



Establishing New Dominant Institutional Logics for the Well-Being of CAF Families

Lieutenant-Commander Anonymous

JCSP 49

Exercise Solo Flight

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PCEMI n° 49

Exercice Solo Flight

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CANADIAN FORCES COLLEGE - COLLÈGE DES FORCES CANADIENNES

JCSP 49 - PCEMI n° 49
2022 - 2023

Exercise Solo Flight – Exercice Solo Flight

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CHALLENGING TRADITION: ESTABLISHING NEW DOMINANT INSTITUTIONAL LOGICS FOR THE WELL-BEING OF CAF FAMILIES

Introduction

In 2022 the Chief of the Defence Staff (CDS) publicly recognized that the Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) are grappling with a ‘personnel crisis’ citing a shortfall of 10,000 positions.¹ Newspapers nationwide featured headlines announcing that the CDS has issued orders to the CAF, emphasizing that recruitment and retention of personnel should be the utmost priority for the organization.² However, as rightly noted, “neither the order nor an accompanying retention strategy provide a clear picture of exactly why Canadians are steering clear of recruiting centres — or why the military is having trouble keeping troops in uniform.”³ As the Canadian job market grows more competitive, the CAF is facing a talent war with industry and the private sector. Thus, the CAF must make significant efforts to present itself as an appealing and feasible career option for prospective employees. This is relevant not only to the acquisition of new personnel but also to the retention of those enrolled.

The CAF possesses specific policies and regulations that set it apart from other employers, with one notable distinction being the concept of unlimited liability. When enlisting in the CAF, the potential risk to life and limb are known to prospective candidates when making the decision to enroll. However, there are certain ideologies that affect the well-being of CAF members, which are not explicitly outlined in policy. These ideologies are institutional logics that govern the daily operations of the CAF and have the unintended impact of shaping its culture, policies, and overall functioning.

Within the context of the CAF, an outdated institutional logic prevails, perceiving men as the primary breadwinners. The organization's operations are significantly influenced by this traditional perspective which regards families as portable entities. However, the CAF is currently taking steps to challenge this entrenched institutional logic by endorsing a newly emerged perspective that acknowledges the importance of supporting military families. Despite the seemingly disparate nature, these logics clash with each other, creating conflicts between the old and the new, ultimately negatively affecting recruitment and retention.

The purpose of this essay is to investigate how the deeply ingrained *old* institutional logic creates a hindrance to the implementation of a new institutional logic. This will be demonstrated by examining the deep-rooted traditional logic contrasted against a modern family-oriented logic, with emphasis on relocation due to military service, spousal employment, access to medical resources, financial security, and childcare. By creating a new dominant logic, the CAF has the potential to enhance its appeal as an employer of choice and improve its ability to retain talented individuals.

¹ Berthiaume, Lee, ‘Defence Chief Calls on Canadians to Rally behind Military during Personnel Crisis’.

² Ibid

³ Ibid

Defining Institutional Logic

Institutional logics are the underlying principles that shape the behaviors of actors within a particular field, and are based on commonly accepted beliefs and practices within the organizational community.⁴ “Defined as socially-constructed sets of material practices, assumptions, values and beliefs that shape cognition and behavior, institutional logics guide us in how to act in particular situations.”⁵ These, often unspoken norms, can have a significant impact on any organization, as they can influence policy development or guide decision-making. Additionally, they have the potential to drive cultural change or maintain the status quo. These beliefs, values, and norms are shared among members of the institution and are often taken for granted.

Institutional logic is often used to explain why organizations and individuals behave in certain ways.⁶ This concept extends beyond the CAF and has been explored through institutional theory, with broad applicability to various domains of work. For example, institutional logic can help to explain why some individuals prioritize career advancement over other values. This is because the institutional logic of many professions emphasizes the importance of career success and upward mobility.

Institutional logics, when “supported by powerful actors contribute to maintaining the status quo since they provide the formal and informal rules of action, interaction, and interpretation that guide and constrain decision makers.”⁷ Overcoming this challenge becomes particularly apparent in organizations that exhibit significant hierarchical structures and have established longstanding traditions and standard practices.

The stronger the institutional logic is rooted in an organization, the more challenging it is to change, as this would require a complete shift in cultural beliefs. Changing of this logic would fundamentally change the organization as a whole. For example, organizations that have a strong market logic may be resistant to initiatives that prioritize social responsibility over profit maximization. The nature of military work often involves high stakes and risks, where the consequences of failure can be severe. This can create a culture of risk aversion, where established practices are seen as the safest and most reliable way to carry out operations. As a result, there can be resistance to change and innovation, as novel approaches may be seen as untested or risky. Overcoming institutional logics in the military requires a willingness to challenge established practices and traditions, and a willingness to experiment with new approaches.

Another obstacle in modifying or overcoming institutional logics is the existence of multiple logics that may conflict with each other. Scholars who study institutional culture contend that although multiple logics may coexist, organizational fields are

⁴ Reay, Trish and C. R. Hinings. "Managing the Rivalry of Competing Institutional Logics." *Organization Studies* 30, no. 6 (2009): 629-652.

⁵ Tyskbo, 'Competing Institutional Logics in Talent Management: Talent Identification at the HQ and a Subsidiary'.

⁶ Ibid

⁷ Ibid

ultimately shaped by a dominant institutional logic.⁸ It is the authors opinion that CAF culture is significantly shaped by an *old*, long-standing, dominant institutional logic. This logic is in relation to gender roles, and associates men with the role of breadwinner and women with that of homemaker. This institutional logic is not exclusive to the CAF, but rather permeates Canadian society and is prevalent in most military organizations. However, what occurs when a new logic is introduced that challenges the pre-existing?

Imagine a scenario set in the 1950s, where the head of the family, the father, is employed in the CAF. The spouse and children accompany the enlisted member as they are relocated across the country for various postings, with the wife being seen as portable. However, the wife decides to pursue a job outside of the household and is no longer flexible to move. In this situation, the CAF's conventional institutional logic creates a barrier for both the CAF member and the spouse.

Theorists have discovered that the presence of multiple logics often generates an inherent rivalry, with many organizational fields being marked by the existence of two or more dominant, competing, or conflicting belief systems.⁹ These “conflicting logics co-exist during transition times until one side or the other wins and the field reforms around the winning dominant logic.”¹⁰ Fast forwarding the aforementioned scenario seventy years, has anything changed that would challenge the dominate logic?

The next section of this paper will aim to define both the old and new CAF institutional logics, and to demonstrate how the traditional logic is likely to prevail as the dominant logic in effect and ultimately cause the CAF to remain at status quo with regards to recruiting and retention numbers.

Old Institutional Logic: Men as Breadwinners, Wives as Caregivers

With the evolution of traditional gender roles, the composition of the workforce has dramatically shifted in the last half century. “Gender roles reflect societal expectations for behaviors based on gender... [and] across time and throughout the world are varied and diverse, although most societies are patriarchal, elevating men above women by giving them more power.”¹¹ These roles can undergo transformation, as evidenced by changes during WWI and WWII. During this time the gender role of women in Canada experienced a significant shift. With positions outside the home left vacant due to the demand for overseas military service, women took on new responsibilities and played crucial roles in various sectors. At the start of WWII, approximately 570,000 women held jobs to support the war-effort in Canada. However, by the end of the war, the number of employed women had increased to nearly one million.¹² Following the conclusion of both wars the workforce participation of women

⁸ Reay, Trish and C. R. Hinings. "Managing the Rivalry of Competing Institutional Logics." *Organization Studies* 30, no. 6 (2009): 629-652.

⁹ Tyskbo, 'Competing Institutional Logics in Talent Management: Talent Identification at the HQ and a Subsidiary'.

¹⁰ Ibid

¹¹ Erickson-Schroth, Laura and Davis, Benjamin, *Gender*.

¹² Government of Canada, 'Canada Remembers Women on The Home Front'.

reverted to pre-war levels, and traditional gender norms were reinstated. Records state that after the WWII ended, “incentives for women workers – such as company daycare centres – ended and they were encouraged to leave the workforce.”¹³ The term “gender-role elasticity” was developed to describe this phenomenon.¹⁴ This theory explains that during times of strain, gender roles may become more adaptable, but when the pressure is lifted, they revert to the previous form.¹⁵

Nevertheless, when examining Canadian statistics from the last thirty years, it becomes evident that the involvement of women in the labor force has been steadily increasing. The concept of gender-role elasticity seems to have dissipated, as in 1976, only 40.5% of mothers were employed outside of the household, compared to 76.5% in 2021.¹⁶ Contrast that against males, where in 1976, 93% were in the work force, which declined in 2021 to 91.8%.¹⁷ First, this statistic demonstrates how the number of men in the workforce has remained remarkably consistent over the past half-century. Secondly, it reveals the increase of women in the workforce sharing the responsibility as a breadwinner for the family.

Although strides have been made in reshaping gender roles, Canada still has a considerable distance to cover in dismantling the perception that men are the primary breadwinners for families. This is exemplified by a 2017 study that compared wages between men and women, revealing that Canadian women earned only 88.6 cents for every dollar earned by male counterparts. The study further projected that, at the current rate, it would take over a century to attain gender equality.¹⁸ Such statistics underscore the entrenched nature of these societal beliefs.

Canadian research demonstrates that “the ‘ideal’ man today is not only a good employee working long hours to be a successful breadwinner, but also is a nurturing husband/partner, father, and son.”¹⁹ Yet, in a 2014 study it was discovered although men are assuming more responsibilities within the home, they tend to do so alongside the role as financial providers and are unlikely to scale back on work commitments.²⁰ The study demonstrates that despite men assuming additional responsibilities beyond employment, there is no reduction in the role of breadwinner.

The gender norms that prevail in Canadian society are often reflected in the culture of the CAF. As Canadian gender roles undergo transformation from a predominantly male workforce to a more inclusive one, traditional gender expectations deeply ingrained in the country's culture are being challenged. Yet, the previous studies

¹³ Ibid

¹⁴ Eidinger, Andrea, ‘History of Gender Roles in Canada’.

¹⁵ Ibid

¹⁶ Statistics Canada, ‘Employment Rate of Mothers and Fathers, 1976 to 2021’.

¹⁷ Ibid

¹⁸ Arthrell, Eric et al., ‘The Design of Everyday Men: A New Lens for Gender Equality Progress’.

¹⁹ Ibid

²⁰ Ibid

listed consider the entire Canadian population, and potentially provide misleading progress in balancing gender roles in comparison to male-dominated workforces.

In examining institutional culture, Wilson argues that militaries have a unique institutional culture, and how it can often be difficult for an organization to tell when the institution is functioning properly based on the traditions, norms and the fact that “those in charge seek people most like themselves to fill vacancies.”²¹ Throughout history, the demographic of a nation’s military has been predominantly composed of men. Examining the demographics in 2022, it was observed that 84% of the CAF consisted of male personnel²² while 87% of military spouses are women.²³ These statistics not only reveal the significant presence of males in the CAF workforce but also underscore the implications for military spouses, who are predominantly women. Consequently, this male-dominated institutional culture often results in women having to follow husbands due to frequent relocations, and likely are unable to acknowledge that the institution is no longer functioning properly.

The CDS “acknowledged that it has been difficult trying to change an institution with decades of established tradition. But [stated] the Armed Forces have no choice.”²⁴ By examining how these logics are evolving in response to changing gender roles, the CAF can better understand the barriers that exist to introduce a new institutional logic.

Family as the “New” Institutional Logic

An important aspect of serving in the CAF is that the occupation of the enlisted individual significantly affects the whole family. Both families and militaries have been referred to as “greedy organizations,” which implies both require a substantial amount of resources and support to function effectively. In studying greedy organizations, DeAngelis and Segal state that “military families live at the intersection of two major social institutions, both of which involve a complex set of roles and rules, and both of which make great demands on the individual’s time, loyalty, and energy.”²⁵ The authors argue that from the Revolutionary War to WWII, the military was dismissive or ambivalent towards family concerns since most members of the military were young and unmarried, and because of this, no conflict existed between the military and the military family.²⁶ However, as the militaries of western societies transitioned to a voluntary force, in a time of relative stability, “by virtue of their time in service, were older and thus more likely to be married with children,”²⁷ and the greedy, competing demands between families and the military began.²⁸

²¹ Wilson, Peter, ‘Defining Military Culture’.

²² Government of Canada, ‘Statistics of Women in the Canadian Armed Forces’.

²³ Sudom K. ‘Quality of Life Among Military Families: Results From the 2008/2009 Survey of Canadian Forces Spouses’.

²⁴ Berthiaume, Lee, ‘Defence Chief Calls on Canadians to Rally behind Military during Personnel Crisis’.

²⁵ Moelker et al., *Military Families and War in the 21st Century: Comparative Perspectives*.

²⁶ Ibid

²⁷ Ibid

²⁸ Ibid

Strategic documentation of the CAF has undergone a noticeable change, emphasizing the importance of achieving a balance between the demands of military service and the well-being of military families. Supporting CAF families can be described as a new institutional logic that emphasizes the military's responsibility to aid and support the entire military family, not just the enlisted member. The new institutional logic recognizes that a strong family support system is essential to the overall success and readiness of the military. This marks a significant departure from previous approaches, which did not place an emphasis on the needs of families.

For example, the *Canada First Defence Strategy* (CFDS) was released in 2008, outlining the CAF's future roadmap for the next two decades. Upon examination, it becomes evident that the section pertaining to CAF personnel was of minimal significance, comprising merely one paragraph. Notably, there was a glaring absence of any mention or reference to initiatives or measures aimed at supporting military families. The word family can only be found in the document when discussing the “acquisition of a new family of land combat vehicles.”²⁹

In stark contrast, *Strong, Secure, Engaged: Canada's Defence Policy* (SSE), released in 2017 focuses extensively on the military family, stating that “military families are the strength behind the uniform.”³⁰ SSE identified three new initiatives that were designed to improve and enhance services and support for military families, and several other initiatives that would indirectly improve the quality of life for families.³¹

In 2022, the CAF released the *Canadian Armed Forces Retention Strategy* with the foreword stating the purpose was “to provide for our people and their families so that they are well-supported, diverse, and resilient.”³² The strategy created lines of efforts (LOE) to guide the CAF through the required changes necessary to increase recruiting and retention. Notably, in LOE six, the strategic objective is to “understand and address the needs and concerns of the CAF members and their families to better balance family life with CAF service.”³³ The Strategy also incorporates findings from the 2019 CAF Retention Survey, which included a query asking active members to specify factors that might lead to early attrition in the coming three years. The primary response, accounting for 25.4% of respondents, was the effect of the military lifestyle on their spouse or partner.³⁴ The CAF recognizes the correlation between unhealthy attrition, and the impact of military lifestyle on families.

By means of strategic documentation, the CAF has established a fresh institutional mindset, emphasizing the commitment to taking care of military families, and deviating from the perception of being a greedy, self-interested organization. However, these strategies may not be addressing the root cause of the issues faced by

²⁹ Government of Canada, ‘Canada First Defence Strategy’.

³⁰ “Strong, Secure, Engaged. Canada's Defence Policy.”.

³¹ “Strong, Secure, Engaged. Canada's Defence Policy.”.

³² Department of National Defence, ‘Canadian Armed Forces Retention Strategy’. I

³³ Department of National Defence, ‘Canadian Armed Forces Retention Strategy’. 49

³⁴ Department of National Defence, ‘Canadian Armed Forces Retention Strategy’.

modern military families, as the traditional institutional logic remains dominant and undermines the effectiveness of these initiatives.

When the “Old” and “New” Institutional Logics Collide

Upon examining the previous institutional mentality that males are the primary earners, it becomes evident that this belief is not exclusive to the CAF, as it is also prevalent in the broader Canadian society. However, what sets the CAF apart is the inability to offer geographic stability, which poses additional challenges for military families. To put it plainly, the notion that men are the primary earners and wives are movable assets does *not* align with the institutional logic that families are important.

Difficulties faced by military families are not a novel concept, as highlighted by Mady Segal's 1986 research, which sheds light on the distinctive challenges associated with a military lifestyle. These include the absence of stable geographic roots, the demands that lead to prolonged periods of separation from spouses, and the expectation that family members should behave in a manner befitting the rank of the service member, as they informally assume that rank.³⁵ While many of these findings still hold true, one of the most significant challenges is the frequent relocation of military personnel and the direct effect on the family.

In 2015, an investigation delved into the stressors encountered by military families, and through a survey conducted among spouses, it was revealed that “the top five challenges facing CAF families were spousal employment (43 percent), primary healthcare (37 percent), relocation due to military service (32 percent), financial stability (30 percent), and childcare (19 percent).”³⁶ These dissatisfactions can have a significant impact, particularly when considering the sheer number of dependents associated with CAF members. In a 2017 *Profile of Military Families in Canada* report suggests that “as of August 2017, there were 66,472 Regular Force (RegF) personnel with 99,716 additional family dependents (spouses, children and other dependents).”³⁷ While arguments have been made stating “postings allow for diversity in the scope of a member’s career experiences and are meant to enhance training and experience as well as to keep members alert and ready to handle new challenges,”³⁸ this argument fails to highlight that the number of dependents affiliated with RegF members significantly surpasses the number of CAF members. This argument prioritizes the career of the CAF member over the civilian dependents.

As discussed, when institutional logics are at odds with each other, the institution undergoes reforms aligning with the dominant logic. The following section of this essay

³⁵ Segal, ‘The Military and the Family as Greedy Institutions’.

³⁶ 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.

³⁷ Manser, Lynda, ‘Profile of Military Families in Canada: 2017 Regular Forces Demographics’.

³⁸ Manser, Lynda, ‘The State of Military Families in Canada: A Scoping Review’.

will explore how the CAF is grappling with the task of redefining the dominant logic, by utilizing the five identified dissatisfiers faced by CAF families.

Relocation Due to Military Service

In order to examine the impact of military service-related relocations, it is essential to begin by determining the portion of the population affected. According to 2018 statistics published by Morale and Welfare Services, approximately 50% of RegF personnel receive a posting message annually, with 25% of them requiring relocation, and 20% are mandated to move to a different province or territory. This translates to an estimated total of 10,000 annual moves.³⁹

In 2018, the CAF Ombudsman highlighted the challenges faced by CAF families when undergoing relocations and drew attention to the staggering amount of policies, precisely 604, that govern military personnel.⁴⁰ Noting the difficulties and complexity in navigating these policies, it was discovered that families most commonly turned to Brookfield Global Relocation Services (BGRS) to address the questions regarding relocation. An important differentiation to note regarding BGRS is that it is an external agency whose primary focus lies in maximizing the organization's profit rather than prioritizing member assistance. It was also identified that smaller percentage of personnel “sought support from the MFRC [Military Family Resource Centre], but for the most part did not receive the type of assistance they were looking for to connect them with services in the new location.”⁴¹ The responsibility to comprehend the entitlements related to the relocation lies with the individual service member and family.

In the event that a CAF member prefers not to undergo relocation, alternative options exist, albeit not ideal ones. These include requesting Imposed Restrictions and moving without family, or opting for a release from the CAF. However, equipped with these statistics, the objective is now to investigate undesired outcomes of relocation.

Spousal Employment

An examination of Canadian statistics demonstrates the active participation of both men and women in the workforce. This is evident in the increasing prevalence of dual-earner households, which rose from 36% in 1976 to 69% in 2015.⁴² However, the CAF system has not adequately adjusted to accommodate the reality of both spouses pursuing professional careers. As outlined in the Retention Strategy, “non-military partners to CAF members suffer economically from postings and are impacted by the demands of a CAF lifestyle in different ways than service couples.”⁴³ When a service couple is posted together, although there are still stressors involved, there is no need for the spouse to seek employment, thereby alleviating some economic pressures. This

³⁹ Morale and Welfare Services, ‘Military Families and Relocations’.

⁴⁰ Lick, Greg, ‘The Military Lifestyle Podcast’.

⁴¹ Morale and Welfare Services, ‘Military Families and Relocations’.

⁴² Arthrell, Eric et al., ‘The Design of Everyday Men: A New Lens for Gender Equality Progress’.

⁴³ Department of National Defence, ‘Canadian Armed Forces Retention Strategy’. 24-25

implies that civilian spouses experience a higher degree of disadvantage compared to CAF spouses.

A 2017 study on military families in Canada unveiled that only 10% (6,472) of enlisted members were in a marital or common-law relationship with another CAF member, either Regular (RegF) or Reserve Force.⁴⁴ Furthermore, the number of spouses for RegF members is 37,052,⁴⁵ indicating that approximately 33,347 civilian spouses are affected by posting messages that prioritize the military member's career over their own. Likely acknowledging this unfortunate reality, the CAF established the Military Spousal Employment Network (MSEN) in 2018 to assist civilian spouses with the transition. The mandate of MSEN states the organization “seek[s] to connect military spouses with select national employers that endeavor to provide equal employment opportunities to spouses amidst the challenges associated with the military lifestyle.”⁴⁶ Yet, a notable phrase in the mandate stands out – *national employers*. Upon examination of the MSEN website, employers, such as Bank of Montreal, Bell, and the Department of National Defence, have duly registered to provide support to military spouses in the pursuit of employment opportunities. Although it is a commendable initiative, it fails to encompass all fields of work. For instance, police forces in Canada are typically either municipal or provincial organizations. In addition, dentists, dental hygienists, nurses, and teachers require specialized training and licenses that differ from province to province.

Further investigation reveals that in the aforementioned scenario, if a civilian spouse is employed as a police officer in British Columbia and subsequently relocated to Ontario, the Ontario Provincial Police (OPP) offers a program for seasoned police officers to apply. However, this process is cumbersome, one must first “take and pass the Ontario Police College (OPC) equivalency testing as part of their conditional offer, if the applicant is an officer from out-of-province, including Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) members, those posted in Ontario and throughout Canada.”⁴⁷ Upon completion, the applicant would then proceed through a seven step process, including but not limited to, reputational, psychological and medical assessment, security clearance, financial inquiries, a home visit and interview, and providing the required transcript form an Ontario Police College.⁴⁸ Considering a standard military posting cycle of two years, it is possible that the spouse may spend a significant proportion of time endeavoring to secure employment before being required to repeat the process in the event of another relocation.

The CAF, through BGRS, the entity responsible for managing CAF moves, does offer support to spouses in the form of resume building assistance. However, this is the only expense the CAF covers for civilian spouses to assist in seeking employment. Furthermore, the Compensation and Benefits Instruction (CBI) that outlines this benefit fails to disclose the specific cost to be reimbursed, stating only that “reimbursement shall be for the actual and reasonable costs incurred for the preparation of the curriculum vitae

⁴⁴ Manser, Lynda, ‘Profile of Military Families in Canada: 2017 Regular Forces Demographics’. 63

⁴⁵ Manser, Lynda, ‘Profile of Military Families in Canada: 2017 Regular Forces Demographics’. i

⁴⁶ Military Family Services, ‘Military Spousal Employment Network’.

⁴⁷ Ontario Provincial Police, ‘Experienced Police Officer Application Process’.

⁴⁸ Ontario Provincial Police, ‘Experienced Police Officer Application Process’.

not exceeding the maximum amount established in Treasury Board directives for a public service employee.”⁴⁹ Despite conducting a thorough hour-long search, this author was unable to determine the cost in question.

The unfortunate reality is this is not a new issue. A 2013 Ombudsman *Special Report on the Homefront: Assessing the Well-being of Canada's Military Families in the New Millennium* it was identified that “the spousal employment challenge has repeatedly been identified as a major consideration leading serving members to release from the CF.”⁵⁰ Without additional support from the GoC in addressing the unique challenges between each of the provinces, or overhauling the requirement for frequent relocations, the likelihood is that this dissatisfier will continue to exist.

Primary Health Care

Although CAF members receive healthcare from the military's federally funded healthcare system, spouses and children access healthcare through provincial and territorial systems. Meaning, CAF dependents compete with all other Canadian citizens for access to healthcare services. Consequently, when relocated, the dependents are responsible for finding a medical practitioner or seeking out alternative means of health care. This is particularly challenging given recent national news coverage highlighting the shortage of doctors in Canada. The Canadian Medical Association has labelled the doctor shortage as critical, stating over six million Canadians are unable to source a doctor.⁵¹ While statistics indicate that around 80% of Canadians have the ability to consult a doctor, the truth is that even among those with a doctor, considerable delays in receiving medical care are prevalent.⁵² “Put another way, the system seems to work for 14 per cent of Canadian adults or 4.4 million Canadians. These people not only have a doctor but have easy access to that medical professional when needed.”⁵³

When discussing the availability of doctors, Canadian statistics can be misleading, as metropolitan cities typically have better access to medical professionals than rural communities. In fact, according to recent data “the situation is particularly alarming in rural communities where only 8% of physicians are serving nearly one-fifth of Canada's population.”⁵⁴ For example, if a family is posted to Petawawa; in 2021 the local newspaper reported that 30% of the population would be without a doctor.⁵⁵ In 2023, it was reported that 40% of residents in Cold Lake lacked access to a family physician.⁵⁶ These same statistics permeate throughout the country in the rural bases of Canada, and “in 2017, 44% of CAF spouses reported experiencing extreme difficulty in regaining

⁴⁹ Government of Canada, ‘Chapter 208 - Relocation Benefits’. CBI 208.995(2)

⁵⁰ Daigle, Pierre, ‘On the Homefront: Assessing the Well-Being of Canada's Military Families in the New Millennium’.

⁵¹ Reid, Angus, ‘Doc Deficits: Half of Canadians Either Can't Find a Doctor or Can't Get a Timely Appointment with the One They Have’.

⁵² Ibid

⁵³ Ibid

⁵⁴ Richardson, Ben and Hussain, Yadullah, ‘Proof Point: Canada Needs More Doctors - and Fast’.

⁵⁵ MyFM News, ‘Doctor Shortage in Renfrew County Will Grow in 2021 and Virtual Care Being Explored’.

⁵⁶ Bellefontaine, Michelle, ‘Cold Lake Buying Medical Clinic in Hopes of Attracting Doctors’.

access to routine medical care following a posting.”⁵⁷ The problem is twofold: families not only lack access to timely medical care, but also lose the continuity of care that exists when a person remains with the same doctor over a prolonged period of time. The combined effect of these factors could prove detrimental to the dependents' overall health.

Similar to the issue of spousal employment, the challenge of accessing healthcare for military families is not a new phenomenon. The 2013 Ombudsman report highlights families would “take leave and travel to previous postings to consult former physicians because they have not secured doctors in their current locations. This practice was outlined repeatedly by a wide cross section of the military family demographic.”⁵⁸ Although there is no straightforward remedy for tackling this issue, the reality is, without bold actions, such as offering the federal healthcare to dependents, the problem is likely to persist.

Financial Stability

The rising cost of living is a significant challenge for Canadian households. Inflation has led to an increase in the prices of goods and services, including housing, food, and family care amenities. For example, a report published by Dalhousie University stated that for a family of four, the average annual food budget is \$16,288.41, which was an increase of \$1,065.60 in a one-year period.⁵⁹ Notably, “CAF spouses earned “an average of \$5,063 to \$13,755 lesser employment income than civilian spouses, despite similarity in industry of employment.”⁶⁰ The combination of escalating expenses and diminished incomes for civilian spouses has presented significant challenges for households in sustaining the desired standard of living, particularly when relying on a sole source of income that has not kept pace with inflation.

Based on a study conducted in 2018, it was discovered that 50% of CAF families encountered a deterioration in the household financial situation subsequent to a relocation. This decline was attributed to various factors, including the loss of wages from the non-military spouse, increased mortgage or rent expenses, and the higher cost of living in the new location.⁶¹

Frequent relocations can be financially and emotionally burdensome for military families, particularly considering the high housing costs across Canada. The housing market has witnessed a significant surge in prices. As an example, from February 2021 to February 2022, the average house price increased by 20%.⁶² When CAF members are

⁵⁷ The College of Family Physicians of Canada, *Best Advice: Caring for Military Families in the Patient's Medical Home*, [2017]).

⁵⁸ Daigle, Pierre, ‘On the Homefront: Assessing the Well-Being of Canada’s Military Families in the New Millennium’.

⁵⁹ Consky, Mitchell, ‘Here’s a Look at What’s Going to Cost You More, and Less, in 2023’.

⁶⁰ Skomorovsky, Alla, Wan, Cynthia and Watkins, Kimberley. ‘Introduction to the Financial Wellbeing of Canadian Armed Forces Members and Families’.

⁶¹ Morale and Welfare Services, ‘Military Families and Relocations’.

⁶² CBC News. ‘Average Canadian House Price Hits \$816,720 — Up 20% in Past Year’.

posted every two years, it becomes challenging to build equity in the housing market. The frequent relocations disrupt the ability to establish long-term roots and invest in a home. While market fluctuations may provide equity gains for CAF members, the opposite may also be true.

The uncertainty and instability in the housing market can make it difficult for military families to commit to homeownership and the associated financial obligations. For instance, in March 2023, the national average home price was \$686,371, a decrease of 13.7% compared to the same month the previous year.⁶³ As a result, in the event of a posting, a CAF member who recently purchased a home may potentially suffer a financial setback of more than \$94,000 if they are compelled to sell the property at a loss. This financial burden makes it more challenging for military families to accumulate equity in homes, limiting their ability to build wealth through homeownership.

Childcare

When both partners are employed outside the home, securing suitable childcare often comes at a high cost. This can be a significant financial burden, especially if the cost of childcare exceeds one spouse's salary. It is worth noting that nearly half of all RegF personnel (47%) have dependent children, with each age group (under 5, 6-12, and 13 and over) representing a third of the total.⁶⁴ While this cost poses a stressor for military families, the transient nature of military postings further complicates the establishment of long-term childcare arrangements.

The availability and accessibility of quality childcare services vary across different regions in Canada. Some areas have limited childcare facilities, especially in remote or less populated regions where military postings can occur.

One significant issue faced nationwide is the extensive waitlists for childcare services. An illustrative case in Halifax, NS, garnered attention in national newspapers. A pregnant woman was required to pay a \$200 fee to include her name on a daycare's waiting list. Despite waiting for a year and a half, no available spot opened up for her child. Upon contacting other daycare centers, she was informed that the earliest acceptance for her child would be in six months to a year. This situation in Halifax is not isolated, as similar stories are making headlines across the country,⁶⁵ from Quebec, Ontario⁶⁶, Alberta⁶⁷ and British Columbia⁶⁸. While wait times vary across the country, a 2020 child-care report conducted by the city of Victoria, which houses one of two naval bases in Canada, stated that the minimum childcare waitlist is one to two years.⁶⁹ Considering a generous, often unheard of, six-month notification of an impending

⁶³ Leduc, Pierre and Coopersmith, Jacob, 'National Statistics: Canadian Home Sales Continue to Rise in March as Markets Tighten'.

⁶⁴ Manser, Lynda, 'Profile of Military Families in Canada: 2017 Regular Forces Demographics'.⁷⁸

⁶⁵ Willick, Frances, 'Parents Left Scrambling after Daycare Pulls "guaranteed" Spot'.

⁶⁶ Veneza, Ricardo, 'Thousands on Waitlist for Childcare Spaces in Waterloo Region'.

⁶⁷ Ritchie, Josh, 'Calgary Childcare Centres See Long Waitlists amid Staffing Shortages'.

⁶⁸ Judd, Amy and Stanton, Kylie, 'B.C. Mom Says Daycares Should Not Charge Non-Refundable Deposits for Wait-Lists'.

⁶⁹ Casorso, Jen and Ravlic, Sarah, 'Child Care in Victoria'.

posting, military personnel would still face challenges in securing childcare as the wait lists exceed the notice to move.

Moreover, the demanding and unpredictable nature of military schedules, including deployments and training exercises, can make it more challenging to find childcare providers who can accommodate the unique needs and irregular hours associated with military service. The Military Family Resource Centre (MFRC) would be the most suitable entity to tackle this distinctive challenge. However, the availability of spaces is highly limited. For instance, the Victoria MFRC only offers a total of 48 spaces for children of all ages, citing a minimum of 18 months to two year wait-list.⁷⁰

Overall, the combination of frequent relocations, varying availability of childcare services, and the nature of military schedules contributes to the difficulty in securing childcare for military members posted within Canada.

Conclusion

The traditional institutional logic permeates the daily operations of the CAF. Despite the endeavors to challenge these entrenched institutional logics and adopt fresh perspectives that acknowledge the significance of military families, the organization has largely upheld the status quo for a decade or more.

Key challenges such as spousal employment, childcare, financial stability or availability to healthcare are all compounded by frequent relocations across different regions in Canada. These challenges highlight the need for bold policy and institutional changes that better support military families. Moreover, recognizing and challenging traditional institutional logics and the role they have on institutional policies.

The CDS discusses the importance of “trying or experimenting new things, “because the path we are on, the stuff that we've tried, it hasn't been working out that great.”⁷¹ However, surpassing the prevailing traditional logic will prove to be a formidable task, considering that many of the issues discussed have been known for decades and were met with failed initiatives such as Journey or Seamless Canada.

Establishing the new institutional logic as the dominant logic exemplifies a wicked problem, demanding the collaboration and commitment of multiple provinces, increased funding for crucial aspects such as childcare, and a comprehensive reevaluation of the CAF's operational practices to minimize the frequency of required relocations.

By actively acknowledging these challenges and working towards inclusive policies and practices, the CAF and Canadian society as a whole can create an environment that better supports the well-being and success of military families.

⁷⁰ Canadian Forces Morale and Welfare Services, ‘Esquimalt MFRC Daycare’.

⁷¹ Berthiaume, Lee, ‘Defence Chief Calls on Canadians to Rally behind Military during Personnel Crisis’.

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