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IMPROVING CAF FEMALE REPRESENTATION

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IMPROVING CAF FEMALE REPRESENTATION

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IMPROVING CAF FEMALE REPRESENTATION

AIM

1. This paper will examine the impediments to and possible solutions for achieving the Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) goal of increasing female representation to 25% by 2026.¹ It will inform key advisors and leaders on what weaknesses current research has indicated in Department of National Defence's (DND) current recruiting and retention strategies and what practices other nations are employing to increase female participation in their respective military forces. It concludes with recommendations for potential areas of study and policy development to improve recruitment and retention of female membership in the CAF.

INTRODUCTION

2. Although women have been participated in the Canadian military for over 100 years, female membership has only started to increase significantly in the last two decades, with representation increasing from 11.4% in 2001 to 15.3% in 2018.² Despite these increases, the CAF has neglected to reach its Employment Equity obligation of 25% female membership.³ With an average rate of increase of 0.3% annually, the target of 25% by 2026 will be difficult to achieve.⁴ Thus, the purpose here is to determine additional approaches to bolster current DND initiatives in increasing female membership.

3. The approach taken is a review of jurisdictional and research reports and academic literature. This provides an understanding of both the obstacles and solutions affecting female recruiting and retention, which are the key enablers to increasing the military female population. The discussion focusses on recruiting and retention, by first outlining the dilemmas in each area, then articulating DND's current approach and finally advocating potential other solutions from both the literature examined and the author's assessment. It will close with a series of recommendations that DND should consider in order to optimize its efforts in meeting its stated objectives.

DISCUSSION

¹Bruce Campion-Smith, "Canadian military falling well short of its target for recruiting women," *Canadian Broadcasting Corporation*, June 05, 2018, <https://www.cbc.ca/news/politics/armed-forces-women-recruiting-1.4691356> (accessed October 09, 2018).

²Canadian Armed Forces, "Women in the Canadian Armed Forces. Backgrounder / March 7, 2018," <http://www.forces.gc.ca/en/news/article.page?doc=women-in-the-canadian-armed-forces/izkjzueu> (accessed October 07, 2018).

³Office of the Auditor General of Canada, *2016 Fall Reports of the Auditor General of Canada. Report 5—Canadian Armed Forces Recruitment and Retention—National Defence*, 2016, 10.

⁴Department of National Defence, *Department of National Defence response to Report 5, Canadian Armed Forces recruiting and retention, of the Fall 2016 Reports of the Auditor General of Canada*, 2018, 2-3. The percentage of women in the Regular and Reserve Force were 14.9% in April 2016, 15.2% in March 2017 and 15.4% in February 2018.

Recruitment

Issues

4. Recent studies on the recruiting of women identified that despite favourable attitudes towards the military, many drawbacks precluded them from considering a military career. These included moving away from friends and family; the potential for physical and psychological harm; hostile attitudes towards women; the perception that military obligations could interfere with having a family and that the physical challenges were too difficult to overcome.⁵

5. Nonetheless, it was noted that women were three times as likely to consider joining the military if they could pursue a career of their primary interest. In addition, women who were knowledgeable about the military were also three times as likely to consider joining.⁶ Increasing knowledge regarding the wide variety of jobs and benefits available in the CAF could enhance the attractiveness of a military career to prospective recruits.⁷

6. Acknowledging the positive correlation between knowledge of the military and likelihood to enrol, the studies identified that the best communication channel is through electronic media.⁸ These means should present the full range of opportunities and realistic images of women working alongside their male counterparts, which are more aspirational than the staged pictures of women in the gym or surrounded by other women.⁹ The most effective and appealing tactics suggested include presentations by female members, either through interactions with female recruiters or video or blog testimonials, which can be easily consumed on social media. The stories of female members increase interest if they describe what military life is like, discuss the transferability of skills and experiences to employment outside of the military, and the opportunities for and journey towards career advancement.¹⁰ CAF female members should be solicited to provide their testimonials either on-line or during recruiting events.

7. Despite improving the odds of recruiting through increased knowledge about the CAF, the drawbacks linked to relocation, work-life balance and freedom and flexibility, are great enough to deter many in considering joining.¹¹ As such, focussing on recruiting women into the Reserve Force may be the more successful approach to increase women membership, as it

⁵Earncliffe Strategy Group, *The Recruitment and Employment of Women in the Canadian Armed Forces*, 2016, 4 & 7-8; Douglas Yeung et al., *Recruiting Policies and Practices for Women in the Military* (Santa Monica: RAND Corporation, 2017), 37.

⁶Earncliffe Strategy Group, *The Recruitment and Employment of Women...*, 6-7.

⁷Yeung, et al., *Recruiting Policies and Practices for Women...*, 34.

⁸Earncliffe Strategy Group, *The Recruitment and Employment of Women...*, 7; Yeung, et al., *Recruiting Policies and Practices for Women...*, 67.

⁹Earncliffe Strategy Group, *The Recruitment and Employment of Women...*, 5; Yeung, et al., *Recruiting Policies and Practices for Women...*, 34.

¹⁰Earncliffe Strategy Group, *The Recruitment and Employment of Women...*, 7.

¹¹*Ibid*, 6-8.

removes any drawbacks upfront and provides a way to educate women more comprehensively on the other benefits of joining the Regular Force.¹²

DND's Approach

8. DND has undertaken several short-term actions which address the key impediments of low CAF knowledge in the recruitment pool and capitalizing on interested recruits. These include the Women in Force program which educates women on the benefits of CAF employment through “day in the life” events. The pilot program engaged a total of 98 candidates of whom 34 enrolled. Plans to continue the program are undergoing study.¹³ It also trialed the re-enrolment of former female members, and canvassed women who had begun but not completed the enrolment process. Both programs met with limited success for the volume of effort, enrolling a total of 15 candidates, with no plans to continue at the moment.¹⁴ It also analyzed the Armed Forces aptitude test using its Gender-Based Analysis (Plus) to identify any unintended bias against assessing women suitable for enrolment and assured itself that there is none.¹⁵

9. An interesting feature of DND's approach is its research partnership with the Privy Council Office to use behavioural insights in analyzing its recruiting, marketing and communications, and policies. Key recruitment recommendations include, revising online application processes to incorporate behavioural insights such as more user-friendly interfaces for the applicant; using gender-neutral titles; and obligatory gender disclosure. Further trials to determine the effectiveness of such improvements is advocated to refine processes for continued improvement.¹⁶

10. Program recommendations involve the use of “try before you buy” events, which the CAF has already piloted through the Women in Force program; pairing new recruits with same-sex mentors; and encouraging part-time employment through the Reserves to address the key impediments of geographic stability, freedom and flexibility and work-life balance.¹⁷ Policy recommendations encompass analyzing CAF policies for potential recruitment barriers and countering them through better education in order to neutralize incorrect perceptions, and/or modifying or mitigating them to attract prospects to a military career. These barriers are similar

¹²Earncliffe Strategy Group, *The Recruitment and Employment of Women...*, 8; Elizabeth Hardy, *Behavioural insights project: Increasing recruitment of women into the Canadian Armed Forces* (Ottawa: Privy Council Office, 2017), 6.

¹³Department of National Defence, *Department of National Defence response to Report 5...*, 3; Hardy, *Behavioural insights project: Increasing recruitment...*, 3.

¹⁴Department of National Defence, *Department of National Defence response to Report 5...*, 3. Of the 1,244 women contacted, only eight women former members completed the enrolment process they had previously started and of the 175 former members contacted, 17 women re-enrolled.

¹⁵Ibid.

¹⁶Hardy, *Behavioural insights project: Increasing recruitment...*, 3 & 5. Examples of user-friendly interfaces for the applicant include simplifying the process, expandable menus, progress feedback, and deadlines to keep on track providing definitions of key military terms and jargon.

¹⁷Ibid., 6.

to those determined in other studies and include “deployments and relocation; leave without pay; childcare support; long-term commitment/ability to resign; and culture/diversity.”¹⁸

11. Of note is a caution to closely monitor recruitment programs that focus exclusively on female (or any minority category), that may inadvertently undermine the perception of fairness and equality amongst both beneficiaries and non-beneficiaries.¹⁹ As such, DND should consider opening such recruitment programs and any potential policy changes to all segments of the population.

12. Finally, in acknowledging the complex factors and the many stakeholders involved in the recruiting and retention process, DND has recently launched Operation GENERATION. Its aim is to improve recruiting, training and retention of CAF members whilst encompassing its diversity strategy which includes its female enrolment goals.²⁰

Other Approaches

13. Recognizing the importance of increasing diversity in their military population multi-national organizations such as NATO, have provided venues to share ideas on how to improve female recruitment.²¹ Nations most likely to share similar logistical and cultural challenges with Canada and have possible approaches that might assist DND, include Australia and the United States (US).²²

14. The Australian Defence Force (ADF) uses a variety of tools to varying degrees.²³ The tools focus on exposing female prospects to potential career paths, female interaction and providing encouragement and support through the recruitment process. Specific actions include providing a guide to support recruits through the recruitment process; employing specialist female recruitment teams that concentrate on and mentor female prospects; and pre-enlistment strength and conditioning programs for female Army recruits.²⁴ On-line marketing campaigns connect women with the idea of finding occupations they want to do in the military through profiles of serving women with emphasis on non-traditional roles.²⁵

15. In addressing issues of moving away from home and freedom and flexibility, the ADF offers reduced initial period of service requirements for certain occupations; a “Gap Year Programme” which permits recruits to explore a career prior to committing; and a “recruit to area” program allowing recruits to specify a geographic location for their first posting.²⁶ The

¹⁸Ibid.

¹⁹Ibid.

²⁰Department of National Defence, *Department of National Defence response to Report 5...*, 2-4; Department of National Defence, *Joint CDS/DM Directive: Operation GENERATION*, 2018, 11.

²¹North Atlantic Treaty Organization, *Summary of the National Reports of NATO Member and Partner Nations to the NATO Committee on Gender Perspectives 2016*, 2016, 5.

²²Meg Trucano, et al., *Foreign Military Strategies to Recruit and Retain Women* (Arlington:Insight Policy Research, Inc., 2017), 8.

²³Ibid, 9.

²⁴Department of Defence, *Women in the ADF Report 2015-16*, 2016, 9 & 17-19.

²⁵Trucano, et al., *Foreign Military Strategies...*, 10-11.

²⁶Department of Defence, *Women in the ADF...*, 8-9 & 17-18.

“Gap Year Programme” is similar to an early 1980’s Youth Training and Employment Program (YTEP) where DND provided basic and trades training to youth during a one-year contract for potential employment in the military.²⁷

16. Informed by research, the US military is acknowledging the importance of female interaction to address gender-specific concerns for both recruits and their families. It is increasing the number of recruiters in order to ensure a minimum of one female recruiter in each of its recruiting centres.²⁸ Similar to Australia, it has modified its marketing campaigns to be more inclusive and highlights female serving members of all ranks. In doing this, it provides role models, emphasizes careers in a variety of trades and stresses the potential for career growth.²⁹ Behavioural insights noted by recruiters are that women recruits take longer than their male counterparts to make a decision and prefer access to speak with female members.³⁰ This is consistent with consumer studies that confirm women’s tendency to want to inform themselves on options and assess them, which take time.³¹ The Marines have started to conduct outreach to target female high school athletes who might better fit the discipline and fitness requirements.³² This may be a potential strategy to target appropriate candidates for CANSOFCOM positions.

RETENTION

Issues

17. The issue of increased female membership is not only a matter of recruiting but also preserving the training, experience and talents unique to women.³³ According to voluntary exit surveys, in 2016, 683 and 339 women left the Regular and Reserve Force respectively. The reasons for leaving the Regular Force by proportion were medical (54%), voluntary (42%), and service completion (4%); and for the Reserve Force, voluntary (62%), medical (22%), and service completion (14%).³⁴ The large portion of releases attributed to voluntary and medical reasons should be more comprehensively investigated in order to determine which concerns the military can prevent or mitigate. Though the CAF does conduct a retention survey discussed below; whether it investigates specific medical related issues is not clear. For example, could such issues indicate inadequate screening of pre-existing health issues; insufficient training and

²⁷Archives association of Ontario, “Fonds 2008/14 - Youth Training and Employment Program fonds,” Accessed October 13, 2018. <https://www.archeion.ca/national-defence-directorate-of-history-heritage-library>.

²⁸Trucano, et al., *Foreign Military Strategies...*, 20.

²⁹Ibid. US Army, “Women in the Army,” Accessed October 12, 2018, <https://www.army.mil/women/profiles/>.

³⁰Yeung, et al., *Recruiting Policies and Practices for Women...*, 38.

³¹J. Banyte, Z. Paunksniene & A. Rütelionė, “Peculiarities of Consumer Perception in the Aspect of Marketing to Women,” *Engineering Economics*, 2007, 56.

³²Associated Press, “To Recruit More Women, Marines Turn to High School Sports Teams,” *The New York Times*, August 16, 2016. https://www.nytimes.com/2016/08/14/us/to-recruit-more-women-marines-turn-to-high-school-sports-teams.html?_r=0 (accessed October 12, 2018).

³³Office of the Auditor General of Canada, *2016 Fall Reports...*, 25-26.

³⁴North Atlantic Treaty Organization, *Summary of the National Reports...*, 68. The most frequent reasons for release among female Regular Force members were medical (366), by voluntary (287) and service completion (28); during the same period, the most frequent reasons for release among female Reserve Force members were voluntary (211), by medical (74) and also service competition (49).

support for injury prevention strategies; or poor treatment and follow-up to resolve medical issues? Could those now being medically released, be accommodated to allow the CAF to retain experience and talent?³⁵

18. According to the CAF Retention survey, which is administered every five years, the reasons why women are most likely to release within the next five years are

... retirement and eligibility for pension benefits, followed by geographic stability, job dissatisfaction, dissatisfaction with postings, seeking more meaningful and satisfying work, dissatisfaction with career progression, family issues, and seeking a better salary.³⁶

Interestingly, the top four reasons coincide with those of men who completed the same survey, though in slightly different order. Thus, any actions to increase female retention will also benefit men.³⁷ Unfortunately, the reasons for “dissatisfaction” with work, posting or career progression do not inform what could be modified or mitigated to improve retention. More detailed investigation and research in both the exit and retention survey may yield more information to allow for practical solutions.

DND’s Approach

19. In its response to the 2016 Auditor General of Canada’s report on CAF recruitment and retention, DND acknowledged that it failed to develop retention strategies despite the availability of information on attrition factors.³⁸ Currently, there is no strategy targeted specifically toward the retention of women. However, DND is in the process of investigating and researching the causes of attrition, with attention to targeted groups such as women and other minorities. It aims to determine possible options, which may encompass offering individuals choices related to career management, postings and operational tempo. There are references to a “Total Force Approach to Retention” that would allow for easy transition “between components with organizational requirements”³⁹ to enable better talent retention. This is a similar approach offered by other militaries, as discussed later.

20. In addition, in line with being an attractive employer to women, DND is fostering a climate of inclusivity in several ways. This includes the conduct of Operation HONOUR, which has the objective of eliminating sexual misconduct; employing gender perspectives in all policies, education, training and operations; and the launch of the Canadian Armed Forces Diversity Strategy and Action Plan, which was approved in January 2017.⁴⁰ The aim is to nurture

³⁵Gloria Galloway, "Canadian military to relax deployment-readiness rule," *The Globe and Mail*, June 11, 2017, <https://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/politics/canadian-military-to-relax-deployment-readiness-rule/article35281256/> (accessed October 13, 2018).

³⁶North Atlantic Treaty Organization, *Summary of the National Reports...*, 68.

³⁷*Ibid.*

³⁸Office of the Auditor General of Canada, *2016 Fall Reports...*, 27.

³⁹Department of National Defence, *Detailed action plan for OAG report recommendation*, 2018, 11.

⁴⁰North Atlantic Treaty Organization, *Summary of the National Reports...*, 71-73; Chief of Defence, *CDS Op Order - Operation Honour*. (Ottawa: Canadian Armed Forces, 2015); Government of Canada, *Canada’s national action plan on women peace and security 2017-2022. The implementation plans* (Ottawa: Government of Canada, n.d), 6-9.

a culture of diversity and inclusiveness throughout DND that permeates all aspects of the institution from its doctrine, to career management, and policies, to include research in how to better understand diversity within the Department. The metrics on evaluating progress and level of penetration of a diverse culture is unknown at this time, and should be developed, if none exists.

Other Approaches

21. The retention of women is as much a concern for other nations as they also aim to increase their female military population. In examining potential solutions, the US and ADF will be examined as they share similar cultures and size and/or talent management approaches to Canada.⁴¹

22. The US military has embarked on a number of pilot programs and commissioned a RAND study that may also be applicable to Canada. To address career flexibility and geographic stability issues, the “Career Intermision Program” allow military members to transfer to the Individual Ready Reserve, earning restricted pay for up to three years prior to returning to full-time duty.⁴² Monitoring of this program may provide valuable insights for Canada in implementing its “Total Force Approach to Retention” program.

23. As a measure to counter dissatisfaction with jobs or career progression, the RAND study advocates leadership education in creating work environments that are more conducive to work-life balance, and providing positive role models and mentorship.⁴³ The CAF should consider developing training and awareness tools to educate and assist leaders in promoting work-life balance. Furthermore, reinforcing role models and mentorship to leaders at all levels could counter dissatisfaction with jobs, postings and career progression. This should be supported through training and education and manifested through both informal and formalized methods.

24. The same study advocates developing options to reduce the frequency of postings and a decentralized assignment process to improve career management and reduce the frequency of relocations.⁴⁴ In a Canadian context, such options might consider longer assignments in each post; or career management at a regional level so that members could be reassigned to posts within the same geographic area without having to relocate.

25. The ADF has similar policies and programs that help address family and personal obligations through both informal and formal “Flexible Work Arrangements” comprising part-time work and working from home. However, in order to improve the use of this program, it has noted that more education is needed to improve understanding of its use and benefits.⁴⁵ Related to the CAF’s idea of a “Total Force Approach to Retention”, the ADF implemented the “Total

⁴¹Lindsay Rodman, *Modernizing the Military Personnel System: Lessons from the Force of the Future* (Calgary: Canadian Global Affairs Institute, 2018), 1.

⁴²Kirsten M. Keller et al., *Addressing barriers to female officer retention in the Air Force* (Santa Monica: RAND Corporation, 2018), 37.

⁴³*Ibid.*, 41.

⁴⁴*Ibid.*

⁴⁵Department of Defence, *Women in the ADF...*, 116.

Workforce Model” in 2016 in an effort to provide flexible work arrangements on an institutional basis, by leveraging both its Reserve and Permanent Force and allowing greater mobility between both components.⁴⁶ The CAF should monitor the effectiveness of this program and identify any lessons to incorporate in its own approach.

CONCLUSION

26. The Canadian Armed Forces, in appreciating that diversity is important to its operational effectiveness, has begun to improve its recruitment and retention strategies to increase the female military population.⁴⁷ It has reinvigorated its marketing campaign, and launched several initiatives to attract and recruit more women, including research to understand behaviours, encouraging an inclusive culture and improving recruitment processes and programs.⁴⁸ In recognizing its adhoc approach to retention, it is in the process of developing comprehensive retention strategies.⁴⁹ Nonetheless, it faces a difficult challenge to meet its aim of having 25% of its members represented by women. In augmenting its approach, it should assess the recruitment and retention strategies adopted by other nations such as the US and Australia to realize gains more effectively. As one observer noted, “As [we adapt] to ever-evolving and complex threats, we cannot afford to draw from less than 100 percent of our talent pool.”⁵⁰

Annex: A. Summary of key recruitment and retention recommendations.

⁴⁶Ibid., 118.

⁴⁷Galloway, "Canadian military to relax deployment...."

⁴⁸Hardy, *Behavioural insights project: Increasing recruitment...*, 3 & 5; Department of National Defence, *Joint CDS/DM Directive...*, 1-32.

⁴⁹Office of the Auditor General of Canada, *2016 Fall Reports...*, 25-28.

⁵⁰Michael Miklaucic, and Cathleen Pearl, "All the Elements of National Power" *Prism*, 2016,16.

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SUMMARY OF KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Underlying the implementation of any and all recommendations is the requirement to closely monitor exclusively female policies and programs which may be perceived as unfair to both beneficiaries and non-beneficiaries. This may also undermine recruiting and retention efforts in general.

Recruiting

1. Continue to increase knowledge of the CAF through electronic media such as websites and social media. Focus should be on the wide career opportunities available and countering any myths perceived as barriers to a military career;
2. Solicit female members to be profiled on websites and provide testimonials either on-line or in person at recruiting events. These should include members from non-traditional occupations and all rank levels;
3. Increase focus on and examine programs to support female recruiting into the Reserve Force;
4. Continue research partnerships to analyse and improve attraction and recruitment strategies;
5. Provide access to same-gender members during the recruiting process either through specialist recruitment teams or staffing recruiting centres with a minimum of one female member;
6. Analyse policies for potential barriers to recruitment and modify or mitigate them to attract prospects;
7. Continue with pre-enlistment events such as the Women in Force and/or strength and conditioning programs in order to counter myths about military life and prepare recruits for the physical challenges;
8. Introduce a “Gap Year Programme” similar to the discontinued Youth Training and Employment Program (YTEP) that DND had previously implemented; and
9. Target high school athletes for CANSOFCOM roles.

Retention

1. Continue to conduct more detailed investigation to determine reasons for medical and voluntary releases to inform possible prevention and mitigation strategies;
2. Develop metrics to evaluate status of progress on the Diversity strategy;
3. The “Total Force Approach to Retention” program should be monitored and managed with a view to incorporate lessons identified from the US “Career Intermission Program”, and Australian “Total Work Force” model;
4. Develop tools to equip leaders on how to create and reinforce work environments that promote positive work-life balance. This may include trialling more formal flexible work arrangements as per the ADF’s “Flexible Work Arrangements” program;
5. Reinforce affirmative role-modelling and mentorship to leaders at all level through training, education and possibly a formal mentorship program; and
6. Investigate options to mitigate frequent relocations. Possible alternatives include increasing intervals between postings and/or managing careers at a local level to facilitate postings within the same geographic area to avoid relocation.