

## Defence Policy Review – Roundtable on Gender Perspectives: Ottawa, 19 July 2016

I was a medical officer, employed in Air Force units for most of my 20-year regular force career. I researched gender integration challenges for CAF female pilots as my Masters in Occupational Health thesis project: although that information is now dated, many of the issues identified remain unresolved.

This specific roundtable has been designated to analyze defence issues from a gendered perspective. However, male/female is only one of many identity factors that needs consideration in the review process. The cultural, policy and research normative in the CAF is still largely based on the stereotypical soldier of Canada's past: male, white, European background, able-bodied, heterosexual, married with a stay-at-home wife, born in Canada, English or French mother tongue, Christian religious background, and with a core notion that war and soldiers = masculinity, as reinforced by Hollywood and popular media. If diversity truly is our strength as a nation and people are our most important asset, then defence priorities, policies, and practices must support and enable the "other" as a full and valued CAF team member.

**How Can We Recruit More Women into the CAF?** Many potential female recruits are not aware that the military is an attractive and viable career option, because neither they nor their influencers have had any significant, positive exposure to the CAF.

Compared to the US, the ratio of Canadians serving or who have served in the CAF to the total population is very low. The current CAF human resource management model fosters the expectation that all recruits will serve for a full 35 years and then be able to fully retire, set apart from Canadian society throughout.

Change the norm so that military service is viewed as a 5 to 10-year "starter" career choice, after which most people return to the civilian workforce. This would cost more up front to recruit and train more entrants, but would conversely reduce the downstream military to civilian transition challenges and military/veteran health care costs largely related to an aging workforce in a demanding work environment. Increasing the turnover rate of people from the community at large into and out of the CAF would improve the links between the military and Canadian society: more Canadians would have personal contact with a CAF member or former service member, increasing their awareness of the many positive aspects of Canada's military force.

Youth, particularly females, have few opportunities for direct contact with CAF members that are working in a potential career choice area. Personal mentoring by a satisfied current or former service member would attract candidates to non-traditional career options and help new recruits to maintain interest through the sometimes challenging and time intensive CAF application and enrolment processes.

Create programs that allow potential adult recruits the chance of a short term immersion in the CAF military working environment and culture, such as shadowing a service member at work, or weekend "mini-military life experiences" (similar to the "mini-medical school" type student exposure opportunities that are now commonplace).

For many civilians, awareness of the CAF is limited to the two issues that receive the most play in the media: sexual harassment of females and poor care of veterans with service related injuries or illness.

First, fix these issues. Only then will the message that the CAF is an employer of choice to which Canadians can safely entrust their daughters (and sons) be credible.

**How Can We Retain More Women in the CAF?** Once recruited and trained, women in the CAF are retained at significantly lower rates than men. This is a multi-factorial issue, but some of the underlying reasons why women leave the CAF earlier and in higher numbers than men are known and fixable.

CAF human resource management policies make it difficult for one to serve while being the main family caregiver. The current career model is designed for a service member who enters single, then transitions to married with an assumed stay-at-home spouse caring for their young children. More career flexibility is required for all, but especially single parents and service couples. Many other military forces, particularly the Nordic countries, have implemented policies that appear to provide a healthier balance between service needs and family obligations as the soldier's life circumstances change.

Consider options such as job sharing, leave without pay for sabbatical periods, and easy component transfers back-and-forth between regular and reserve service.

There are *bona fide* areas where treating men and women “equally” is not an appropriate goal. When gender integration was ordered in the US military, Congress provided a budgetary line item for “fixing” whatever needed to be changed /researched to allow for the rapid and safe integration of women into previously male only occupations. No such central funding was, or is today, provided in the CAF; units must still fund adjustments necessary to allow women to function effectively in the operational settings, often creating individual piecemeal fixes instead of systemic resolutions. This approach can also result in an unhelpful perception that gender issues are inequitably consuming limited unit-level operations funds.

Create a national / central funding line item to address outstanding and recurring gender-specific integration issues, such as research, modification of military equipment, life support equipment, pregnancy related needs and formalize a lessons learned capture, analysis and dissemination.

Review all taxpayer-funded CAF and VAC research through a GBA lens to identify gender gaps.

The CAF and DND are subject to Canada Labour Code and its occupational safety standard regulations when not on deployed operations. The military work environment has a multitude of challenging chemical, biological, physical, ergonomic and emotional exposures to be considered. Federal government employer due diligence requires that all CAF/DND members have safe workplaces and yet workplace hazard assessments are still not commonplace. Workplace exposure limits are still almost exclusively based on adult male-only research; female specific hazard exposure limits must be developed.

Mandate an occupational workplace hazard assessment capability within federal government capable of assessing all federal workplaces for exposure hazards, formal documentation of those exposures and a counselling capability to educate the members and their chains of command on the health implications of those exposures, inclusive of reproductive safety (for men and women).

Mandate continuing medical education for all Canadian Forces Health Services clinicians on women's health care needs – inclusive of gender-specific operational medical support issues; individual prenatal and pregnancy counselling as it relates to the member's unique occupational hazard exposure profile; and civilian female population needs in disaster/humanitarian scenarios.

Some deployments present heightened risk of harassment and assault to specific CAF populations.

Educate all CAF members pre-deployment about the different assumptions, behaviours and other cultural norms of host nation populations (and allied nation's military cultures), any consequent risks of behaviours that are unacceptable by Canadian standards, and what to do if a CAF member is harassed or assaulted by a host-nation person or member of an allied military.