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## MEETING RECRUITING TARGETS OF WOMEN: CHALLENGES OF ATTRACTION

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### JCSP 45

#### Service Paper

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CANADIAN FORCES COLLEGE/COLLÈGE DES FORCES CANADIENNES  
JCSP 45/PCEMI 45  
15 Oct 2018

DS545 COMPONENT CAPABILITIES

**MEETING RECRUITING TARGETS OF WOMEN – CHALLENGES OF  
ATTRACTION**

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Word Count: 2,287

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Nombre de mots: 2,287

## **MEETING RECRUITING TARGETS OF WOMEN – CHALLENGES OF ATTRACTION**

### **AIM**

1. Within the new defence policy, *Strong, Secure, Engaged* (SSE), the Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) have been directed to increase recruiting of women by 1% annually for the next 10 years to reach a target of 25% by the year 2026.<sup>1</sup> The aim of this service paper is to provide insight into the potential impediments and solutions to achieving this goal.

### **INTRODUCTION**

2. A precipice for change, the 1989 ruling by the Human Rights Tribunal to fully integrate women into all occupations within the CAF can be viewed as a historic time stamp for Canadian gender integration.<sup>2</sup> Almost 30 years later, the CAF as an employer is still underrepresenting the diverse society it supports. Statistics Canada (StatCan) reported that Canadian women represent approximately 50.4% of the population and their contribution to the labour market is about 71%.<sup>3</sup> Today, women represent 15.3% within the CAF while in 2001 that figure was 11.4%.<sup>4</sup> Instilling a growth target to 25% for the next ten-year period may be quite ambitious given the increases to female representation thus far. However, with continued access to a large and growing labour market this is completely achievable. The challenge is to find balance and applicable solutions to both pillars of recruitment and retention that are contributing to the under representation of women within the CAF. Understanding, each come with their own challenges and unique barriers, this paper will focus on the issue of recruiting only.

3. As the CAF continues to meet its allocated targets for overall recruitment of personnel each year, it can be assumed that the current strategies and means of attraction are successful at eliciting interest. Where improvements need to be made to increase female representation are in the specific and dedicated gender diversity attraction techniques and the underlying cultural narratives that are limiting female attraction. Approximately 17% of total CAF enrollees over the last two years were female and the CAF has recognized that success of recruiting can no longer be measured in just enrollment but by measuring the number of enrollees who reach their respective Operationally Functional Point (OFP).<sup>5</sup> Therefore, measuring this recruiting trend against a mandate of 25% in 8 years does not allow for much time to significantly bolster female enrollment without addressing some of the root causes of lack of female attraction. In addition to the need to adjust techniques, perhaps it is time to adjust the narrative that delivers employment opportunities in the CAF. With 21<sup>st</sup> century warfare evolving away from the traditional battlefield and the current political emphasis on Peacekeeping, does this change the attributes the CAF is attracting in a soldier? Finally, the increased reports and media attention depicting the

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<sup>1</sup> Department of National Defence, *Strong, Secure, Engaged: Canada's Defence Policy* (Ottawa: DND, 2017), 23.

<sup>2</sup> Canadian Human Rights Commission, *Tribunal Decision 3/89 between: Isabelle Gauthier, Joseph G. Houlden, Marrie-Claude Gauthier, Georgina Ann Brown (Complainants) and Canadian Armed Forces (Respondent)* (Ottawa: 1989).

<sup>3</sup> Statistics Canada, *Table 14-10-0287-01 Labour Force Characteristics, Monthly, Seasonally Adjusted and Trend-Cycle, Last 5 Months* (Ottawa: 2018).

<sup>4</sup> Department of National Defence, *Women in the Canadian Armed Forces – Background* (Ottawa: DND, 2018).

<sup>5</sup> J. H. Vance, *Joint CDS/DM Directive: Operation Generation* (Ottawa: National Defence, 2018), 5.

CAF as a sexualized culture and toxic workplace may also be limiting attraction from Canadian females.

## DISCUSSION

4. A bi-annual report conducted by Earncliffe Strategy Group for DND concluded that “awareness and familiarity with the CAF was generally very low; virtually non-existent among those in the 18-34 age group.”<sup>6</sup> If the ideal target market for the CAF is that same age group, it becomes very difficult to increase attraction to an even narrower gender group if general awareness continues to flounder. With the CAF wide effort through Operation GENERATION, it has been recognized that past recruitment approaches lacked coordinated targeting efforts and were solely reactive in nature.<sup>7</sup> The conduct of operations for this newly released initiative will see proactive, data-enabled and talent-focused attraction efforts to achieve the targeted SSE goals.<sup>8</sup> Although these are great strides in the right direction, to truly promote awareness to create attraction within the female demographic, focus needs to be shifted to earlier in the adolescent development stage, away from the traditional career fairs and wrapped with personnel connections.

5. By shifting focus of time and space, the recruitment process can target the timeframe in which adolescent goals and objectives towards post secondary education and employment begin to take form. Through examples such as sport teams, competitions, clubs, community centers, and summer camps, the use of data analytics could target female participation and the associated talent and attributes that align with CAF occupations. By dedicating and shifting focus outside of the career fairs, the target audience grows substantially by tapping into females at a younger age and presumably their parents who are also present for their extra curricular activities. Athletic coaches start scouting for talent years before an athlete is scheduled to graduate high school. During this time, relationships are formed with both the athlete and their parents, and awareness and education are fostered early. Using data enabled analytics in this decentralized awareness approach could prove very beneficial however the other vital piece becomes emphasizing the personal connection. If a female can gain a greater sense of not only awareness of what the CAF has to offer but have feelings of similarity and acceptance stimulated by engaging with another females who have already been through the process, then the potential for attraction can increase.

6. Director General Military Personnel Research and Analysis (DGMPPRA) conducted a study focused on women in the Canadian public and found that 83% stated they would not consider a career in the CAF.<sup>9</sup> Reasons cited varied from the requirement to move from family, perception of ill treatment by co-workers, association with a profession of aggression and the concern for diagnosis of mental health issues.<sup>10</sup> While these perceptions may take time to adjust if even at all, having an experienced and passionate female increasing awareness on behalf of the

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<sup>6</sup> Marc Montgomery, "Canadians and the Military: We Like You, but what do You do?" *Radio Canada International*, 20 July 2018.

<sup>7</sup> Vance, *Joint CDS/DM Directive: Operation Generation...*, 4.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 12.

<sup>9</sup> Diane Riddell, "On the Road to Greater Representation of Women in the CAF," *Army News Article, Project number: 17-0095* (April 2017).

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*

CAF could conduct that face to face communication to alleviate concerns, correct assumptions and provide exposure to new information that defies current perceptions. Dedicating CAF females, serving and retired to create this connection could provide a strong role model to look up to and ideally provide young females someone to aspire to emulate. Under Operation GENERATION and with data enabled analytics on hand, examining avenues to include current CAF women to be involved in this process through their own geographic locations could informally boost CAF attraction from the Canadian female population.

7. Aside from technical strategies, there are some narratives founded in CAF culture that may need to be adjusted to boost attraction from the female population. One of the underlying cultural narratives being the CAF, the Canadian Army and the concept of combat and fighting are one in the same. Communicating to the Canadian public that although there are Universality of Service requirements underpinned by physical and medical fitness standards and a common level of basic training, there are over 100 different full and part time career paths that contribute to the operational effectiveness of the CAF, all open to women. The Women in Force Program (WFP) launched in 2017 is an initiative to expose and provide opportunities for women to learn about military life before they decide to join.<sup>11</sup> While the WFP is a creative avenue to garner attraction using a hands-on approach, it is still in its infancy stage of accessing the greater target market and does not really delve into the plethora of career opportunities that stray from the traditional perceptions of what one does in basic training. With a constant rise in women graduating with degrees in Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) than ever before and 67% of women in Canada attaining overall a post-secondary degree, female interest is out there and growing in those non-traditional fields.<sup>12</sup> The CAF needs to find way to communicate those career opportunities that mirror the skills being achieved in those fields. Additionally, leveraging the unique career opportunities the Air Force, Navy and Special Operations elements also provide may prove to cast a wider net of female attraction through communication of how those elements differ and how they deliver their functions through their capabilities.

8. To understand some of the external influencing factors to support a cultural change in narrative, focus can shift to the global perspective. The United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSR) 1325 was a breakthrough calling for participation of women across the world in peace processes at all levels including prevention, negotiations and the importance of full involvement for the maintenance and promotion of peace and security and Canada is in full support.<sup>13</sup> SSE affirms this commitment through explicit emphasis on the CAF doing its part in Canada's contribution to a more stable, peaceful world including, through peace support operations and peacekeeping.<sup>14</sup> If barriers of societal perceptions surrounding accepted gender role definitions are not going to change anytime soon, then there may be room to appeal to some of the traditional feminine traits that have steered females away from a militarized institution in the past. Emphasizing the CAFs focus and global emphasis on peacekeeping initiatives and the associated future employment opportunities could prove successful in attracting those who previously related the CAF to just combat and aggression. Whether right or wrong, society

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<sup>11</sup> Sarah Boesveld, "Marketing the Military to Women," *Chatelaine* (2017).

<sup>12</sup> Randstad, "More Women are Graduating with STEM Degrees than Ever Before," last modified 30 July 2018, [https://www.randstad.ca/workforce360-trends/archives/women-with-stem-degrees-are-on-the-rise\\_1771/](https://www.randstad.ca/workforce360-trends/archives/women-with-stem-degrees-are-on-the-rise_1771/).

<sup>13</sup> United Nations Security Council, *Resolution 1325* (New York: UN, 2000).

<sup>14</sup> Department of National Defence, *Strong, Secure, Engaged: ...*, 14.

maintains constructed definitions of masculine and feminine traits and a military institution reinforces the acceptance of masculinity through its socialization processes. If female representation is to increase amongst current societal norms, then methods to attract should also focus on creating connections via society's definition of feminine characteristics. Emphasizing a place in the CAF for empathy, sensitivity, compassion and caring may prove to resonate with more females and thus connect back to the bigger picture of effecting change through CAF employment.

9. The recent findings of the Deschamps Report from 2015 have undoubtedly placed a barrier to attraction and arguably a disdain for employment in the CAF at this time. Upon release of the report, the media communicated the CAF as having a "highly sexualized culture that is hostile to women and other minority groups."<sup>15</sup> Upon the public revelation of the reported harmful and inappropriate behaviour being conducted throughout the CAF, responses were varied. Criticisms continue to paint the CAF as a toxic work environment with ill regard for member personal safety and overall mental health while other views, typically of younger generations indicate similar behaviours are prevalent in society and the CAF is not immune.<sup>16</sup> The CAF's reaction included the launch of Operation HONOUR to formally eliminate, hold those accountable for their actions, be responsive and ensure commitment to a safe and respectful workplace for all.<sup>17</sup> Despite CAF leadership reacting quickly and taking accountability for the organizational level failings that lead to the current state of affairs, the impression left on the Canadian public will take much longer to correct.

10. This barrier becomes the most significant and the hardest to overcome. The CAF is already experiencing an uphill battle to strengthen its diversity and the public revelation of an unsafe workplace adds an additional layer of complication. Increasing attraction for a minority demographic can be done through resources, data-enabled targeting and appealing to cultural norms and desires however, when the choice for a potential minority applicant becomes an organization that values personal safety over one that doesn't, the odds start to dwindle. With the Canadian unemployment rate in a decreasing trend, the competition in the labour force can be fierce and if pay, benefits and job satisfaction are all comparable, the perception of a workplace culture that marginalizes minorities could weigh significantly into decision making to apply to join the CAF. To shift perceptions the CAF has already taken the first critical steps by pledging to look after its members and meaning it. StatCan indicates there are quantitative signs that Operation HONOUR is having an impact on its members, through survey results of trust in leadership to deal effectively when issues arise and on the increased number of reported occurrences hypothesizing an increase in awareness of bystander responsibilities.<sup>18</sup> As much as this is not an overnight process to correct within the CAF, the public perception and associated attraction will also take an investment of time and perseverance. Through a continued unified front by the CAF, the female demographic can begin to understand that despite the prevalence of

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<sup>15</sup> Marie Deschamps, *External Review into Sexual Misconduct and Sexual Harassment in the Canadian Armed Forces* (External Review Authority, 2015).

<sup>16</sup> Boesveld, "Marketing the Military to Women."

<sup>17</sup> Department of National Defence, *Harmful and Inappropriate Sexual Behaviour Statistics Summary* (Ottawa: DND, 2018).

<sup>18</sup> Department of National Defence, *Canadian Armed Forces Third Progress Report on Addressing Inappropriate Sexual Behavior* (Ottawa: DND, 2017).

sexualized and harmful behaviour in society, the CAF has zero tolerance and will take action to protect its members.

## **CONCLUSION**

11. Attraction as a large pillar of recruiting will continue to challenge the CAF's ability to successfully meet SSE's outlined target of 25% female representation by 2026. The most prevalent barriers challenging this success are the limited strategic techniques to access the target market, the established CAF cultural narratives further solidifying masculine and feminine characteristics and the perceptions of an organization that treats the demographic on the margins differently. With Operation GENERATION, the CAF is very cognizant it needs to transform its recruiting approach and requires support from all levels. The population of Canadian women provides an ample target market of which to access, leaving the onus on the CAF to optimize.

## **RECOMMENDATION**

12. It is recommended that through the support of Operation GENERATION and within the proactive systems approach identified, further process development specific to female attraction be explored. Specifically, there is potential to leverage current female serving members once the CAF can utilize data and analytics to target specific Canadian demographics. Allocating resources towards creating a centralized program that enables female members within their geographic locations to individually connect and inform local female demographics, could bring exponential success to the CAF's overall recruiting targets. Additionally, leveraging the WFP concept and expanding opportunities to explore other CAF elements amongst various base and wing locations as well as programs to explore the differentiation between occupations, may prove to further inform and attract.

13. Changing the cultural narratives that may contribute to increased female attraction will continue to require a dedicated approach from the CAF in its entirety. Continued work to inform the public, maintain transparency and deliver on its objectives will positively reinforce to the Canadian public that the CAF is an employer of choice.

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