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## The Impacts of Relocation on Military Families

Major Kimberly Horan

**JCSP 48**

### Exercise Solo Flight

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# THE IMPACTS OF RELOCATION ON MILITARY FAMILIES: A RETENTION ISSUE

## INTRODUCTION

Anyone who has ever moved house is familiar with the disruption that it brings, first from choosing a replacement residence, which may include renting or purchasing, to packing up your belongings and moving them to your new domicile, there are many challenges to be overcome. When that new home is located in another city or another province, the business of moving may be exponentially more difficult. Finding and being accepted into new schools or childcare, seeking out new family doctors or specialists, and applying to new jobs are just a few of the major hurdles facing those relocating across the country. Considering that military families move on average three to four times more than the average Canadian family, these challenges are felt more strongly, and their effects more long-lasting, than civilian families who do not relocate frequently.<sup>1</sup> Indeed, the top five challenges from a recent study of CAF families are spousal employment (43%), primary healthcare (37%), relocation due to military service (32%), financial stability (30%) and childcare (19%), all of which have some nexus to the short military posting cycle.<sup>2</sup>

These concerns are reflected in the top factors motivating members to release from the CAF prior to Compulsory Retirement Age (CRA). Among the top five reasons

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<sup>1</sup> Pierre Daigle, *On the Homefront: Assessing the Well-being of Canada's Military Families in the New Millennium*, Ombudsman National Defence and Canadian Forces, [2013], 31.

<sup>2</sup> Sanela Dursun, Zhigang Wang and Lesleigh Pullman, "Military Lifestyle Stressors and Social Support in the Well-being of Military Families," in *The Politics of Military Families*, eds. René Moelker, Manon Andres and Nina Rones, 1st ed. Routledge, 2019), 105.

listed are impact on spouse/partner (13.6%), impact on children (10.5%), and lack of geographical stability (9.9%).<sup>3</sup> The other top reasons are job dissatisfaction (17.9%) and dissatisfaction with occupation (10.6%).<sup>4</sup> Several recruitment and retention strategies have been developed in recent years but do not adequately address the root cause of the problem. A thorough understanding of the effects of military service on military families and their relation to retention is thus required.

This paper will analyze the impact of military family relocation from a Gender-based Analysis Plus (GBA+) lens in the wake of numerous retention issues facing the Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) today by looking at the effects of relocation on military families in the areas of spousal employment, housing, medical care, and childcare. It will include a cursory review of existing policies from the perspective of their effect on families with a civilian spouse, as well as families where both partners are service members - sometimes called dual-military marriages or service couples - as well as where the member is a single parent. While this paper will focus on the CAF, it will also look at how military families in other countries experience postings, and policies developed to address those issues. This paper will not address in any detail the added physical and mental health concerns that military families face due to deployments or other military service, only to state that military families face health concerns above the average Canadian family.<sup>5</sup> Rather, it will address the access to medical care that military

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<sup>3</sup> Nicolas Bremmer and Glen Budgell, *The 2016 CAF Retention Survey: Descriptive Analysis*, (Ottawa: Human Resources Systems Group Ltd, 2017), 24.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>5</sup> Alyson L. Mahar et al., "A Retrospective Cohort Study Comparing the use of Provincially Funded Mental Health Services between Female Military Spouses Living in Ontario and the General Population," *Military Behavioral Health* 9, no. 4 (2021), 404. doi:10.1080/21635781.2021.1927917. <https://doi-org.cfc.idm.oclc.org/10.1080/21635781.2021.1927917>.

dependents experience as a result of frequent postings, some of which whose issues may result from those added physical or mental health concerns.

Lastly, while the term military spouse is used throughout this paper and much of the literature, the use of this word is more broadly acknowledged to include all partners of military members, whether married or not. The term dependents covers all members of the military family who the military member is financially responsible for, including spouse, minor children, adult children with disabilities, and parents, provided that they are living with the member.

## **DEMOGRAPHICS OF THE CAF AND THEIR DEPENDENTS**

The current military population is markedly different from those of previous generations. In decades past, military families, in Canada and elsewhere, largely consisted of a single wage earner (the military member - male) with a stay at home spouse (female). That typical military family lived in military housing on base, where the children attended school and accessed medical care. Today, there are 88,900 members in the CAF, split between the Reg F (65,800 members) and Res F (23,100 members).<sup>6</sup> Of these, there are 40,000 families making up the Regular Force (Reg F), and 14,000 families amongst the Reserve Force (Res F).<sup>7</sup> On average, there are at least 10,000 personnel who are posted annually, most concentrated during the Active Posting Season

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<sup>6</sup> Jacques Gallant, "Too White and Too Male, Canadian Armed Forces are Rethinking Recruiting as Staffing Slides, Senior Officers Say," *Toronto Star*, 23 March 2022. <https://www.thestar.com/politics/federal/2022/03/23/too-white-and-too-male-canadian-armed-forces-are-rethinking-recruiting-as-staffing-slides-senior-officers-say.html>. Statistics are accurate as of 28 February 2022.

<sup>7</sup> The College of Family Physicians of Canada, *Best Advice: Caring for Military Families in the Patient's Medical Home*, [2017]).

(APS), approximately 8,000 of which are posted to other provinces.<sup>8</sup> Among the benefits widely touted by recruiters, Reg F military members and Res F personnel under specific classes of service are assured of employment, schooling (where sponsored education or military training is applicable), as well as medical and dental care. However, their dependents, including civilian spouses and minor children, are not. Among Reg F families, there are just under 34,000 are spouses and 58,000 children.<sup>9</sup> Given that 87% of military spouses are women, this is an issue that disproportionately affects women more so than men.<sup>10</sup> In addition, women in general disproportionately assume responsibility for unpaid work, whether they are the civilian spouse of a military member or part of a service couple. Women in the US Army are more likely to be married to another military member than Army men are, with 39.3% of female married members married to another military member, while only 5.1% of married men have a service spouse.<sup>11</sup> Accordingly, they disproportionately assume the burden of searching for doctors, schools, childcare, etc. for minor children, in addition to attending to their own needs.<sup>12</sup> This form of unpaid work is also called emotional labour, and has been the historical role of military spouses for generations.<sup>13</sup> In the case of single parent military families, this burden is borne by the

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<sup>8</sup> David Pugliese, "Job Dissatisfaction and Repeated Moves Across Country Causing Canadian Soldiers to Quit, Report Says," *National Post*, 31 October 2016. <https://nationalpost.com/news/canada/job-dissatisfaction-and-repeated-moves-across-country-causing-canadian-soldiers-to-quit-report-says> - :~:text=Job%20dissatisfaction%20and%20repeated%20moves%20to%20new%20locations,to%20a%20report%20obtained%20by%20the%20Ottawa%20Citizen.;

<sup>9</sup> Lynda Manser, "The State of Military Families in Canada: A Scoping Review," *Journal of Military, Veteran and Family Health* 6, no. 2 (2020), 123.

<sup>10</sup> The College of Family Physicians of Canada, *Best Advice: Caring for Military Families in the Patient's Medical Home*, [2017]).

<sup>11</sup> Jared R. Anderson et al., "Factors that Differentiate Distressed and Nondistressed Marriages in Army Soldiers," *Marriage & Family Review* 47, no. 7 (2011), 461.

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

<sup>13</sup> Liz Dean, Brendan Churchill and Leah Ruppner, "The Mental Load: Building a Deeper Theoretical Understanding of how Cognitive and Emotional Labor Overload Women and Mothers," *Community, Work & Family* 25, no. 1 (2021), 17.

military member alone, regardless of gender. By identifying those stakeholders who are most adversely affected by military postings, and desegregating data that describes the impact of various policies on these populations, we can then consider how these policies affect specific populations of military families.

Let us first consider why a study of military families and understanding their impact on retention is critical. Traditional views of families consist of the triad: father, mother, and children; single parent families are dyadic (parent, children), as are childless couples, and stepfamilies or newly blended families, but these often have a third party component in the form of a co-parent, grandparent, friend, etc. who plays an important role.<sup>14</sup> Similarly, military families are also triadic or dyadic, depending on their composition and whether they are analyzed at the organization level or the family level (figure 1).<sup>15</sup> Military dependents, especially spouses, while not military members themselves, occupy a crucial role in supporting the organization, as acknowledged by SSE.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> René Moelker, Nina Rones and Manon Andres, "Introduction: The Politics of Military Families and the Rise of the Negotiation Household—tensions between State, Work, and Families," in *The Politics of Military Families*, eds. René Moelker, Manon Andres and Nina Rones, 1st ed. Routledge, 2019), 5.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>16</sup> Department of National Defence. *Strong, Secure, Engaged: Canada's Defence Policy* (Ottawa: National Defence, [2017]).



**Figure 1: Triadic figurations approach of understanding modern military families.**

Source: René Moelker, Nina Rones and Manon Andres, "Introduction: The Politics of Military Families and the Rise of the Negotiation Household—tensions between State, Work, and Families," in *The Politics of Military Families*, eds. René Moelker, Manon Andres and Nina Rones, 1st ed. Routledge, 2019), 15.

The organizational culture of the CAF prioritizes the mission above all else, and “is transmitted to members of the organization through the continuous socialization of both existing and new [CAF] members.”<sup>17</sup> Because of the demand the military organization places “due to the normative pressures and obligations on both military personnel and their families” there is an inherent tension between the three facets of the triad.<sup>18</sup> Where the demands become too great for the military family to handle there is a fracturing of the balance within the organization triad, which has an effect on the family level triad. It is at this point that we see a breakdown of a number of factors which may lead to military members considering release from the CAF. With annual releases

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<sup>17</sup> Rachael Johnstone and Bessma Momani, "Organizational Change in Canadian Public Institutions: The Implementations of GBA+ in DND/CAF," *Canadian Public Administration* 62, no. 3 (2019), 506.

<sup>18</sup> Anitta Hannola, "Relocating Military Families in Finland," in *The Politics of Military Families*, eds. René Moelker, Manon Andres and Nina Rones, 1st ed. Routledge, 2019), 171.

currently exceeding historical rates and the CAF struggling to recruit new members, it is more important than ever to address the reasons why CAF members release before CRA, while exploring how policies can be adapted to address concerns that CAF members and their families have.

## **SPOUSAL EMPLOYMENT**

### **Impact of Frequent Relocation**

Seventy percent of military spouses report that their careers have been negatively impacted by the military member's frequent postings.<sup>19</sup> Not only is it difficult for the military spouse to change jobs every few years, as searching for a new job can often take months, incurring periods of lost wages, but there are longer term impacts. Frequent career changes mean the civilian spouse has little opportunity to increase in seniority within their place of employment and hence, pay, within their field. As a result, the spouses of US military members earn approximately 25% less than the spouses of non-military members.<sup>20</sup> A look at the financial outcomes of civilian spouses of CAF members produced similar results. CAF spouses earned "an average of \$5,063 to \$13,755 lesser employment income than civilian spouses, despite similarity in industry of employment."<sup>21</sup>

The demanding nature of many CAF occupations, which may include deployments, workup training, courses, shiftwork, all contribute to the impression that

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<sup>19</sup> Leigh Spanner, "Governing "dependents": The Canadian Military Family and Gender, a Policy Analysis," *International Journal (Toronto)* 72, no. 4 (2017), 489.

<sup>20</sup> Alla Skomorovsky, Cynthia Wan and Kimberley Watkins, "Introduction to the Financial Well-being of Canadian Armed Forces Members and Families," *Journal of Military, Veteran and Family Health* 5, no. S1 (2019), 4. <https://jmvfh.utpjournals.press/doi/full/10.3138/jmvfh.5.s1.2018-0031>

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid*, 3.

the military career takes precedence over any career that the civilian spouse may have, and certainly limits their employability and availability. Goffman's classification of the military as a total institution accurately describes the process by which CAF members are socialized to military culture, which contributes to the internalization that outside influences, such as family, are secondary.<sup>22</sup> This was particularly true in past generations. While the norm 50 plus years ago was for the female spouse to stay at home, and follow their male spouse around from post to post without complaint, the expectations of many modern military families are quite different, just as the makeup of those families are different. Most spouses of military members work outside the home, and do so in order to support of their family financially. When the non-military spouse is unemployed or underemployed, it causes financial distress on the entire family. Unemployment rates for wives of military members are three times that of civilians' wives, while husbands of military members have double the rate of unemployment than their civilian peers.<sup>23</sup>

This employment disparity also extends to the rank level of the military member; the spouses of CAF officers earn on average \$3,814 more than their peers who are married to CAF NCMs.<sup>24</sup> A recent study of financial wellbeing of 1,887 CAF members concluded that financial strain as well as financial satisfaction among junior NCMs was respectively higher and lower, as compared to senior NCMs, and junior and senior officers, who receive a greater rate of pay than more junior members.<sup>25</sup> That their spouses also experience this pay difference further exacerbates any financial challenges felt by the

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<sup>22</sup> Joseph Soeters, *Sociology and Military Studies: Classical and Current Foundations*, 1st ed. (Milton: Routledge, 2018), 91-94. doi:10.4324/9781315182131. <https://go.exlibris.link/10DRFm48>.

<sup>23</sup> Skomorovsky, "Introduction to the Financial Well-being of Canadian Armed Forces Members and Families," 3.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid*, 4.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid*.

military member. The CAF has a number of programs in place to assist members and their families who may be experiencing financial burdens.<sup>26</sup> But these are temporary measures meant to alleviate acute but temporary financial difficulties. They do nothing to address the systemic issue, that military families experience higher rates of financial distress as a result of spousal unemployment or underemployment due to frequent postings.

### **Canadian and Allied Spousal Support Programs**

Canadian Forces Morale and Welfare Services (CFMWS), through Military Family Resource Centres (MFRCs), provides access to a range of employment assistance programs, from the Military Spousal Employment Network (MSEN) to Portfolio Development Programs aimed at translating their experience into marketable skills for future employers.<sup>27</sup> Similarly, the Australian Partner Employment Assistance Program (PEAP) provides funding for the spouses of military members on each posting for professional employment services and re-registration costs associated with regaining employment following a posting.<sup>28</sup>

In the US, the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA), passed each year by Congress, provides authorization for defence spending, including capital procurement, military pay and benefits, and social programs benefiting military personnel and their

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<sup>26</sup> Canadian Forces Morale and Welfare Services, “SISIP,” accessed 1 May 2022. <https://www.sisip.com/en/>

<sup>27</sup> Canadian Forces Morale and Welfare Services, “Portfolio Development Program.” <https://admin.cafconnection.ca/National/Programs-Services/Employment/Job-Seekers/Online-Career-Development/Portfolio-Program.aspx>; Department of National Defence, “Military Spouse and Partner Employment,” accessed 1 May 2022. <https://www.canada.ca/en/ombudsman-national-defence-forces/education-information/military-families/spousal-partner-employment.html>

<sup>28</sup> Australia Department of Defence, “Partner Employment Assistance Program,” Defence Member and Family Support, last accessed 4 May 2020. <https://defence.gov.au/members-families/Family/Partners/PEAP.asp>

families. In 2010, these programs included a pilot program to incentivize federal agencies to hire military spouses by assuming costs associated with employing them as interns.<sup>29</sup> The 2022 NDAA includes funding for another three-year spousal employment program worth \$5 million to provide paid fellowships with employers across a variety of industries.<sup>30</sup> It also includes a DoD spousal employment study which will examine barriers for employment, rates of unemployment and underemployment, while seeking to determine in what ways their career opportunities have been affected by their spouse's service.

While these efforts are admirable, a holistic look at the efficacy of these programs from a GBA+ lens for different subsets of military spouses would be appropriate to ensure that programming is improving spousal employment outcomes across multiple postings. In addition, any new programming or policy would also need to be developed considering local needs and job markets, which may require flexibility on behalf of the policy makers.

## **MEDICAL CONSIDERATIONS**

### **Background**

The Canada Health Act (CHA) outlines the breakdown of responsibilities between federal and provincial governments, while the Canada Health Transfer (CHT) provides federal funding for health care and supports the provisions of the CHA.<sup>31</sup> Healthcare is deemed a provincial responsibility, with provincial governments receiving transfer

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<sup>29</sup> Karen Blaisure, *Serving Military Families: Theories, Research, and Application*, 2nd ed. (New York, NY; Hove, East Sussex: Routledge, 2015), 263.

<sup>30</sup> National Military Family Association, "NDAA Update: And Now for the Rest of the News," accessed 3 May 2022. <https://www.militaryfamily.org/ndaa-update-and-now-for-the-rest-of-the-news/>

<sup>31</sup> Government of Canada, *Canada Health Act Annual Report 2020-2021*.

payments from the federal government to augment provincial taxes and other revenue. Accordingly, each province establishes a standard of care for residents. The CHA aims to ensure that “all Canadians have access to medically necessary care based on their needs.”<sup>32</sup> Canada is among a number of developed nations whose governments provide universal health care to its citizens. While every Canadian citizen is ideally assured of access to medical aid, the reality is far different. Currently, 14.5% of Canadians report not having a family doctor, although this number may actually be higher, given that many Canadians have been unable to access routine medical care during the COVID-19 pandemic, and many medical professionals experiencing burnout.<sup>33</sup> Those without a family doctor must present themselves to an emergency room or an urgent care clinic for medical care. While this suffices for urgent medical needs, it does little to address routine preventative care, nor does it allow for early identification of serious medical conditions that would otherwise be caught early if under the routine care of a family doctor.

### **Medical Care for Military Members**

Conversely, the Constitution Act established that the Government of Canada is responsible for the provision of medical services for military members.<sup>34</sup> Medical coverage was included in the Constitution Act as an acknowledgement to the complex medical needs that military members may face. Military members, whether long established at their base of employment or newly posted in, have equal access to medical

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<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>33</sup> Tara Kiran, “Build Back Better: Every Canadian Should Have a Family Doctor,” *Toronto Star*, 15 August 2021. <https://www.thestar.com/opinion/contributors/2021/08/15/build-back-better-every-canadian-should-have-a-family-doctor.html>

<sup>34</sup> Department of National Defence, “About the CAF Spectrum of Care,” last modified 15 January 2019, <https://www.canada.ca/en/department-national-defence/services/benefits-military/pay-pension-benefits/benefits/medical-dental/information-management.html>.

and dental care. While wait times for appointments vary depending on the number of medical or mental health professionals employed on each base, these wait times are usually much shorter than civilians who do not have a family doctor. Military members are not informed that there is no doctor accepting patients at their new post. Military doctors or those who are contracted by the military have equal ability to see new patients. In addition, there is significant coordination between the CAF health care system and civilian health care providers to meet the medical needs of CAF members where specialist care is required.

### **Dependent medical care**

Dependents of military members also experience medical and mental health challenges associated with their proximity to military life. However, dependents only receive military medical care in a small number of cases where they accompany their service member to isolated posts or postings outside Canada.<sup>35</sup> While most provinces have a central registry of doctors that people can access to find a new doctor, wait times until a family doctor can be identified vary, with many military families finding themselves posted before they are able to gain a family doctor.<sup>36</sup> This has resulted in 24% of military families not having access to primary medical care compared to 15% of the civilian population.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Deborah Harrison and Lucie Laliberté, *No Life Like it: Military Wives in Canada* (Toronto: J. Lorimer, 1994), 24.

<sup>36</sup> Pierre Daigle, *On the Homefront: Assessing the Well-being of Canada's Military Families in the New Millennium*.

<sup>37</sup> College of Family Physicians of Canada and Canadian Military and Veteran Families Leadership Circle, "Family Physicians Working with Military Families," (2016), 4. [https://vanierinstitute.sharepoint.com/sites/PublicWebResources/Documents/PublicFiles/Military\\_Family\\_Physician\\_Guide\\_E\\_Sept2016.pdf?ga=1](https://vanierinstitute.sharepoint.com/sites/PublicWebResources/Documents/PublicFiles/Military_Family_Physician_Guide_E_Sept2016.pdf?ga=1)

In 2017, 44% of CAF spouses reported experiencing extreme difficulty in regaining access to routine medical care following a posting.<sup>38</sup> This is in spite of a waiving of the standard 90 day residency period on moving to a new province, before applying for provincial health insurance. As a result, MFS and other organizations supporting military families have teamed up to provide greater access to medical care for military dependents. One of these initiatives provides virtual medical doctor “visits” through Maple, although the registration page indicates that this is only for a limited period of time.<sup>39</sup> Telemedicine is reportedly a great way to bridge gaps in health coverage, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic, but it should not replace routine care through a family physician. In urging doctors to return to in-patient care, Dr. Kieran Moore stated his concern that patients were not receiving physical exams, having their blood pressure checked, or undergoing basic cancer screening; “physical assessments [which] are necessary in order to make a diagnosis or treatment decision.”<sup>40</sup> While this is a new, pandemic-induced phenomenon, military families have long experienced this lack of care, routinely “accessing medical care through emergency departments and walk-in clinics rather than through a family physician, constraining access to routine health prevention and maintenance procedures such as vaccinations and gynecologic examinations.”<sup>41</sup> Where newly posted military dependents are able to find a family doctor, they often experience delays in transfer of medical records or face language

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<sup>38</sup> The College of Family Physicians of Canada, *Best Advice: Caring for Military Families in the Patient's Medical Home*, [2017]).

<sup>39</sup> "Register Today to Receive Coverage from Military Family Services," , accessed 2 May, 2022, <https://app.getmaple.ca/register>.

<sup>40</sup> Hannah Alberga, “Ontario’s Top Doctor Urges Physicians Resume In-Person Care, Reduce Virtual Appointments,” *CTV News Toronto*, 14 October 2021. <https://toronto.ctvnews.ca/ontario-s-top-doctor-urges-physicians-resume-in-person-care-reduce-virtual-appointments-1.5622891>

<sup>41</sup> Heidi Cramm et al., "Caring for Canadian Military Families," *Canadian Family Physician* 65, no. 1 (2019), 10.

barriers, both complicating their medical care.<sup>42</sup> In the case of dependents who have special medical needs, delays in prognosis or referrals to specialists are common. A recent study on military children with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) reported that seven of nine military families whose child received a diagnosis of ASD before being posted experienced significant delays in accessing specialist care or programs at the new location, with waitlists of two years being not uncommon.<sup>43</sup>

### **Canadian and Allied Solutions**

In the early 2000s, a lack of access to medical care for dependents led to several bases establishing family medical clinics.<sup>44</sup> While some have been successful in attracting and retaining doctors, others have been forced to close.<sup>45</sup> Still others, recognizing the efforts to obtain by some to close or seek out medical services in the form

The Calian Military Family Doctor Network is a medical referral program established in 2016 with the aim of linking military families to primary care physicians in many (but not all) locations nearby military bases or stations.<sup>46</sup> In the first two years of the program, 2,000 military family members found doctors with the assistance of the Military Family Doctor Network.<sup>47</sup> Unfortunately, the effectiveness of this program is

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<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>43</sup> Heidi Cramm et al., "Navigating Health Care Systems for Military-Connected Children with Autism Spectrum Disorder: A Qualitative Study of Military Families Experiencing Mandatory Relocation," *Paediatrics & Child Health* 24, no. 7 (2019), 480-481.

<sup>44</sup> Pierre Daigle, *On the Homefront: Assessing the Well-being of Canada's Military Families in the New Millennium*.

<sup>45</sup> North Bay MFRC, "22 Wing Family Medical Clinic," accessed 4 May 2022. <https://www.northbaymfr.ca/22-wing-family-medical-clinic/>; "Trenton Medical Centre for Military Families Closes," CTV News, 30 October 2008. <https://ottawa.ctvnews.ca/trenton-medical-centre-for-military-families-closes-1.338179>

<sup>46</sup> Primacy, A Calian Company. "Military Family Doctor Network," accessed 2 May 2022. <https://www.primacy.ca/mfdn/>; Calian, "Calian Launches Military Family Doctor Network Across Canada," 20 January 2016. <https://www.calian.com/press-releases/calian-launches-military-family-doctor-network-across-canada/>

<sup>47</sup> "More than 2,000 Military Family Members Referred to a Physician through the Military Family Doctor Network." *NASDAQ OMX's News Release Distribution Channel* 2019.

unknown at this time, and represents a significant data gap when considering programs aimed at this population.

Unlike in Canada, the U.S. Department of Defense Military Health System (MHS) “provides the oversight for all military medical programs, including medical education, research, and the provision of medical care for all beneficiaries,” which include military members and their families.<sup>48</sup> TRICARE, the U.S. military health care program acts as insurance ensures access to a network of military doctors on base or civilian doctors off base, although a new focus on operational readiness and cost-savings means that many military families will be unable to access care on base.<sup>49</sup>

## **LACK OF AFFORDABLE HOUSING**

### **The Housing Crisis**

General Wayne Eyre, Chief of the Defence Staff, recently stated that CAF members are experiencing financial distress because of skyrocketing housing prices and the shortage of military housing.<sup>50</sup> He acknowledged, “the number 1 issue that comes up as I travel around the country is cost of living and the challenges our people are facing in

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<https://www.proquest.com/wire-feeds/more-than-2-000-military-family-members-referred/docview/2247818212/se-2?accountid=9867>

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<sup>48</sup> Blaisure, *Serving Military Families: Theories, Research, and Application*, 277.

<sup>49</sup> Amy Bushatz, “More Than 3 Dozen Military Hospitals to Stop Treating Retirees, Families, Memo Shows,” *Military.com*, 7 February 2020. <https://www.military.com/daily-news/2020/02/07/more-3-dozen-military-hospitals-stop-treating-retirees-families-memo-shows.html>

<sup>50</sup> Lee Berthiaume, “Military Members Feeling Bite of Skyrocketing Housing, Living Costs: Defence Chief,” *Orillia Matters*, 14 April 2022. <https://www.orilliamatters.com/national-news/military-members-feeling-bite-of-skyrocketing-housing-living-costs-defence-chief-5266935>

terms of finding affordable accommodations.”<sup>51</sup> The Military Housing Program oversees 11,673 Residential Housing Units (RHUs) at 27 locations across Canada, serving only 20% of CAF members.<sup>52</sup> Unfortunately, the majority of RHUs in Canada were built in the 1940s to 1960s, and approximately 10-15% are uninhabitable at any time due to ongoing repairs.<sup>53</sup> As a result of the time when these units were built, room sizes are small, and either the number of rooms or storage inadequate for the average military family. Those CAF personnel who are unable to access on-base accommodations, either due to long waitlists or the inability of military housing to meet their family needs, are required to live off-base in rental accommodations or housing which they purchase themselves. These numbers reflect the housing situation in the US, where in 2007, 70% of married active duty members lived off base in civilian housing.<sup>54</sup>

### **Canadian and Allied Housing Benefits and Policies**

The primary reason (63%) why members who live in RHUs report choosing to live there is that it is less expensive than private housing.<sup>55</sup> Yet costs of military housing continue to increase along with rents and purchase prices for private housing, as rents are

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<sup>51</sup> Lee Berthiaume, “Military Members Feeling Bite of Skyrocketing Housing, Living Costs: Defence Chief,” *Orillia Matters*, 14 April 2022. <https://www.orilliamatters.com/national-news/military-members-feeling-bite-of-skyrocketing-housing-living-costs-defence-chief-5266935>

<sup>52</sup> Department of National Defence, 1258-3-046 - ADM(RS), *Evaluation of Military Housing*, [2021]. <https://www.canada.ca/en/department-national-defence/corporate/reports-publications/audit-evaluation/eval-military-housing.html>

<sup>53</sup> Department of National Defence, 1258-3-046 - ADM(RS), *Evaluation of Military Housing*, [2021]. <https://www.canada.ca/en/department-national-defence/corporate/reports-publications/audit-evaluation/eval-military-housing.html>

<sup>54</sup> Benjamin R. Karney, John S. Crown and Rand Corporation, *Families Under Stress: An Assessment of Data, Theory, and Research on Marriage and Divorce in the Military*, Vol. MG-599 (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corp, 2007), 59.

<sup>55</sup> Lynda Manser, "State of Military Families in Canada: Issues Facing Regular Force Members and their Families," *Ottawa, ON: Canadian Forces Morale and Welfare Services* (2018), 74.

tioned to local market value, as required by Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat (TBS).<sup>56</sup> By setting the rates at market value, particularly in areas where the housing markets are hot - such as CFB Esquimalt, CFB Cold Lake (in years past), and the National Capital Region) – policymakers ignore the particular needs of military families who can ill afford to be posted there. A review of this policy with a focus on GBA+ and the needs of affected members, should consider the lower economic power of military families, particularly where the military member is junior, resulting from spousal employment inequities and how these policies affect the financial stability of military families and retention issues of the CAF.

In 2000, DND established a benefit for members posted to certain locations where the cost of living is excessively high compared to other regions. This benefit, called the Post Living Differential (PLD) has been frozen since 2009, despite soaring housing prices and increased cost of living due to inflation.<sup>57</sup>

Unlike in Canada, married military members in the US receive a housing allowance which is based upon the number of dependents. Unfortunately, this amount is rarely sufficient to cover the increased costs of housing in the vicinity of military bases, resulting in members and their families living at some distance from work.<sup>58</sup> Without suggesting that this is a policy that should be duplicated in Canada, applying a GBA+

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<sup>56</sup> Department of Defence, DAOD 5024-0, *DND Living Accommodation*; Treasury Board Secretariat, *Policy on Management of Real Property*, (Ottawa: Government of Canada, 1 November 2006), accessed 4 May 2022, para 6.1.6. <https://www.tbs-sct.canada.ca/pol/doc-eng.aspx?id=12042>

<sup>57</sup> Martin MacMahon, “Canadian Military Members Call for Update to Cost of Living Allowance Frozen since 2009,” *CityNews*, 9 April 2022. <https://ottawa.citynews.ca/local-news/canadian-military-members-call-for-update-to-cost-of-living-allowance-frozen-since-2009-5249765>

<sup>58</sup> Karney, *Families Under Stress: An Assessment of Data, Theory, and Research on Marriage and Divorce in the Military*, 59.

analysis to this policy would involve consideration of family size and the increased cost this brings for housing requirements.

## **UNEQUAL ACCESS TO CHILDCARE**

### **Childcare for Military Children**

In the US, the childcare system by the US military is the largest employer-provided childcare system in the entire country, and is available at every post.<sup>59</sup> A 2006 survey reported that less than 10% of military families had unmet childcare needs.<sup>60</sup> By contrast, during this same period in Canada, “more than half (57%) of [CAF] families participating in the *2009 CF Child Care Symposium* were unable to obtain child care [sic] services from their MFRC, due to spaces already filled.”<sup>61</sup> The situation in Canada has not improved significantly, despite childcare being a focus of SSE.

Childcare is one of the services provided by MFRCs, but the services offered at each vary considerably. On one end of the scale, the CFB Borden MRFC provides full-time, part-time and casual (where space exists) childcare only for infants, toddlers and preschoolers.<sup>62</sup> The MFRC at CFB Gaagetown offers full-time childcare Monday through Friday from 0630 hrs to 1730 hrs. It also provides before and after school childcare, casual (part-time) childcare during the week and on weekends for families with a deployed member (or one who is away on courses, training, exercises, or on imposed

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<sup>59</sup> Karney, *Families Under Stress: An Assessment of Data, Theory, and Research on Marriage and Divorce in the Military*, 60.

<sup>60</sup> . Joy S. Moyni et al., *Providing Child Care to Military Families: The Role of the Demand Formula in Defining Need and Informing Policy*, Vol. MG-387 (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 2006), xvii. [https://www-rand-org.cfc.idm.oclc.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/monographs/2006/RAND\\_MG387.pdf](https://www-rand-org.cfc.idm.oclc.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/monographs/2006/RAND_MG387.pdf)

<sup>61</sup> Pierre Daigle, *On the Homefront: Assessing the Well-being of Canada's Military Families in the New Millennium*, Ombudsman National Defence and Canadian Forces, [2013]), 105 (footnote).

<sup>62</sup> Borden Military Family Resource Centre, “Child Care Program Parent Handbook,” [Borden, ON: Canadian Forces Military Family Welfare Services, February 2022], 8.

restriction), childcare at the base gym, emergency and respite care, and a summer care program.<sup>63</sup> In addition, the Gagetown MFRC allows for up to 15 vacation/sick days where the parent is not required to pay for childcare services.<sup>64</sup> This policy is an excellent adaptation of GBA+ analysis in that acknowledges military families whose primary caregiver is the female non-military member and who would be required to take time off from work in order to care for the sick child. As noted above, female military spouses often have lower pay and benefits than their civilian counterparts due to interruptions in their careers and loss of seniority and taking time off work may mean loss of pay. While the CAF has seen an increasing level of support for military members to take time off work to care for sick children, the requirements of service mean that the service member is not always available, especially in periods of high operational tempo. A total lack of childcare likewise impacts the military spouse's ability to seek employment, further exacerbating the cycle.

MFRCs are provincially regulated childcare centres, and usually receive funding from provincial sources, in addition to directly receiving federal funding from Military Family Services, a DND/CAF organization.<sup>65</sup> Yet, many CAF families report being unable to access childcare at MFRCs because the spaces are occupied by civilian families with no connection to the military.<sup>66</sup> Few MFRCs explicitly state that priority is given to the children of military personnel; Kingston MFRC is one such Centre that states that priority

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<sup>63</sup> Gagetown Military Family Resource Centre, "Early Learning and Care Centre Parent Manual," [Gagetown, NB: Canadian Forces Military Family Welfare Services, 2016], 5-6.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid*, 7.

<sup>65</sup> This author has been told anecdotally that because of this public funding MFRCs are unable to discriminate against civilian families due to their lack of employment within DND/CAF for the provision of childcare. Despite significant research, no policy statement was found either to back this up or to show that CAF members have priority for childcare at MFRCs.

<sup>66</sup>

will be given to children of military, DND and Non-Public Fund (NPF) personnel over siblings of children already in care, with children of non-military families welcome to spots left over.<sup>67</sup> Space, as with other publicly available childcare, appears to be first come, first serve. Notably, where the children of CAF, DND and NPF receive priority, there is no distinction in priority between the three, although only CAF members are subject to postings every few years. The exception to this preferential treatment for childcare has been during the periods of emergency, such as provincially licensed emergency childcare programs for emergency workers in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. According to TBS, workplace daycare centres, which are “intended to assist [public service] employees . . . must attempt to operate with all or most of its capacity used by children of employees.”<sup>68</sup> Private as well as public sector employers, such as L’Oreal, Simon Fraser University, and Sunnybrook Health Sciences Centre, have for years recognized the benefits to providing childcare for its employees.<sup>69</sup> These include increased recruitment and retention, greater job satisfaction, suggesting similar outcomes that if child care were more accessible for CAF members. While the TBS policy appears to apply only to the public service, it would be a good place to start if there is a policy gap that does not ensure priority of care to military children.

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<sup>67</sup> Kingston Military Family Resource Centre, “Les Petits Amis Childcare Centre Licensed Childcare Programs Parent Handbook – April 2022,” [Kingston, ON: Canadian Forces Military Family Welfare Services, April 2022], 25. <https://www.cafconnection.ca/getmedia/7b7e316e-5ecc-4979-89c2-4fe7ddd1c4b4/LPA-Parent-Handbook-2021-ENv2.pdf.aspx>

<sup>68</sup> Government of Canada, “Workplace Day Care Centres,” accessed 2 May 2022. [https://www.tbs-sct.canada.ca/pol/\(S\(e021jvamqbhco5551teiyz55\)\)/doc-eng.aspx?id=12614](https://www.tbs-sct.canada.ca/pol/(S(e021jvamqbhco5551teiyz55))/doc-eng.aspx?id=12614)

<sup>69</sup> Ashley Dunfield, “Onsite Daycare Still a Scarce Commodity,” *The Globe and Mail*, 9 October 2012. <https://www.theglobeandmail.com/report-on-business/careers/top-employers/onsite-daycare-still-a-scarce-commodity/article4598578/>

## **Allied Childcare Policy Frameworks**

In September 2020, a new policy signed by the Secretary of Defense took effect that prioritized military families over civilian families at on base childcare facilities.<sup>70</sup> In Australia, The Australian Defence Force (ADF) applies a point system to ensure that equitable access to childcare for mobile Defence families, with the goal of achieving childcare placement within 6 months of a new posting.<sup>71</sup> The Priority of Access Guidelines allocate higher points where at least one parent is a full-time ADF member over parents who are Reserve Members but not on continuous service. As well, additional points are provided to personnel returning from maternity leave, single parents, dual Defence Personnel families (either ADF or Defence Public Service), and newly posted members. Not only does the ADF consider a needs-based approach to prioritizing childcare but the policy is also in line with GBA+, recognizing that the requirements of families differ and must be considered in light of reducing barriers to childcare and hence, barriers to service.

## **NEW PROGRAMS RELATED TO RETENTION**

Canada's Defence Policy, *Strong Secure Engaged*, acknowledges the requirement to support the total health and well-being of military families through new initiatives like the development of a Comprehensive Military Family Plan "to help stabilize family life

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<sup>70</sup> U.S. Department of Defense, "DOD Implements Policy Change for Child Care Priorities," 9 March 2020. <https://www.defense.gov/News/Releases/Release/Article/2105734/dod-implements-policy-change-for-child-care-priorities/>

<sup>71</sup> Australia Department of Defence, "Childcare Assistance," Defence Member and Family Support, last accessed 4 May 2020. <https://defence.gov.au/members-families/Family/kids/childcare.asp>

for Canadian Armed Forces members and their families who frequently have to relocate.”<sup>72</sup>

A government initiative, entitled Seamless Canada, was launched on 27 June 2018 in order to “alleviate significant stressors for Canadian Armed Forces members and their families during relocation” with the goal of creating a seamless experience for military families.<sup>73</sup> Like many pre-pandemic initiatives, Seamless Canada appears to have fallen prey to other more pressing concerns of the last two years. Aside from annual news reports of consultation with the provinces, little actionable items appear to have resulted.

Another program, called the Journey, has been envisioned as a smoother transition between the Reg F and Res F that would allow members to shift between the two as their family and personal situations require.<sup>74</sup> Unfortunately, not all trades lend themselves to Res F. Of those trades that have successfully managed are pilot and ACSO, the former an in-demand trade in the civilian world.

## CONCLUSION

The CAF is currently short of 7,600 personnel, a number that is expected to grow in the next few years as the force under goes a period of reconstitution following decreased recruiting during the COVID-19 pandemic.<sup>75</sup> A recent poll conducted by DND

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<sup>72</sup> Department of National Defence. *Strong, Secure, Engaged: Canada's Defence Policy* (Ottawa, Ont.: National Defence, [2017]).

<sup>73</sup> "Canada: National Defence Advances the Seamless Canada Initiative with Provinces and Territories." *Asia News Monitor* 2018. <https://www-proquest-com.cfc.idm.oclc.org/newspapers/canada-national-defence-advances-seamless/docview/2153458868/se-2?accountid=9867>

<sup>74</sup> Timothy S. Stackhouse, "Mentoring and Motivating Millennials and Post-Millennials at the Unit and Sub-Unit Levels," *Canadian Military Journal* 21, no. 2 (2021).

<sup>75</sup> Ashley Burke, "Canadian Military Reports Sagging Recruitment as NATO Ramps Up Deployment in Eastern Europe," CBC News, 23 March 2022. <https://www.cbc.ca/news/politics/canadian-armed-forces-staff-shortfall-1.6395131>

highlights the extreme challenge the CAF faces in recruiting personnel. When asked if they would be interested in joining the RCAF, CA, or RCN, the results were 58%, 57%, and 61% respectively that respondents were not at all likely to join, while between 21 and 22% indicated that they were not very likely to join.<sup>76</sup> Not only do the issues described in this paper impact retention, but they also serve as a barrier to recruitment. Potential recruits who may already have established families would be more likely to join the military were they assured that their families would be well looked after.<sup>77</sup>

Lack of sufficient access to medical care and childcare, lack of affordable housing, as well as wage insufficiencies and gender pay gaps are problems faced by many Canadians. These are not problems faced only by military families. However, owing to greater frequency of relocations, these are problems that have the potential for greater impact on military dependents, many of whom do not remain within a region long enough to build up a support network or work their way through wait lists before being posted again. Underscoring these challenges is the fact that many current programs offered to support military families have not been reviewed in some time, and hence, have never been analyzed using a GBA+ lens, which only became a governmental priority in 2016.<sup>78</sup> In addition, the majority of the programs and policies described within this paper are tied to financial policies that fall under TBS. As these programs were discontinued or adjusted to bring them in line with benefits that the average Canadian

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<sup>76</sup> David Pugliese, "Majority of Canadians have no Interest in Joining the Military, DND Poll Shows," *Ottawa Citizen*, 28 April, 2022. <https://ottawacitizen.com/news/national/defence-watch/majority-of-canadians-have-no-interest-in-joining-the-military-dnd-poll-shows>.

<sup>77</sup> Blaisure, *Serving Military Families: Theories, Research, and Application*, 261

<sup>78</sup> Johnstone, "Organizational Change in Canadian Public Institutions: The Implementations of GBA+ in DND/CAF," , 501.

would have access to, the historical focus on ensuring an equitable standard of care and living for military families was lost. As Daigle asserts,

[Canadian military] families are not looking for shortcuts or handouts or preferential treatment of any sort. [They] seek: a fair family income and reasonable financial stability and security that allow them to meet their immediate needs and adequately plan and prepare for the future; safe, healthy and affordable housing; effective, appropriate education opportunities for their children, including the means to limit the academic effects of relocation, deployment and separation; access to quality, timely health care; employment options for spouses who want to work outside the home; some degree of control over their destiny within the limitations they accept as part of the military lifestyle; and a healthy and safe home environment.<sup>79</sup>

As any changes to policy or benefits for military members and their families would likely require the cooperation of TBS, as well as significant support from other federal and provincial agencies. Before embarking on any policy change or policy development, a more thorough review of the impact of frequent military relocation on military families and the resultant impact on retention is required. This paper has endeavoured to explore the ways in which military spouses, who are predominantly women, and their children experience barriers to employment, medical care, and childcare and the implications of a lack of affordable housing on military families. By applying GBA+ analysis to extant and historical policies within these areas, we begin to

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<sup>79</sup> Pierre Daigle, *On the Homefront: Assessing the Well-being of Canada's Military Families in the New Millennium*, Ombudsman National Defence and Canadian Forces, [2013]), 89.

see how diverse military families have been adversely impacted by frequent military relocations, affecting retention. As well, the author recognizes that not all military families' needs fit within the research described herein, and further study in this particular area is recommended.

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