policy, Strong, Secure, Engaged (SSE), states that one of the CAF's initiatives is to "Aspire to be a leader in gender balance in the military by increasing the representation of women by one percent annually over the next 10 years to reach 25 percent within the overall force"¹. Despite the best efforts in recruiting, this goal still remains to be a challenge. This paper will discuss the recruiting and retention issues to meet the SSE requirements and provide recommendations to overcome these challenges.

INTRODUCTION

2. In recent decades, women have been adopting a greater variety of roles in the CAF. In 1970, the Royal Commission on the Status of Women reported that women represented only 1.6 percent of the military, but by 1999, those figure rose to over 10 percent². Although the strength of women in the forces only grew to approximately 15 percent since then, this places Canada among the top of the 27 NATO countries, at an average of 10.3 percent as of 2014³. Despite the slow growth of female representation, the CAF is focused on adjusting to the changing security environment and increasing cultural diversity; this diversity contributes different viewpoints, skillsets and knowledge to the organization⁴.

¹ Department of National Defence, *Strong, Secure, Engaged: Canada's Defence Policy* (Ottawa: DND, 2017), 107

² Karen D. Davis, "Sex, Gender and Cultural Intelligence in the Canadian Forces," *Commonwealth & Comparative Politics* 47, 47, no. 4 (November 1, 2009): 431. doi:10.1080/14662040903375091.

³ North Atlantic Treaty Organization Office of the Gender Advisor International Military Staff, *Summary of the National Reports of NATO Member and Partner Nations 2014*. 7 (March 2016), 8.

⁴ Karen D. Davis "Sex, Gender and Cultural Intelligence in the Canadian Forces," *Commonwealth & Comparative Politics* 47, 47, no. 4 (November 1, 2009): 431. doi:10.1080/14662040903375091.

3. Research has found a variety of reasons why women are reluctant to join the forces, and the CAF has initiated various recruiting activities to address the shortfalls, but the numbers are not increasing at the target rate. During an Op GENERATION panel, it was stated that there is “data and indications that women do not want to be recruited as women, they want to be seen as part of a team, not just a percentage or number”⁵. However, it is stated in SSE that the Defence team will be “contributing to peace and security through re-engaging in United Nations (UN) peace operations, providing training, supporting development and empowering women and girls”⁶. This is an indication that the messaging is not clear and must be changed to ensure that women know that they have a purpose in the forces, that it is not just an exercise in elevating statistics.

DISCUSSION

4. To introduce the challenges the CAF is facing in the campaign to recruit women, a strong understanding of the current statistics is required. Between FY 16/17 and 17/18, there was an increase in overall recruitment of ~10 percent, however, over the same period of time, the percentage of women’s enrollment only rose by 0.03 percent (from 17.06 to 17.09 percent). In addition, in FY 17-18, ~39 percent of female recruits spanned only 11 MOSIDs, almost 90 percent of which were logistics or medical trades⁷. In June 2016, NCM clerical personnel and officer support trades made up 63.8 and 33.9 percent, respectively, whereas combat arms NCMs consisted of 1.9 percent women⁸. A study by The Earncliffe Strategy group found that if the variety of trades and associated specialized training were better communicated, women would be

⁵ Senior CAF officer as part of a panel of Op GENERATION, “Op GENERATION Panel” (NSP discussion, Canadian Forces College, Toronto ON, October 4, 2003), with permission.

⁶ Department of National Defence, *Strong, Secure, Engaged: Canada's Defence Policy* (Ottawa: DND, 2017), 92.

⁷ Canadian Force Recruiting Group, “Recruiting Women Extract”, 4 April 2018, Slide 6.

⁸ Department of National Defence, *Short Term Numerical Employment Equity Goal Calculator* (Ottawa: DRDC, 25 October 2016), 3.

more persuaded to enroll⁹. The marginal overall increase of female enrolment and the high concentration of women in traditional female trades, lends to the conclusion that not only does the CAF need to change its messaging to diversify the employment of women in the forces, but the spectrum of employment opportunities needs to be better communicated to avoid oversaturation of the MOGs highly populated by women.

5. In 2016, The Privy Council Office (PCO) conducted preliminary research to identify key recruitment issues. The findings reported five main reasons why women are reluctant to join. These are: relocation, leave without pay, childcare support, the ability to release, and attitudes toward women¹⁰. The first of two long-term recommendations were to review the CAF policies related to these concerns. The first four findings are concerns that predominantly orient around career flexibility and changes in personal situations. The CAF is addressing these concerns, as an SSE initiative to conduct “a review of conditions of service and career paths to allow much more personalized career choices and flexibility”¹¹. These concerns are more refined in “The Journey”, which would permit a service member to tailor their type of employment to their current personal requirements. The CDS directed that this program to be implemented as soon as possible, which will effectively ensure the research-recommended policy changes are implemented¹². When the Journey will commence, however, is still uncertain. An imminent implementation of this program would therefore not only attract more women, but retain them when they wish to start a family or any other personal situation that may arise.

⁹ Earncliffe Strategy Group, *The Recruitment and Employment of Women in the Canadian Armed Forces: Research Report* (Ottawa: DND, 2017), 4.

¹⁰ Privy Council Office, *Behavioral insights project: Increasing recruitment of Women into the Canadian Armed Forces*, (Ottawa: Canada Communication Group, 2017), 6-7.

¹¹ Department of National Defence, *Strong, Secure, Engaged: Canada's Defence Policy* (Ottawa: DND, 2017), 22.

¹² Stephen J. Thorne, “CAF needs to be more diverse, says general,” last modified June 19, 2017, <https://legionmagazine.com/en/2017/06/caf-needs-to-be-more-diverse-says-general/>.

6. The second recommendation by the PCO is a “try before you buy” program, permitting potential enrollees to get a feel for the forces before enrollment¹³. In 2017, Canadian Forces Recruiting Group (CFRG) initiated a “Women in Forces Program”, which ran two courses at CFB Borden and two at Saint-Jean Garrison. The program was to enable women to learn about a career in the military, without committing¹⁴. Out of the 120 available spots, 98 people actually enrolled. Out of these numbers, 46 women demonstrated interest, but as of April 2018, only nine had enrolled or were in the process of enrolling. The program demonstrated a success rate of nine percent, which compared to the ~17 percent regular enrollment, questions the effectiveness of this initiative¹⁵. Considering that the courses at the Saint Jean garrison were conducted from the Canadian Forces Leadership and Recruit School (CFLRS), who were not only struggling to augment the number of staff due to the increase in the Strategic Intake Plan (SIP) in response to Op GENERATION, but already experienced difficulty obtaining fair female representation of instructors posted to the unit. Removing these instructors from the training platoons to prepare for and deliver this additional training is quite taxing on the school. The cost-benefit of this initiative must therefore be further analyzed.

7. The Earnscliffe study indicated that knowledge of the CAF was very limited and the participant’s impressions were greatly influenced by news stories and fictional movies¹⁶. Since the beginning of the recruitment campaign, CFRG initiated several awareness activities oriented toward women. For instance, in December 2017, CFB Edmonton hosted a dozen women influencers from the Prairie Provinces to demonstrate what the military can offer. The force test

¹³ Privy Council Office, *Behavioral insights project: Increasing recruitment of Women into the Canadian Armed Forces*, (Ottawa: Canada Communication Group, 2017), 6-7.

¹⁴ Department of National Defence, "The Women in Force Program, a new Canadian Armed Forces initiative for women," last modified 31 May 2017, https://www.canada.ca/en/department-nationaldefence/news/2017/05/the_women_in_forceprogramanewcanadianarmedforcesinitiativeforwom.html.

¹⁵ Canadian Force Recruiting Group, “Recruiting Women Extract”, 4 April 2018, Slide 6-7.

¹⁶ Earnscliffe Strategy Group, *The Recruitment and Employment of Women in the Canadian Armed Forces: Research Report* (Ottawa: DND, 2017), 6.

was among the activities that the women participated¹⁷. This is an excellent initiative, as a popular misconception among the women test groups is that they are not fit enough to endure physical training activities, such as the force test, or even basic training¹⁸. Hosting women influencers is an excellent initiative by the CAF, however CFRG must follow up after the activity to ensure that they have the resources to inspire women in their industry in order to dispel some of these misconceptions.

8. The Earnscliffe study, which corresponds with the PCO's fifth finding, also found that due to the influence of media stories of sexual harassment, there is still stigma around a sexualized military culture and negative treatment toward women in the CAF¹⁹. With news articles entitled "Still embroiled in allegations of pervasive sexual misconduct among its ranks, the CAF is holding steady on its goal of increasing the number of women in the military..."²⁰ the stigma is still present. Although the CAF instituted Op HONOUR after the Deschamps report was released, if the CAF were to raise the recruitment levels, more positive messaging and the seriousness of Op HONOUR incidents must be communicated.

9. Referring back to increasing numbers in non-traditional MOGs, it has been noted that 310 women were employed in combat roles in the ten years in Afghanistan, which was three times more than any other peacekeeping mission for any previous decade. This demonstrates the attitude that women are capable of filling any role asked of them²¹. Some officer cadets were

¹⁷ Kim Smith, "Canadian Armed Forces pushes for more women: 'I'm a woman in the military and I love it,'" Last modified 5 January 2018, <https://globalnews.ca/news/3923213/canadian-armed-forces-women-military/>.

¹⁸ Privy Council Office, *Behavioral insights project: Increasing recruitment of Women into the Canadian Armed Forces*, (Ottawa: Canada Communication Group, 2017), 6.

¹⁹ Earnscliffe Strategy Group, *The Recruitment and Employment of Women in the Canadian Armed Forces: Research Report* (Ottawa: DND, 2017), 30.

²⁰ Amy Minsky, "Reality Check: Is the Armed Forces' goal to bring on more women out of reach?," Last modified 7 June 2017, <https://globalnews.ca/news/3510377/military-culture-women-defence-policy-review/>.

²¹ Valerie Fortney, "Canada's Female Soldiers Took on Combat Roles," *The Gazette*, 1 March, 2012. <https://search.proquest.com/docview/926050245>.

inspired to join arms trades due to female role models like Capt Nichola Goddard²². The Earnscliffe study found that recruitment would be more effective if women were able to hear testimonials and have frank discussions with established women in the forces²³. In order to not only gain momentum in recruiting women, but to diversify into under represented MOGs, such as combat trades, more publication of this type needs to be communicated. Combat engineer, BGen Jennie Carignan has demonstrated the effectiveness of outreach by established female CAF leaders. As the Commandant of RMC Saint-Jean, the “stereotype-defying mother of four” raised the female enrollment rate at the college from 10 to 25 percent during her tenure by personally engaging “girls and their mothers at open houses and appeared in the Quebec Media”, on her way to commanding 2nd Canadian Division²⁴. Not only did she prove that this method attracts potential female recruits, her accomplishment demonstrates that women can be successful in the forces. The study also found that social media was the preferred communication platform of younger women. Depicting professionals in a realistic work environment, not staged videos, received a positive reaction from the test group²⁵. Using an outreach approach, combined with leveraging the younger generation with social media has the potential to reach a wider target audience.

10. As discussed, women want to be seen as part of the team based on their merits, and not a just a recruiting number. This is an indication that the purpose of having a representative portion of the population is not clearly understood. In addition to bringing a different perspective of to

²² Valerie Fortney, “Women Dig in at the Front Lines; The Afghan Conflict Marked the Beginning of a New Era for Female Soldiers Serving in Combat,” *The Vancouver Sun*, 1 March, 2012. <https://search.proquest.com/docview/926051076>.

²³ Earnscliffe Strategy Group, *The Recruitment and Employment of Women in the Canadian Armed Forces: Research Report* (Ottawa: DND, 2017), 74.

²⁴ Meagan Campbell, “Meet the world’s first female combat general,” Last modified 12 April 2018, <https://www.macleans.ca/news/canada/jennie-carignan-will-be-the-first-female-general-from-the-combat-arms-trades/>.

²⁵ Earnscliffe Strategy Group, *The Recruitment and Employment of Women in the Canadian Armed Forces: Research Report* (Ottawa: DND, 2017), 5.

the forces, SSE specifically addresses the importance of women's roles in operations. For instance, it addresses Canada's contribution to UN Security Resolution (UNSCR) 1325²⁶. The resolution states that "civilians, particularly women and children, account for the vast majority of those adversely affected by armed conflict"²⁷. Deploying women on peacekeeping operations is a critical mandate to not only to Canada's Defence Policy, but to Canada's National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security. This is best stated as "... the promotion of gender equality and empowerment of women and girls is the most effective approach for Canada to reduce poverty, and build a more inclusive, peaceful and prosperous world"²⁸. Not only does it take women to empower women, it also takes women to change attitudes about women. In an Op ATHENA documentary, for example, a female member of the Operational Mentoring and Liaison Team Member (OMLT) had proven to the Afghan soldiers that she can execute the same tasks as her male counterpart²⁹. The work of this female Canadian soldier at the tactical level created a small, but important incremental impact toward empowering women in underdeveloped countries. This is the type of messaging that is required if the CAF were to break the perception that women are being recruited merely to raise the percentage of females in the forces.

CONCLUSION

11. The mandate to increase women in the forces from 15 to 25 percent by the year 2026 will be a challenge. An augmentation of 0.3 percent between FYs 16/17 and 17/18 means that in order to compensate for this shortfall, the CAF will need to exceed the targeted one percent annual growth in the upcoming years. The Women in Forces program yielded results that are

²⁶ Department of National Defence, *Strong, Secure, Engaged: Canada's Defence Policy* (Ottawa: DND, 2017), 85.

²⁷ United Nations Security Council, *Resolution 1325*, (New York: UN, 2000), 1.

²⁸ Government of Canada, *Canada's National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security 2017-2022: The Implementation Plans* (Ottawa), 3.

²⁹ "OP ATHENA – Combat, Convince, Construct," YouTube video, 15:00, posted by "Canadian Army," 5 November 2012, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1en10QGN9go>.

lower than the regular recruiting campaign, questioning if the effort in the program is beneficial. In order to attract more women, the PCO study found that flexibility in their careers is of primary concern and suggested that the CAF should institute policy changes to make the military more attractive. These issues are being addressed in SSE and, eventually, 'The Journey'. The Earnscliffe report found that messaging and misconceptions are key influencers, not only in what women are capable of achieving in the military, but the negative connotation of a sexualized culture. Further, the message isn't clear regarding why the CAF needs women, beyond being a positive statistic. In today's security environment and peacekeeping, women need to know that not only they are capable of success in any military occupation, but that their contributions to deployed operations are critical.

RECOMMENDATIONS

12. If the CAF is to increase from 15 to 25 percent, several initiatives need to be implemented. As predominant concerns orient around relocation, leave without pay, childcare support and contract flexibility, The Journey must be implemented immediately in order to force policy changes that address the career flexibility that women are concerned with.
13. The Women in Forces program generated results well below the regular recruiting rate of 17%. A cost-benefit analysis is recommended to determine whether programming additional serials would be advantageous, taking to account the resources invested into an already over taxed training system. In the same context, women influencer programs conducted at CFB Edmonton had a positive effect on the target audience. It is recommended that these programs continue to be conducted. If established female professionals such as teachers can succeed in challenges like the force test, they can further influence younger women when considering career

options. CFRG must follow up with these professionals once they complete the program in order to provide adequate guidance and resources to enable them to accomplish this.

14. Messaging is a critical factor. People are heavily influenced by media; therefore this medium must be optimized to its full potential to communicate the themes discussed in this paper. It is recommended that messaging through social media platforms address specific concerns, including:

- a. the benefits and flexibility that the CAF has to offer in context of The Journey;
- b. the progress made and consequences of Op HONOUR; and
- c. messaging on the changing security environment, the different perspectives women contribute to the overall organization and how critically important they are on deployed operations.

15. Involvement of women role models. The involvement of high ranking women to message that there is no limit to what can be accomplished will influence the recruitment rate. Women who have deployed in non-conventional occupations should also lend testimonials and participate at more events, such as career fairs and on-line videos, to speak on the difference they have made.

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