OPERATIONALIZING RECONSTITUTION:

Research Insights on Recruitment & Retention in the CAF

VOLUME 32 | JULY 2024

ON TRACK

VOLUME 32 | July 2024

ON TRACK is the official journal of the CDA Institute. Through its pages, the CDA Institute promotes informed public debate on security and defence issues and the vital role played by the Canadian Armed forces in society. ON TRACK facilitates this educational mandate by featuring a range of articles that explore security, defence, and strategic issues that may have an impact on the Canadian strategic interests and on the safety of its citizens. The views expressed in ON TRACK are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent those of the CDA Institute.

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Introduction

Irina Goldenberg, PhD., and Anna Ebel-Lam, PhD.

Personnel are at the heart of the Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) and everything that it does to deliver on its mandate. CAF soldiers, sailors, and airmen/airwomen acquire a range of skills and expertise through extensive training, education, and socialization, making them uniquely specialized to meet the specific demands of military service. As such, personnel are the CAF's most important asset, and their recruitment and retention are perennial organizational priorities.

At the same time, the CAF is affected by unprecedented personnel shortages. Like other militaries, the CAF has experienced reduced intake and training capacity. While the CAF has added 10,731 new members since 2020 (Director Research Workforce Analytics, 2023), these gains have been offset by retirements and departures from the ranks—which have left the Armed Forces in a continued deficit. Furthermore, shortages in training resources and skilled instructors for certain CAF occupations have contributed to training inefficiencies, extending the time that it takes for new members to become fully qualified, resulting in frustration and exacerbating early attrition. These issues likely stem from a convergence of factors, including the recent global pandemic, an

organizational culture crisis, as well as a degree of burnout stemming from delivering on CAF's commitments to operations and international peace and security during and following the COVID-19 pandemic. The personnel shortages stemming from these factors challenge the military personnel system, and CAF readiness more broadly.

To address these personnel shortages, the CAF has undertaken what is termed 'Reconstitution,' aimed at returning the size of the force to 71,500 Regular Force and 30,000 Reserve Force members, as was specified in Canada's Defence Policy *Strong, Secure, Engaged* or 'SSE' (Bourgon, 2018). Reconstitution comprises a number of simultaneous strategic objectives, including modernization and streamlining of training and other personnel 'production' aspects, but the core foci are on recruitment — getting enough good-fitting applicants to join — and retention — keeping valued, skilled, and experienced members in uniform. These key aspects are the topic of this issue of ON TRACK.

RECRUITMENT

Recruitment is critical to hiring enough personnel. However, getting sufficient numbers of new recruits is just the beginning. Effective personnel management and operational success hinges on recruiting diverse prospects who will develop a strong sense of commitment to the CAF, and who (collectively) possess the aptitudes and skillsets required to meet current and emerging challenges. While continuing to fall short of its overall recruitment targets, the CAF is also

experiencing difficulty in achieving specific recruitment targets for occupations involving specialized skillsets that are in high demand in both the military and civilian sector—for instance, in the health services and some technical occupations (Director Personnel Generation Requirements, 2023), and reaching representation targets for certain employment equity groups, such as women (Director Human Rights and Diversity, 2022).

Concerted efforts are being undertaken to address these issues and to understand the recruitable population as a whole, including their familiarity with and perceptions of the CAF, their employment preferences and priorities, and the best approaches for attracting quality recruits (Blais and Yeung, 2022; Craig, Yeung, and Eren, 2022; Department of National Defence, 2023). Frequently cited reasons for joining the CAF among new recruits, the majority of whom have historically been young Caucasian males, have included employment features such as opportunities for adventure and personal growth, the ability to serve, and the opportunity for an active lifestyle (Otis and Ross, 2023). While these employment aspects are likely to remain influential in the future, rapid demographic changes in the Canadian population (Otis and Dale, 2020), coupled with research indicating that most Canadian youth have limited awareness of the CAF (Earnscliffe Strategy Group, 2020), highlight the need for a greater understanding of the nuances of recruiting individuals with varied backgrounds, and targeted efforts to enhance the visibility and attractiveness of career options in both the Regular Force and the Primary Reserves.

RECRUITMENT STRATEGIES AND INITIATIVES

The current recruitment challenges that the CAF is facing are significant and complex, and include (a) developing new recruitment strategies tailored to potential prospects from different designated groups, generations, and socio-economic backgrounds (Otis and Dale, 2020); (b) establishing a strong CAF presence (both online and within various communities across the country) that highlights the different roles that the organization plays in domestic and international operations, and that presents balanced, accessible information about career paths within each component, and the range of occupations that members can pursue (McKay, 2022); (c) modernizing and streamlining the application and enrolment process within the CAF, so that prospects and applicants are more likely to actually enrol (Otis and Ross, 2023; O'Rourke and Connick-Keefer, 2022, McKay, 2022), and (d) identifying the recruitment requirements for evolving CAF capabilities and roles (Director Personnel Generation Requirements, 2014). While much work remains to be done, the CAF continues to make headway on addressing recruitment issues and implementing evidence-based recruitment strategies at every level—ranging from tailoring recruitment and outreach events developed by individual recruiters (Earnscliffe Strategy Group, 2020) to executive leadership meetings comprising the Chief of Defence Staff and select General/Flag Officers.

NEXUS BETWEEN RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION

Before turning our attention to retention, it is critical to highlight the close interplay between recruitment and retention. When attrition is high and personnel staffing is low, there is often a call to increase recruitment (Goldenberg, 2018). It is important to recognize, however, that new and untrained personnel cannot readily replace trained and experienced members, nor can bringing in new, untrained members address rank structure requirements and leader succession (Chief of Military Personnel, 2009; Straver and Ueno, 2018). Moreover, recruitment is often hastened in the face of personnel shortages, which is generally not advisable in the long run as this can affect the suitability, quality, and experiences of incoming members. That is, when recruitment needs are high, entrance standards (e.g., cut-off scores on selection tests), are sometimes lowered, which leads to increases in training and performance failures and spikes in early attrition, compounding retention challenges (Military Personnel Generation, 2016; 2022). Fast-paced recruitment can also put pressure on the rest of the 'personnel generation' system, which can also impact retention negatively. For example, it becomes more challenging to assign new recruits to their occupations of choice, and to provide proper information that helps to calibrate expectations regarding military service. Moreover, it frequently results in long wait times for stages of training, all of which can affect new recruits' morale and lead to early attrition (Goldenberg, 2018; Otis and Connick-Keefer, 2021). As such, increased recruitment does not replace retention, especially considering the significant time and investment needed to train and develop military personnel. With this in mind, we turn our attention to retention in the CAF.

RETENTION

Overall retention has not traditionally been problematic in the CAF, with historical rates of attrition hovering between 8% and 9% annually, and 3% expected each year from retirements alone. These rates are lower than those in many of our allied armed forces, and are generally comparable to or lower than the Canadian labour market rate (Goldenberg, 2018; Boileau, 2024). With that said, closer examination within specific CAF subgroups reveals much higher, and often concerning, levels of attrition.

Key subgroup considerations related to attrition include gender, tenure, military occupation and component, and geographical location (Department of National Defence, 2022; Goldenberg, 2018). For instance, while overall rates of attrition are lower for women than for men, there are consistent differences in the type of attrition, with women being more likely to leave for medical reasons. In regard to tenure (i.e., years of military service), attrition of new members, especially during their first year of service, is particularly concerning. Higher than desired rates of attrition in the most tenured members, with greater than 20 years of service who are eligible for pension benefits, are also problematic. There are also notable differences in attrition depending on the members' military occupations, with some CAF occupations (e.g., technical occupations, health services occupations) having much higher attrition rates than others, affecting the

overall readiness of the force. And, not surprisingly given the geographic size and heterogeneity of Canada, postings and geographic stability influence retention, with more remote and rural locations generally associated with higher attrition, creating personnel shortages at specific bases and wings.

Even with these patterns in mind, retention and attrition occur in a complex, multifactorial environment, and people usually do not leave for one specific reason. In addition to the subgroup considerations discussed above, retention is influenced by a variety of factors at the individual, occupational, and organizational levels. At the individual level, people have different needs, wants, and preferences. Internal conditions, including organizational practices and policies, are important to consider, as are organizational challenges such as the current organizational culture crisis (Arbour, 2022). And of course, external conditions are also critical, with a main aspect being the external labour market. With all things being equal, low unemployment generally leads to higher CAF attrition, and high unemployment generally leads to lower CAF attrition. The aging workforce, increasing cultural diversity, and changes in technology also impact retention.

Retention Strategies and Initiatives

Like many other militaries, the CAF has tried to build a *retention culture*—in other words, an "an environment that encourages members to stay, to contribute, and to feel satisfied with their careers and valued by the organization." (Chief of Military Personnel, 2009, p. 1). This is a *relational approach* to retention, which can be contrasted with a *transactional approach*. Transactional incentives, such as pay, benefits, and other concrete rewards will always be important. But research shows that the biggest influencers of retention in the armed forces are the relational aspects of military and service life. These include consideration and respect for members and their families, fairness, recognition, leader support, and camaraderie—all these things speak to the kind of organization members want to belong to, and they strengthen members' affective and normative commitment to the organization (Department of National Defence, 2022; Goldenberg, 2018). Transactional and relational approaches have been contrasted as "buying low attrition versus building high retention," (Villeneuve, Dobreva-Martinova, and Currie, 2004). Research shows that enhancing financial incentives can bring short-term success but that relying disproportionately on transactional measures is not particularly effective in the long run, especially if applied without also taking relational measures into account.

Nonetheless, individual differences will always exist and what motivates one person will not necessarily motivate another. Some are interested in competitive salaries, others in educational opportunities, deployments and travel, or benefits for their family. This brings us to what a number of nations call the "Defence Employment Offer" or DEO, or in Canada "the CAF Offer" (Canadian Armed Forces, 2022b), DEOs include both the tangible and the intangible factors, the transactional as well as the relational, and they affect the reasons people

join the military and the reasons they stay. Given the myriad individual differences, militaries need to better understand what benefits and work conditions influence commitment and retention, and then employ these in DEOs to maximize the value to both the member and the organization.

In light of the multifaceted considerations noted above, it is clear that multi-level approaches to retention are required. We need to approach retention on two fronts — including aspects that benefit all military personnel, as well as targeted retention strategies that focus on specific subgroups or concerns. At the broadest levels, a wide range of personnel research reveals many common concerns (e.g., job satisfaction, leadership, family factors; Laplante, Otis, Skomorovsky, and Chamberland, 2023; Yeung, Musolino, and Eren, 2019.). Thus, a dual level Retention Strategy has been developed. This includes a CAF-wide retention strategy or a holistic CAF Offer that best balances the demands of service with members' needs, which "will help ensure that we provide the best possible career experience so that members are committed to a long-standing career in the CAF" (Department of National Defence, 2022, p. 3). At a more granular level, the CAF Retention Strategy proscribes more targeted approaches to address unhealthy attrition in specific areas (e.g., first year of service; at-risk occupations). In addition to broad culture change efforts towards establishing a culture of respect, inclusivity, and support for all who serve, targeted retention efforts also need to focus on specific retention-related concerns that affect underrepresented groups (e.g., women,

Indigenous Peoples, visible minorities), which can be missed in more aggregated approaches that tend to reflect the concerns of the majority. This two-tiered approach will result in the highest return on investment and address critical shortages (Department of National Defence, 2022; Department of National Defence, 2018).

Conclusion

The old adage of getting and keeping "the right people, with the right skills, in the right place, at the right time" is more important, yet more difficult to attain, than ever before. Understanding and optimal actualization of recruitment and retention, the key foci of CAF Reconstitution, are critical to this fundamental challenge, and ultimately, to the operational success of the CAF. Taken together, the papers in this volume of *On Track* provide important insights on the key factors, challenges, and enablers of military personnel recruitment and retention.

IN THIS ISSUE OF ON TRACK

In the first article, co-authored by Francesca Ruscito, MA., and Nancy Otis, PhD., from the Recruitment and Retention Section of the Director General Military Personnel Research and Analysis (DGMPRA) of DND, attitudinal survey findings based on the CAF Prospect Survey and the CAF Recruitment Survey are presented to highlight the main factors that attract (or deter) people from joining the CAF. The article also examines potential differences in perceptions, preferences, and deterrents between respondents from diverse groups based on gender and visible minority status.

The second article, co-authored by Christopher McDonald, PhD., and Ryuichi Ueno, PhD., of the Advanced Analytics Section of DGMPRA introduces innovative geographical based analytical approaches for maximizing attraction and recruitment efforts through better directing resources towards regions of the country that are most likely to produce viable applicants to the CAF. The approaches discussed, and their advancement, can be used to improve overall applicant numbers, and to target specific demographic groups or those with particular skillsets, and to do so more efficiently, thereby increasing the CAF's success and return on investment.

The third article, co-authored by Captain William Francis Scott Van Veen, MA., Dominique Laferriere, PhD., of the Diversity and Inclusion Section of DGMPRA, Lieutenant-Colonel (Retired) Damian O'Keefe, PhD., and Stefania Maggi, PhD., Associate Professor at the University of Carleton, focuses on gender diversity from the perspective of gendered work (with the premise that CAF employment is usually characterized as male-dominant work), and examines the extent to which military employment can intensify gender stereotypes and perceptions of exclusion, especially among individuals who do not identify as men. Implications for recruiting women, who are the gender minority in the CAF, as well as increasing their interest in traditionally male- or female-dominant CAF occupations (i.e., gendered work) are discussed.

The fourth article, co-authored by Justin Wright of the Diversity and Inclusion Section of DGMPRA and Anna Ebel-Lam, PhD., of the Recruitment and Retention Section of DGMPRA, offers insights based on a recent CDAI community engagement initiative aimed at establishing trust, communication, and long-term relationships with communities and individuals from various ethnic backgrounds. The authors highlight the importance of building sustained connections between ethnic communities and the CAF, and the importance of these connections to understanding how their unique perspectives and experiences may have shaped their perspectives of military service, as well as to foster a sense that the CAF is open to, and inclusive of, all members who embrace its ethos and values.

In the fifth article, Luka Dursun, MA., of Director General Military Personnel Strategic argues that the diminishing familiarity with the CAF among members of the Canadian populace is an underacknowledged cause of the recruiting difficulties that the organization is currently experiencing. He describes a broad range of factors that have contributed to this lack of familiarity—such as the changing demographic makeup of the country's population, the closure of CAF bases that were proximal to large urban centres (e.g., CFB Toronto, CFB Calgary), and the diminishing number of family connections to the military among Canadians. Mr. Dursun highlights the need for more targeted research on this subject, as well as new recruitment strategies that circumvent the impact that a lack of familiarity with the CAF has had on the military's growth.

In the sixth article, Meagan Boileau, MSc., of the Workforce Modelling and Analytics Section of DGMPRA, provides a

systematic quantitative analysis of various approaches and their potential opportunity (or lack thereof) for improving retention. Examining historical attrition rates, comparing CAF attrition to that of the Public Service and of military allies, and exploring different types of releases (e.g., voluntary releases, medical releases), this article highlights the potential retention gains that are realistic and feasible going forward, helping to inform overall personnel planning requirements and personnel generation approaches.

In the seventh article, Carina Daugherty, MA., demonstrates the importance of measuring indices associated with key CAF personnel priorities over time, to uncover meaningful trends that may have implications for CAF recruitment and retention efforts. Using data from several consecutive cross-sectional CAF survey administrations, the author highlights noteworthy changes in (a) perceived organizational support, (b) morale, (c) job satisfaction and well-being, and (d) satisfaction with employment aspects such as leadership, pay and benefits, career management, and promotion opportunities. Key findings associated with CAF members' perceptions of their work climate and organizational culture are also discussed. Ms. Daugherty describes factors that may have contributed to these differences and emphasizes the importance of continuing to monitor these indices in the future.

In the eighth article, Justin Chamberland, PhD., Alla Skomorovsky, PhD., (of the DGMPRA Organizational Effectiveness section) and Joelle Laplante, PhD., (of the DGMPRA Recruitment and Retention section) present findings from the 2022 Your Say Matters: Defence Team Well-being Survey (YSM) which highlight the influence that varied job demands and resources have on retention intentions among Reg F members. The authors identify pride in CAF membership as the sole job resource that has a sizeable direct impact on retention intentions. However, they note that other job demands and resources, such as perceptions of meaningful work and organizational support, may have an indirect effect on Reg F members' career intentions through mediating factors, such as job satisfaction and affective commitment. The authors proffer several practical recommendations that the CAF could implement to help enhance these job resources and improve retention outcomes.

In the ninth article, Lieutenant-Colonel Kim A. Beriault, MBA., MDS., discusses the personnel retention issues associated with Task Force Latvia (TFV), making a compelling argument for optimizing the Employee Value Proposition (EVP) in this context by (a) systematically measuring participants' attitudes and preferences, so that evidence-based retention interventions can be developed, and tailored to meet the needs of specific subgroups, and (b) emphasizing the overarching importance or meaning (i.e., the why) of TFV. LCol Beriault elaborates on the complexities of optimizing the EVP in this context, describing the various factors that make this task particularly challenging. More broadly, LCol Beriault speaks to the role that agency may play in mitigating retention issues by drawing insights from previous work on the key factors that influence leave intentions in the CAF.

In the tenth article, Elizabeth Suen, MSc., of the Diversity and Inclusion Section of DGMPRA examines the employment and retention of persons with disabilities as part of both CAF organizational culture change and reconstitution efforts. She focuses on the importance of meaningful engagement of members with disabilities (as well as other equity-seeking groups) in the conduct of both research and policy development, highlighting the potential of participatory approaches for building trust with traditionally marginalized groups, and thereby supporting sustained culture change and reconstitution.

In the eleventh article, Joelle Laplante, PhD., Matt Ross, PhD., and Andrew Woodward, MA., of the Recruitment and Retention Section of DGMPRA, use longitudinal data to identify differences between those who completed basic military training and those who did not. The insights regarding how 'stayers' compare to 'leavers' both at the start of basic training (e.g., expectations about the training and military service; family support for choosing a CAF career), as well in their experiences during basic training (e.g., support from instructors, cohesion with peers, performance, satisfaction with elements such as food and sleep), are directly relevant for both recruiting the best fitting members, as well as supporting their success and retention once they join.

The views expressed in this issue of ON TRACK are the authors' and do not represent the Department of National Defence, the Canadian Armed Forces, or the Government of Canada.

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Motivators and Barriers to Joining the Canadian Armed Forces: An Analysis of the 2022 CAF Prospect and Recruiting Surveys

Francesca Ruscito, MA., and Nancy Otis, PhD.

From North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) leaders pledging to increase spending on national defence (*North Atlantic Treaty Organization*, 2024) to responses to international conflicts, the current geopolitical situation has motivated armed forces around the globe to reinforce their militaries, or at the very least, maintain a steady and stable level of strength to be operationally ready. Many militaries, like the Canadian Armed Forces (CAF), are struggling with personnel shortages (Geluk, et al., 2020). Canada's Defence Policy (Department of National Defence, 2017)

outlined a new set of priorities for the CAF, including increasing its ranks by 3,500 Regular Force and 1,500 Reserve Force members by 2026. The CAF has also recognized the importance of attracting and recruiting the right people to reinforce its strength through diversity (Department of National Defence, 2022). To date however, the CAF has fallen short[1] of its targets (House of Commons, 2022), and has not fulfilled any of its representation goals for women, Indigenous persons, and visible minorities. The CAF Prospect Survey (Otis, et al., 2023) and the CAF Recruiting Survey (Otis and Ross, 2023) are critical tools to assess attraction and recruiting strategies by collecting valuable data at different time points during the recruitment process.

AIM

This article presents key results from each survey using 2022 data to shed light on what attracts and deters people from joining the CAF. A second aim is to examine whether there are differences in perceptions of respondents from diverse groups (i.e., Caucasian men, Caucasian women, visible minority men, and visible minority women).[2]

THE CAF PROSPECT SURVEY

The CAF Prospect Survey gathers information on what type of person is interested in a CAF career, [3] and their perceived benefits and drawbacks of joining the CAF (Otis, et al.,

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[1] The CAF has achieved 93 percent of the Regular Force target and just under 80 percent of the Reserve Force target, with still 50 percent of occupations experiencing critical deficits.

[2] In the text of the article, demographic differences highlighted are statistically significant at the 95 percent confidence level. The statistical test used to determine the significance of the results was simple Analysis of Variance for Likert-type questions and chi-square tests of independence for multiple-selection items.

[3] The invitation to participate in the survey appears as a banner at the bottom of every page of the CAF recruitment website (www.forces.ca), as an attempt to reach a wide audience with different levels of interest toward the CAF.

2023). For the purpose of this paper, two groups of prospective recruits were examined: respondents who indicated on the first screening question that they were visiting the recruitment website because they were thinking about joining the CAF, but were still not sure if they wanted to (*n* = 5,561; *Interested but undecided*); and, those who were either seriously thinking about joining the CAF, were gathering information, were preparing to apply to join, or had already applied to join the CAF (*n* = 8,028; *Serious*). For the *Interested but undecided* sample, 25 percent were women, 10 percent self-identified as Indigenous persons, and 16 percent as visible minorities.[4] For the *Serious* sample,[5] 19 percent were women, 10 percent self-identified as Indigenous persons, and 26 percent as visible minorities (Statistics Canada, 2024).

RESULTS

In the survey, respondents *Interested but undecided* were provided with a list of potential advantages of a CAF career and asked to select all that applied. More than half selected the opportunity to serve Canada, while over 40 percent selected benefits like health care and pension, and free job training while on full-time salary. Caucasian women and visible minority women were more likely than their male counterparts to endorse benefits, paid university education, flexibility to change careers, and work-life balance as perceived advantages of a CAF career.

When presented with a list of factors that would discourage them from joining the CAF, roughly one-third of respondents selected doubts about meeting the requirements while a quarter selected a loss of personal freedom / control, and a lack of information. Irrespective of their visible minority status, women were also more likely than men to mention the doubts about meeting the requirements, mental health consequences of combat service, the danger, and international missions as barriers. Those who selected doubts about meeting the requirements commonly cited the physical fitness level required for military service, especially women, concerns related to previous injuries, and both physical and mental health conditions (e.g., asthma, depression; Urban and Ruscito, 2024).

The *Serious* respondents were asked in the survey to select the top three information sources that had the greatest influence on their interest in joining the CAF. The most influential sources for all groups were: family and/or relatives; friends; and the CAF recruitment website. The least influential sources included recruiting brochures, displays, and events. When asked to select all reasons that influenced their interest in joining the CAF, between 50 and 60 percent of respondents selected pride in the job, defending Canada / warfighting, personal growth, and serving Canada, while between 40 and 49 percent selected career opportunities, discipline, peacekeeping, to stay fit, for new

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[4] Visible minorities and women are underrepresented in the *interested but undecided* sample (16 and 25 percent respectively), in relation to the corresponding proportions in Canada's population (27 and 51 percent respectively).
[5] Women are underrepresented in the Serious sample (19 percent), in relation to the corresponding proportions in Canada's population (51 percent).

experiences, and to make a difference. Lack of employment was the least frequently selected. Regardless of their visible minority status, men most frequently selected serving and defending Canada / warfighting, while women indicated educational opportunities, challenging work and an opportunity to make a difference as influential for joining the CAF.

Lastly, *Serious* respondents were asked to rate the influence of benefits on their interest in joining. Continued education and training in their career field was most often rated as having a strong influence (by 53 percent), followed by health and dental care plans, regular pay raises, and retirement benefits (each 45 percent). Paid training and education and military housing were rated strongly by 40 percent of respondents, followed by paid leave (34 percent), second language training (29 percent), childcare (24 percent) and parental leave benefits (23 percent). Irrespective of their gender, visible minority respondents were more likely than Caucasian respondents to rate childcare as strongly influential.

THE CAF RECRUITING SURVEY

While the two main purposes of the CAF Recruiting Survey[6] are to inform attraction and recruiting strategies, and to collect data on applicants' satisfaction with recruiting services and materials, this article will only present findings related to the first purpose. The survey was completed by 4,573 respondents,[7] 80 percent of whom were men,[8]

7 percent self-identified as Indigenous persons, and 25 percent as visible minorities (Statistics Canada, 2024).

RESULTS
Applicants were first presented with a list of advertising sources and asked to select all of those in which they had seen or heard about CAF career opportunities. Applicants were most likely to have seen or heard advertisements on the FORCES.CA website (63 percent), followed by social media (47 percent), television (20 percent), in-person recruiting event (13 percent), posters (13 percent), and internet sites (12 percent). When asked to indicate the extent to which various factors influenced their decision to contact the CAF about career opportunities, most respondents (85 percent) indicated the website, [9] followed by CAF social media, internet advertising, displays (e.g., airshows), recruiting events, and CAF commercials (over 60 percent each). Weaker influences included brochures (45 percent), Service Canada (37 percent), and print advertising (29 percent). Of note, visible minority men and women rated the influence of Service Canada as more influential than Caucasian men. Regarding external sources of information, other militaries and news on the CAF were considered by more than 60 percent of applicants to have an influence [10] on their decisions to contact the CAF. As for various individuals influencing applicants' decisions,

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6 The CAF Recruiting Survey is an online survey sent via personal email to all CAF applicants who complete the selection process.
7 The 4,573 respondents represent a 51 percent response rate.
8 Women are underrepresented in the sample, in relation to the corresponding proportions in Canada's population (51 percent).
9 These respondents included those who answered *moderate* to *very strong influence.*
10 Ibid.

most mentioned [11] friends with CAF experience (65 percent), recruiters (63 percent), and relatives with CAF experience (58 percent). Caucasian women rated the influence of relatives with CAF experience as moderately higher compared to all other gender and visible minority groups. Friends with CAF experience was also found to be more influential for Caucasian women than for men in both groups.

REASONS FOR JOINING

More than 70 percent of respondents selected the reasons of personal growth, the opportunity to make a difference, to have pride in their job, to stay fit, for new experiences, and to serve their country as having a strong influence on their decisions to contact the CAF about employment. Moving away from home, family tradition, and scarcity of jobs were selected the least (less than 20 percent). Caucasian women rated defending Canada / warfighting, serving their country, and gaining discipline as less influential than respondents from all other gender and visible minority groups.

DISCUSSION

The current results have many implications for military recruitment. Results from the CAF Prospect Survey for prospects who were not sure about joining the CAF, suggest that marketing external incentives of joining the CAF (i.e., benefits, free job training) combined with a call to serve, represents important means to first attract people to visit the recruitment website, whereas common barriers

that prevent them from taking the leap include doubts about meeting requirements, a loss of personal freedom, lacking some information, and the impact of a military career, especially combat, on mental health. Results obtained from the CAF Prospect Survey for serious prospects and from the CAF Recruiting Survey suggest those who are serious about joining or have applied to the CAF value personal growth, see pride in holding a CAF job, and more importantly, have the desire to serve and defend their country. This means that to effectively engage with potential recruits, marketing strategies should be designed specifically for different points in the recruitment process. At the consideration stage of the recruitment, results of this study indicated that prospects would benefit from information on both: (1) tangible/economic benefits of pursuing a military career; and (2) intangible benefits related to the uniqueness of a miliary career that offers both purpose and making a difference in the life of others. At the same time, efforts should be made to address and minimize, if possible, perceived barriers to a military career. For instance, concerns about meeting the requirements can be remedied by ensuring that the CAF website details all pertinent information, including but not limited to the physical demands of basic training (e.g., swim test), and of a military career in general (Otis, et al., 2021). At the later stage, the focus should be less on benefits/tangible factors but on the desire to serve. In addition, advertising and recruitment materials should be designed to highlight the potential for personal growth through a

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[11] Ibid.

military career path and attaining self-development goals that are common in the younger generation, such as wanting a challenging job and new experiences (Schewe, et al., 2013).

In terms of methods for reaching prospects, the results showed the CAF recruitment website to be the most visible and influential source of information for applicants. This finding highlights the importance of including detailed information commonly sought by potential recruits on the recruitment website, including information on recruiting requirements (e.g., specific medical issues), the recruiting process (e.g., testing procedures, paperwork), the military lifestyle (i.e., what to expect), preparing for basic training, and how to persuade parents/spouses to support them when selecting a military career.

Recruits, and especially Caucasian women, were also heavily influenced to apply to the CAF by family, friends, and relatives with CAF experience. Considering that family, friends, and relatives share their lived experiences and knowledge of military life with potential candidates, the CAF must work towards improving its overall culture to make it a positive work environment. This will ensure that the CAF becomes an attractive employer that both former and current members continue to endorse. While some group differences did arise, it is important to note that the top attraction factors and barriers remained the same for all groups. To improve recruitment and marketing aimed at recruiting diverse groups into the CAF, it would be important to use a global marketing campaign while adjusting advertising/communication

channels to resonate with specific target groups. Most of the group differences uncovered were between women and men regardless of ethnicity (i.e., Caucasian women and visible minority women vs. Caucasian men and visible minority men). Future advertising campaigns and strategies therefore need to address women's fears of mental health consequences and the overall risks and dangers they associate with joining the CAF, as well as appease their doubts about meeting the physical fitness requirements. Finally, the low representation of women and visible minorities in the survey samples suggest needed improvement in terms of connecting with diverse people and triggering their interest in a CAF career.

CONCLUSION

The Canadian Defence Policy outlined an ambitious plan to ensure that Canada has a combat-ready military (Department of National Defence, 2017). By using surveys that target both prospective recruits and candidates in the recruitment process, the CAF has identified an array of factors that influence people's decisions to join. Given that militaries all over the world are experiencing similar recruitment issues and personnel shortages, military leaders could likely incorporate such findings when modifying their own marketing and advertising strategies. This will allow for an increase in overall recruitment, which in turn will lead to a stronger and more effective armed force.

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Using Geographical Based Analytics to Enhance the Success of Military Recruitment Attractions Activities

Christopher McDonald, PhD., and Ryuichi Ueno, PhD.

INTRODUCTION

The Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) is currently facing a personnel crisis. Exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, recruitment has failed to keep pace with attrition over the last several years resulting in an overall deficit of approximately 16,000 members needed to fill the CAF's Regular and Reserve Force ranks (Dyson, 2023). During the fiscal year 2022-2023 alone, the Regular Force (Reg F) lost over 6,000 members (Government of Canada, 2023) while only bringing in approximately 4,500 new members; this represents a miss of the recruitment target set out in the Reg F's Strategic Intake Plan (SIP) for the fiscal year by almost 2,700 recruits.

Canada is not alone in facing these challenges, however, as many of its allies are also experiencing similar situations. The United Kingdom's Armed Forces (Government of the United Kingdom, 2023), the Australian Defence Force (Ikonomou, 2023) and New Zealand Defence Force (Darling, 2023) have all experienced declines in their strength. Even Canada's neighbour to the south has not remained unscathed. This year the United States (U.S.) Army is expecting a shortfall of approximately 15,000 recruits, while the U.S. Navy and the U.S. Air Force anticipate shortfalls of 10,000 sailors and 3,000 aviators, respectively; the Marine Corps is the only U.S. service branch that expects to meet its recruiting target for 2023 (Kesling, 2023). Given the tense global situation with the ongoing conflict resulting from Russia's invasion of Ukraine, an ever-belligerent China in the Indo-Pacific region and the escalating conflict between Israel and Hamas (Ratcliffe and Hawkins, 2023; Kelly, 2023; Syed, 2023), it is becoming increasingly critical that Canada and its allies maintain adequately staffed defence forces capable of responding to threats, both domestic and abroad.

In order to meet the staffing goals defined in Canada's Defence Policy (Government of Canada, 2017), the CAF will need to return to a state of growth in which more members are entering the Forces than are leaving. This could be achieved in the short term by reducing attrition; however, the time someone can serve in the CAF is ultimately finite and members will eventually leave. While retention of CAF members needs to be

part of the solution, any longer-term growth scenario will require a consistent supply of recruits each year that allows the CAF to achieve the targets set out in its annual SIP. It is this supply of new recruits that will be the focus of this article. In particular, this work focuses on how analytics can be leveraged to increase return on investment by directing resources towards regions of the country that are most likely to produce applicants to the CAF. With a looming $1 billion cut to the Defence budget (Brewster, 2023), directing recruitment attractions activities towards regions of the country where the CAF will achieve the best return on investment is important now more than ever.

A GEOGRAPHICAL BASED ANALYTICAL APPROACH TO RECRUITING

Responsibility for CAF recruiting falls under the purview of the Military Personnel Generation Group (MPGG) and is primarily executed through the Canadian Forces Recruiting Group (CFRG). CFRG is supported in its efforts by several organizations within the CAF and the Department of National Defence (DND). These include, but are not limited to, organizations within DND who produce marketing recruitment products and conduct strategic advertising campaigns, and the various attractions teams from each of the environments (Navy, Army, Air Force). While not directly tasked with recruiting, the attractions teams attend events for the purpose of generating interest in the CAF and creating

a positive opinion of the organization.

In support of the CAF's recruitment efforts, Director General Military Personnel Research and Analysis (DGMPRA) initiated a program of research through the Director Research Workforce Analytics (DRWA) to use analytical methods for the purpose of identifying geographical regions where strategic advertising, marketing and recruitment campaigns can be directed to towards specific demographic groups, or the broader Canadian public for the purpose of producing the greatest number of applicants to the CAF. Such an approach has the benefit of allowing for potentially limited resources to be directed towards regions of the country that have the greatest potential to produce a return on investment. Given the current recruiting crisis in which the CAF finds itself, initiatives that will help boost recruitment are a necessity for alleviating the current situation. Through the use a simple analytical model, this work will demonstrate the potential benefit to the CAF of employing analytics on a geographical level in support of their recruitment efforts.

The approach[1] employed here divides Canada into smaller geographical regions and ranks these regions by assigning a score based on the annual number of expected applicants to the CAF from a designated demographic group. The designated demographic group can be broad (all Canadians ages 18-34), or more narrowly defined (women ages 18-29) provided it is supported by the data. The geographical regions were defined to be the forward sortation areas (FSAs). A score for

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[1] This approach was developed in response to a need from a client organization within DND as part of the applied DND/CAF Personnel Research Readiness Program, for the primary purpose of providing insight to the client to improve outcomes of strategic marketing and advertising campaigns (Ueno and McDonald 2023).

each FSA was determined by first computing the probability for a member of the region's target population to apply to the CAF during the fiscal year. [2] This probability was then multiplied by the size of the target population[3] in the FSA to produce an expected value for the annual number of applicants. Using these expected values as scores for each region, the regions were ranked by arranging the FSAs in descending order according to their score, with the top ranked FSA possessing the greatest expected value.

Consider the population demographic of Canadians aged 18-34, the demographic most likely to contain potential applicants to the CAF. Figure 1 shows the size of this population versus the ranking of the FSA with one being the highest ranking. Intuitively, when selecting geographic regions in which to direct recruitment resources, it would make sense to select regions where the population of interest is the largest; however, the results in Figure 1 demonstrate that this would not be an optimal approach. Out of 1,670 FSAs, the top two hundred ranked FSAs account for 34 percent of the expected number of applicants due to the relation between expected applicants and FSA ranking being highly nonlinear (see inset); the FSAs in the top two hundred are expected to produce between two and ten times the number of applicants as FSAs in the bottom half of the rankings. At the same time, the population of interest in many

of the top two hundred FSAs have sizes below those in the lower ranked FSAs; the FSA with the lowest population of interest in the top two hundred (as indicated by the horizontal dashed line) is below that of the majority of the lowest ranked FSAs. This indicates that there are regions where the population has a significantly higher probability of applying to the CAF; thus, prioritizing these regions is more likely to provide a better return on investment. For example, if a focused recruitment campaign were directed to towards the top two hundred FSAs ranked according to the score produced by the analytical model, the expected number of applicants would be nearly seventeen percent higher than if the FSAs were selected according to the size of the demographic population of interest. The benefit to following the analytical approach would then be a reduced cost per applicant. In normal times this would be considered beneficial, but is even more pertinent in an environment of reduced defence spending.

Figure 1: Population of Interest Size and Expected Applicants Versus FSA Rankings for Canadians Aged 18-34.

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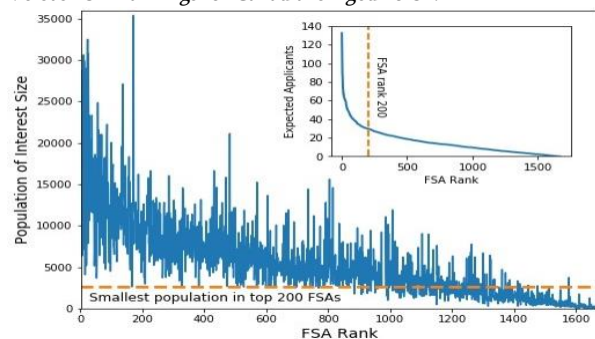
[2] A point estimate of the probability for a member from the target population to apply to the CAF was determined through a maximum likelihood estimator (Hogg and Tanis, 2001); the details of this approach are beyond this work and will be presented in an upcoming report. This probability was computed using five years of historical applicant data from the Canadian Forces Recruitment Information Management System which is used to collect and hold information on applicants to the CAF. This information includes the postal code of the applicant as well as demographic information such as age and sex.
[3] Target population sizes for each FSA were determined using the DemoStats data from Environics which is based on data from the Canadian Census.

While the discussion above involved FSAs on the national level, the approach can also benefit decisions around recruitment attractions activities on a regional level. As an example, Figure 2 shows a map of the FSAs in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA) ranked in the top ten percent (light blue) and the bottom ten percent (dark blue) according to the analytical model. [4] Interestingly, the majority of the highest ranked FSAs do not reside in the densely populated Toronto proper, but in the outlying regions such as Scarborough and Mississauga. This indicates that any decisions regarding recruitment attractions activities conducted in the GTA that are not tied to a specific location could also consider FSA ranking information resources. This would mean looking at the outlying regions of Toronto and focusing less on the city centre, as these areas are expected to produce a better outcome.

Figure 2: FSAs Ranked in the Top (Light Blue) and Bottom (Dark Blue) Ten Percent for the GTA.
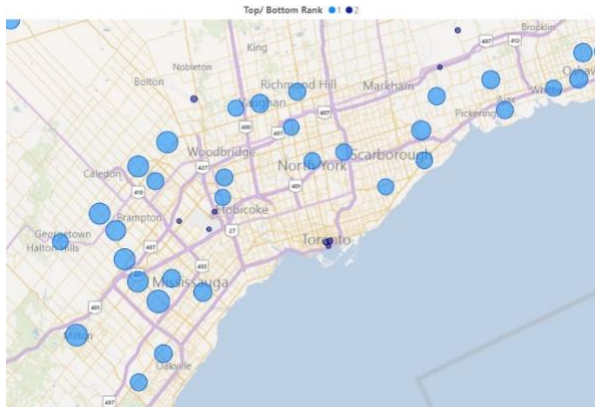
The examples in the discussion above were intended to demonstrate potential applications and benefits of using ranked geographical regions for recruiting, attractions, and strategic

advertising activities; however, they do not provide a complete picture. The information provided is not intended to be used as a standalone source of where to direct resources, but rather is intended to serve as an additional source of actionable intelligence that, when combined with the expertise of members in the recruitment and attractions space, can help achieve a greater return on investments made by the CAF. Further, the model used in this work represents the first stage a broader research program and will act as a baseline against which more sophisticated models can be compared. The benefit of the simple approach is it allows timely information to be provided to recruiters, at a time when it is greatly needed, while more sophisticated models are in development.

CONCLUSION
This work demonstrated the potential benefit of using analytics on a geographical level to improve applicant numbers and increase return on investment whether that be from a specific target demographic or the broad Canadian public. Regardless of whether the information is produced by a simple analytical model as shown here, or through a more sophisticated machine learning/artificial intelligence approach, the results will provide actionable intelligence that can be used to enhance the effectiveness of CAF recruiting attractions activities. The approach discussed in this work, however, is not limited to informing strategies for specific demographic groups, it also holds the potential to identify the best regions to recruit for specific skillsets. This

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[4] Each marker represents the geographical centre of the FSA while its size is proportional to the expected number of applicants.

would be greatly beneficial for addressing shortages in high priority occupations. However the information is used, the key to receiving the greatest benefits of employing analytics in the recruitment space will ultimately fall to the CAF's recruiting teams effectively operationalizing the information provided.

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Add your Diversity to Ours:[1] Interest in Gendered Work and the Reconstitution of a Gender Diverse Workforce in the CAF

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Many Western militaries now acknowledge the importance of, and are striving towards, increasing gender diversity in their workforce (Bridges and Horsfall, 2009; National Defence, 2017). For example, the Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) employment equity goal is to increase the representation of women in its total strength to 25.1% by 2026 (National Defence, 2017). Similarly, the United Kingdom (UK) government announced that they are seeking to increase the representation of women among its recruits to 30% by 2030 (Ministry of Defence, 2020).

Some experts believe these laudable objectives might be difficult to achieve (Béland, 2023). For instance, the public continues to perceive military organizations as male-dominated (Mayer, 2020) or ill-suited for women. Indeed, public opinion research suggests that while 60-70% of respondents believe that the CAF is a good career choice for both women and men, many also doubt that the CAF is a respectful environment for women (Earnscliffe Strategy Group (ESG), 2020; Quorus Consulting Group, 2023). Additional research suggests that few women from the Canadian public would consider the military as one of their main occupational interests (ESG, 2017; cited in Waruszynski et al., 2022). Many factors have been highlighted as possibly influencing these low levels of interest in the CAF, including negative perceptions of the military, a lack of familiarity with employment in the CAF (ESG, 2017), and misconduct allegations (Quorus Consulting Group, 2023). In view of these findings, the goal of this paper is to assist the CAF in attracting a more diverse workforce by consolidating relevant research focused on building interest in gendered work.

RESEARCH ON INTEREST IN GENDERED WORK

The persistence of gender imbalances in male-dominant work as is evident in the CAF can intensify perceptions of exclusion, especially

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[1] "Add your Diversity to Ours" is one of the key messages of the Canadian Armed Forces' Operation UNIFIED RECRUITER, which encourages Canadians from diverse backgrounds to join its ranks (National Defence, 2023a).

among individuals who do not identify as men (Kanter, 1977; Stamarski et al., 2015). These perceptions of exclusion can generate a self-perpetuating cycle in which entrenched gender stereotypes further deter interest in military work among the gender minority. As such, organizations who seek to attract a more gender-diverse workforce should investigate influences on interest in traditionally male- or female-dominant occupations (i.e., gendered work).

An important driver of interest in gendered work is career aspiration, understood as the saliency and importance of one's personal vocational goals (Shell et al., 2010). Research suggests that aspirations may be impacted differently between genders (Howard et al., 2011; Mau and Bikos, 2000; Patton and Creed, 2007; Powers and Wojtkiewicz, 2004). For example, career aspirations were found to be influenced by same-gender pairings with recruiters, which likely reduces the activation of gender-based stereotypes (Gooch and Kemp, 2018; Lockwood, 2016; O'Keefe et al., 2018). However, these effects on career aspirations appear stronger amongst women than men (Ensher and Murphy, 1997; Morgenroth et al., 2015).

Interest in gendered work may also be influenced by gender-based stereotype threat, which arises when individuals worry that their behaviours and demeanour might be perceived as conforming to the negative stereotypes that are associated with their gender (Steele and Aronson, 1995). Gender-based stereotype threat can be triggered in contexts that generate a heightened awareness of potential prejudice or discrimination (Shapiro, 2012),

and military employment has been described as meeting all the conditions of stereotype threat for women (Maheshwari and Kumar, 2016). While gender-based stereotype threat has often been studied in the context of academic underperformance, it has also been linked with career aspirations (Casad and Bryant, 2016) and is a relevant concept for interest in gendered work.

Implicit gender biases, which are learned and automatic attitudinal connections about gender (Rudman and Ashmore, 2007), may also be relevant in the study of interest in gendered work. Levinson and Young (2010), for example, found that implicit gender biases were prevalent among both men and women, who automatically associated the role of judge to men, and aspects of employment connected to the home and family to women. However, research has also generated mixed findings (Girvan, et al., 2015). While Rudman and Goodwin (2004) found that implicit gender biases towards women tended to be more often positive, others reported the opposite (Richeson and Ambady, 2001). Notwithstanding specific effects, the importance of unconscious gender biases has been acknowledged in the workplace, as exemplified by the plethora of bias training available for employees (Dobbin and Kalev, 2018; Hensch, 2016; Nakamura and Edelman, 2019).

Van Veen (2023) examined the impacts of career aspirations, gender-based stereotype threat, and implicit gender bias on interest in gendered work using data collected from a sample of 1,036 undergraduate students attending a large Canadian university. This study also generated recommendations to support the CAF's current reconstitution

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efforts that can favour the development of a force that is gender-diverse, strong, and resilient. In line with past research, career aspirations were found to affect interest in gendered work. Regardless of their gender, participants who had strong aspirational goals were more likely to report being willing to accept a job within either traditionally male- or female-dominant domains of work.

Van Veen (2023) further suggested that gender-based stereotype threat is relevant in understanding interest in gendered work. Regardless of their gender, participants experiencing female stereotype threat (i.e., believing that their behaviours might be perceived as conforming to female stereotypes in the workplace) were more likely to be interested in female-dominant work. Conversely, they were less likely to show interest in male-dominant domains. Results differed slightly among participants who experienced male stereotype threat, regardless of their gender. While these individuals were more likely to report interest in male-dominant occupations, their experience of male stereotype threat had no impact on their interest in female-dominant fields of work.

While previous research has highlighted the importance of implicit gender biases and discussed their potential impacts in the workplace (Godsil et al., 2016; Moreira et al., 2021; Shin and Seo, 2019), Van Veen (2023) found that implicit gender biases did not relate to interest in gendered work. This study did suggest, however, that career aspirations and gender-based stereotype threat are important factors to consider when trying to understand individuals' interest in gendered work.

ADDRESSING CAREER ASPIRATIONS AND GENDER STEREOTYPE THREAT IN CAF RECRUITMENT EFFORTS

Building on past research, Van Veen (2023) provides additional insights into elements that might make the CAF more appealing to gender-diverse candidates. First, since people who have strong career aspirations are more likely to show interest in gendered work, the CAF should continue to actively highlight the value of their employment opportunities and to portray the organization as an employer of choice. This is important given that awareness and familiarity with the CAF appears low among the Canadian public (ESG, 2020; Quorus Consulting Group, 2023), especially among women. Indeed, a recent study suggested that many women were unaware of the various occupational opportunities that existed within the CAF and that few of them were therefore interested a military career (ESG, 2017; cited in Waruszynski et al., 2022). Interestingly, once women learned that their career of interest was available in the CAF, they were more interested in joining. As such, the CAF should pursue its ongoing efforts to educate the public on its constituent occupations (Van Veen, 2023; Waruszynski et al., 2022). Some of the new recruitment activities undertaken by the CAF such as the 'military member for a day' public activity (Béland, 2023) could be a venue to showcase the diversity in the CAF's operations and trades.

Findings from Van Veen (2023) also suggest that women who experience female stereotype threat are more likely to be interested in female-dominant work and less likely to show interest in male-dominant work.

This finding is in line with past research, which suggests that women who are attracted to the military may not perceive themselves as particularly feminine (Crowley, 2017), and that women in the military sometimes embody masculine traits to better fit into their environment (Taber, 2005). While the first effect was also seen in men regarding male stereotype threat, which was linked to increased interest in male stereotyped work, the reduction in interest in opposite-gendered work was not replicated amongst men. While more research is needed to examine these relationships, these results suggest that individuals are often more comfortable in occupational contexts where their gender predominates, and in which colleagues may also embody, or accept, behaviours that conform to gender stereotypes. The CAF should take this into consideration and address the finding that some women experience female stereotype threat, and that these women may be less interested in occupational environments they perceived as dominated by men. Interventions/training that can mitigate gender stereotype threat may thus be relevant.

THIS IS FOR YOU:[2] PROGRESSIVE ACTION TOWARDS GREATER EQUITY

Together, the research findings presented in this paper suggest that the efforts currently undertaken by the Canadian Forces Recruiting Group (CFRG) through its "This is for you" campaign (National Defence, 2023b) are moving in the right direction. This recruitment campaign portrays a diverse cast, while depicting the wide range of skills and experiences that the CAF needs to function effectively, including skills and experiences that are traditionally understood as more feminine. This is in line with the research discussed in this paper, which highlights the relevance of strategic communication and recruitment initiatives that highlight a range of employment opportunities, including those that are traditionally appealing to women, such as careers that emphasize community and social support (Diekman et al., 2010; Smith et al., 2015). While warfighting and violence are sometimes a military requirement, CFRG should continue to portray the wide array of operations in which the CAF is engaged, including emergency response, peace support operations, and training in support of allied nations and other work that seeks to help others (see also Waruszynski et al., 2022). Image revamping initiatives should also address issues of harassment, discrimination, and sexual misconduct, as these have been found to impact women's interest in the CAF (ESG, 2020; Quorus Consulting Group, 2023). Ultimately, the recruitment of women will require the CAF to reinforce the understanding that it is a safe and welcoming work environment.

The CAF's current culture change efforts that guide recruitment have been criticized by some, as exemplified in Sarkonak's (2023) negative perception of the CAF's diversity, equity, and inclusion lexicon. While the validity of these criticisms can be debated, it is important to acknowledge them and understand how some individuals may start to feel like the CAF is changing in a way

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[2] "This is for you" is the main slogan of the CAF's Operation UNIFIED RECRUITER (National Defence, 2023a).

that no longer represents them. A calculated approach should thus be favoured within recruitment efforts, in which the work would be presented as appealing to individuals from across the gender spectrum. While research findings suggest that men might be less impacted by stereotype threat than women, an attentive approach towards the career interests of both men and women is suggested, with the goal of projecting, and more importantly, developing a unified and diverse force.

Lastly, implicit gender biases might not be as important as career aspirations and gender-based stereotype threat in one's interest in gendered work (Van Veen, 2023). While research is needed to confirm these findings, gender biases tend to be rooted in deep-seated socialization, some of which has occurred outside of the organization (Godsil et al., 2016) and, as such, might be difficult to tackle. However, it could also be relevant to add training on gender-based stereotype threat, especially among recruiters. Such training might help them gain a better awareness of the potential impacts of gender-based stereotypes on the recruitment of women (Van Borm, 2022). This would likely buoy current approaches which focus on the role model, such as recruiters, and their influence towards potential employees (Lockwood, 2006).

CONCLUSION

Interest in gendered work is shaped by various factors, including career aspirations and gender-based stereotype threat. Future research should continue to examine the lived experiences of CAF members to understand how the CAF influences perceptions of gender diversity as a traditionally male-dominated organization. Such insights will help pave the way for a comprehensive model of CAF work interest and provide a guide for a more diverse, effective, and resilient workforce. In tackling recruitment issues and the struggle to recruit women, it is incumbent on the CAF to take responsibility in not only reshaping its culture, systems, and structures to overcome the gender stereotypes of its work, but to also foster an environment that all can desire to join.

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Reaching Out to Welcome In: Insights from a Pilot Outreach and Engagement Initiative Among Diverse Canadian South and East Asian Communities

Justin Wright and Anna Ebel-Lam, PhD.

BACKGROUND

In recent years, the Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) has placed an increasing emphasis on diversity and inclusion—both to ensure that the CAF represents the population that it serves, and that the service experience of all CAF members is equitable. Indeed, demographic projections suggest that by 2041, about 2 in 5 Canadians will be part of a racialized group (Statistics Canada, 2022). Thus, proponents of diversity initiatives in the CAF maintain that deliberately recruiting members from varied backgrounds is now, and will become, increasingly vital to maintaining the CAF's effective strength. Focusing on recruitment and attraction campaigns among diverse communities is also key to fostering greater support and awareness for the military among the Canadian populace. The CAF are not alone, moreover, in recognizing the need to increase recruitment from diverse communities. Work in the US military, for example, demonstrates the priority they have placed on improving workforce diversity and inclusion (Berglund, Mariano and Maerzluft, 2023; Lytell et al., 2023). Similarly, research collaborations among The Technical Cooperation Program (a collaborative, five-nation program between Canada, United States, United Kingdom, Australia, and New Zealand) partners (Wright, 2019), and through NATO (NATO, 2022; Waruszynski et al., 2023), illustrate a common effort among the international security community to address diverse representation of their forces.

Current CAF and Department of National Defence (DND) directives to prioritize reconstitution (DND, 2022), coupled with ongoing challenges in meeting diversity targets (DND/CAF Ombudsman, 2022), have highlighted the need to reevaluate traditional recruitment strategies and to explore alternate means of promoting the CAF as a viable career path for Canadians from varied backgrounds. One such strategy is to invest more effort into building positive, long-term relationships with ethnic communities that have historically been underrepresented in the CAF, but that are becoming increasingly influential within Canada. While building a positive rapport between Canada's military and its citizens from diverse cultures is a worthy goal in its own right, community engagement has also been identified as a potential means of improving the recruitment of under-

represented or difficult-to-reach populations. Such efforts have been applied in a variety of different contexts, ranging from clinical research trials (Brockman et al., 2023) to employment settings (Jepsen and Grob, 2015), by building trust and familiarity. To achieve similar outcomes for the CAF, the Conference of Defence Associations Institute (CDAI) developed a community outreach initiative uniquely tailored toward establishing a positive rapport with representatives from prominent ethnic communities within Canada.

CDAI COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT INITIATIVE

Rather than focusing on recruitment alone, the aim of the initial CDAI community engagement initiative was to establish the groundwork for long-term relationships, and to provide an informal venue which would enable (a) community representatives to openly share their perceptions of the CAF, and to ask questions about potential areas of opportunity or concern; and (b) CAF representatives to gain insight into the lived experiences of individuals from various ethnic backgrounds, and to understand how these experiences may have shaped their perspectives on military service.

The pilot session of the of the CDAI engagement initiative, which was held in June 2023 at the Royal Canadian Legion Branch 82 in Mississauga, Ontario, involved bringing together representatives from the local branch of the Canadian Forces Recruiting Group (CFRG) and nearby Reserve Units, CDAI staff, Chief Professional Conduct and Culture (CPCC) and her staff, as well as leaders and stakeholders from local organizations (e.g.,

Not for Profits, business associations) that represent South and East Asian communities with sizeable populations in the Toronto/Mississauga area.

In addition to recording the session, CDAI engaged the Director General Military Personnel Research and Analysis (DGMPRA) to provide empirically based observational insights. To this end, two DGMPRA members with research backgrounds in CAF recruitment, retention, diversity, and inclusion (the authors) were asked to attend the session as observers. This paper provides a short summary of insights that emerged from our observations.

WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS

Considerable effort was devoted by the CDAI organizers and CAF representatives to establishing a welcoming ambience that fostered inclusion and active participation. Moreover, the CDAI event moderator introduced the engagement session by emphasizing the desire, on the part of CDAI and the CAF, to listen and learn from the community leaders who were present. In the guided discussion that followed, community group representatives explained what prompted them to attend the event, and described how they saw a relationship between their communities and the CAF developing. This approach enabled the community group representatives to direct the conversation toward specific topics and questions that were of interest to them, and contributed to a relaxed, unguarded atmosphere.

INSIGHTS ON REPRESENTATIVES AND ASSOCIATED COMMUNITY GROUPS

The initial round of introductions, in which community group representatives described their respective organizations and the populations that they served, revealed that many of the ethnic community associations in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA) had a large footprint and a substantial sphere of influence—providing services to tens of thousands of individuals and families, including those who were newcomers and still integrating into Canadian society. Moreover, these organizations are very diverse, often representing multiple language groups, nationalities, and belief systems.

While all community organizations represented shared the general aim of helping newcomers to transition successfully to their lives in Canada while preserving their heritage, the specific objectives of the various community groups differed. Some groups focused mainly on supporting and empowering women who were re-establishing themselves as Canadian residents, or on supporting refugees and their families to do the same. Other groups had developed a broad network of connections across multiple domains (post-secondary institutions, business communities), with the aim of strengthening political, economic, and social ties between members of their organization and Canadian institutions.

Individual and cultural differences also became evident over the course of the session. For instance, community group representatives differed in their proclivity to acknowledge each other's experiences and communicated respect for CAF personnel in culturally varied ways. These cultural nuances served to reinforce the need for CAF outreach and recruitment efforts to be tailored to the worldviews and norms of each group.

PERCEPTIONS OF THE CANADIAN ARMED FORCES AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT: KEY THEMES

Community group representatives attended the CDAI outreach event for a variety of reasons, many of which centred on learning about the opportunities that the CAF could offer to their community members, as well as resolving concerns that they harboured about the organization. Key themes that emerged during the discussion, and their implications for community engagement and recruitment, are summarized below:

Positivity and support for the CAF and for military service. Community group representatives tended to have very positive views of the CAF, and of military service in general, voicing a deep respect for what they referred to as the *global military institution,* and expressing gratitude and reverence for CAF personnel (and members of military organizations in other countries) who dedicated their lives to service. Of note, many representatives voiced profound admiration for the CAF's peacekeeping and humanitarian role—which was widely regarded as an aspect that was unique to the Canadian military. An emphasis on prioritizing the preservation of global and national security was shared, particularly by those who had directly experienced circumstances where this was in jeopardy.

Interest in career opportunities for youth. Community group representatives

exhibited great enthusiasm (and often surprise) at the broad range of career opportunities that were available through the CAF—noting that (a) many professions in the civilian sector had an equivalent in the military, and (b) joining the CAF might enable new (e.g., first generation) Canadians and ethnic youth (e.g., second generation) to capitalize on subsidized educational opportunities and pursue careers that would otherwise be difficult to access. They felt that the lack of awareness among youth of all backgrounds about the CAF and the opportunities it provides is a significant missed opportunity.

Surprise at the CAF's low profile in Canadian society. Relative to attitudes toward military service in their countries of origin, and in light of the contributions the CAF has made to Canadian society, such as during domestic emergencies (e.g., wildfires), most community representatives expressed surprise over the CAF's lack of visibility in varied aspects of Canadian life. Specifically, they remarked that in other countries, military service was more prominently associated with patriotism and national pride, and that military organizations were visible (and revered) in public life—cultivating a presence in schools and other organizations where they could establish positive relationships with the populace.

Concerns over discrimination/harassment. Several community representatives voiced concern over gender discrimination, sexual misconduct, and harassment in the CAF. In discussing these concerns, they raised questions about (a) the use of quotas in hiring and promotion, (b) the impact of maternity on career progression, (c) whether systemic issues of sexual misconduct were actively being

addressed, and (d) the vetting process for selecting and promoting personnel. Despite reservations about these issues, community representatives were encouraged to note the presence of a female Lieutenant-General, as well as other male and female racialized CAF members who were at the session and who shared their enthusiasm and positive perceptions of their service.

Importance of acquiring cultural knowledge. Community representatives repeatedly highlighted the importance of learning about their community's culture to engage with its members effectively. Specifically, it was noted that engagement by the CAF to recognize cultural backgrounds could have a significant influence on receptivity to the CAF by their communities, and on perceptions of military service in general. They provided personal examples of having strong military family heritage, or in contrast coming from countries where the military was less favourably perceived. Others noted cultural norms around the prestige associated with military service which varied by country, and occasionally expressed views that differed from those espoused by the CAF on key topics such as diversity and the prioritization of individual rights. Of particular relevance to CAF recruitment, community representatives observed that ethnic communities differed in the extent to which parents and community leaders still influence youth with regard to lifestyle choices and career paths, and that in some cases, this influence appears to be diminishing. It was widely noted that awareness of such cultural differences could be critical to facilitating the

successful recruitment and integration of new Canadians from diverse cultures into the CAF.

FUTURE COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT EFFORTS: COMMUNITY REPRESENTATIVE-DRIVEN INSIGHTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The pilot CDAI engagement session yielded valuable insights into how future engagement efforts on the part of the CAF and its affiliates could be extended, and measures that could be implemented to enhance interest in CAF careers among youth from diverse ethnic communities. Community representatives were receptive to future engagements with the CAF and were enthusiastic about the varied educational and employment opportunities that military service offers—opportunities of which they indicated that they (and their respective communities) had little prior awareness. The discussion further demonstrated that these communities knew little about the CAF and its mandate, what military service in Canada entailed, and the educational and professional benefits it afforded its members. They offered several specific recommendations on how the CAF could consider engaging their communities in the future:

(a) Relationship-build by maintaining a positive, non-recruitment-oriented presence at community events. Community representatives suggested bringing military equipment for children/youth to interact with, and engaging with parents and other influencers to educate them about the CAF and enhance their perceptions of the organization.

(b) Do more to showcase the CAF involvement in peacekeeping, humanitarian missions, and domestic support. Several representatives observed that most people tended to equate military service to being a soldier in combat and noted that some of the other roles that the CAF fulfils might hold more appeal for their communities.

(c) Become a regular positive presence at schools, universities, and ethnic associations, to showcase the subsidized educational opportunities, career paths, and benefits packages that the CAF could offer.

Of note, there was a substantial amount of interest in the part-time employment opportunities offered through the Reserve Force, and other ways to ease youth into the CAF so that they could better understand military service (e.g., cadets). Given that Reserve Force units, which are often situated in urban centres, are also more likely to be co-located with sizeable ethnic communities, this component of the CAF may be well-positioned to play a particularly important role in outreach and engagement.

CONCLUSION

Much of the discussion during the engagement session centred on situating the lived experiences of these communities, through the lens of the community group representatives who attended. Their shared views and perspectives suggest how these community members frame their experience as ethnic minorities in Canada. They spoke about experiencing transition and the accompanying

loss and recreating of identity (e.g., as refugees, immigrants, minorities), and finding one's "place". They spoke about their lives (and that of their family) as being bound by the opportunities and challenges created by Canadian immigration policy, which in some cases may impede CAF recruitment (e.g., citizenship requirements for enrolment, or potential talent loss due to immigration backlog). They also shared a common view of Canada as a place of opportunity for a stable, secure and prosperous life, and connected what they learned about CAF educational and employment opportunities to this perspective. Finally, they recognized the potential that having a sustained CAF presence within their communities and day-to-day activities could provide, both to their members and to the CAF, and thus suggested that the CDAI engagement session was a positive *start* to a much longer dialogue.

The CDAI community engagement initiative highlighted the importance of building *sustained connections* between ethnic communities and the CAF, as many community representatives indicated that a demonstrated willingness to learn about their culture and invest in ongoing relationships was key in reinforcing the sense that the CAF was open to members from all backgrounds who embrace its ethos and values.

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Familiarity and Proximity to the CAF: A Missing Piece of the Personnel Gap

Luka Dursun, MA.

The ongoing shortage of military personnel in the Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) rightfully continues to dominate public discussion of the military. Currently, the deficit stands at a total of over 16,000 CAF members, a troubling gap in contrast to the desired strength of 71,150 Regular force members and 30,000 Primary reservists (DGMPRA, 2023). Indeed, the CAF is working intensely to overcome its challenges—the issuance of the Reconstitution directive in October of 2022 by the Chief of Defence Staff and the Deputy Minister represents a substantial, concerted effort to bring the CAF to its full strength.

The Reconstitution directive calls for changes to operational tempo and the re-prioritization of resources to orient the CAF towards recruitment and retention efforts—this includes the possible temporary halting of any non-essential activities that have a considerable personnel requirement. However, this emphasis on internal process and bureaucratic resourcing belies a more fundamental demographic crisis facing the military. This article aims to draw attention to one significant trend, a longer-term phenomenon which has gone largely unrecognized: the problem of proximity and familiarity with the CAF, largely attributable to continuing demographic change, which may mean that the pool of qualified CAF applicants will continue to shrink despite the CAF's best efforts (Otis and Dale, 2020). In short, fewer Canadians know someone in the CAF or have family in the CAF (Department of National Defence, 2023), and this may lead to even greater recruitment trouble in the future. This piece could serve as a springboard for a more systematized long-term research agenda, justifying efforts to better understand the subject.

This current crisis has emerged just as operational demands on the military have increased to their greatest extent since the end of combat operations in Afghanistan. A shift towards the Indo-Pacific is bracketed by a major war in Europe and increasing conflict in the Middle East. The CAF is also facing greater pressure from domestic operations (with some observers expressing concerns for readiness; Leuprecht and Kasurak, 2020), with the number of domestic deployments, usually in response to natural disasters, rising dramatically in recent years (Rock, 2021). It is worth noting that these operations also function as a potential recruitment tool for the CAF, contributing to positive impressions among the Canadian public ("Support Role for Armed Forces," 2020).

Although these personnel strains were precipitated by COVID-19, this ongoing crisis is the culmination of longer—and predictable—trends in the CAF's personnel generation system, such as bottlenecks in training and a shrinking pool of qualified

recruits (Berthiaume, 2018). As we move further from the pandemic, DND/CAF has continued its wholehearted reform of the personnel generation system (Department of National Defence, 2022)—it has become increasingly clear that these strains are not merely the aftershocks of this event.

This is, of course, not a uniquely Canadian issue; other militaries are facing comparable challenges with personnel input and throughput, exacerbated by long-term demographic changes which have been brought to the fore since the pandemic, such as greater competition for talent in the labour market (Barno and Bensahel, 2023; George, 2023; UK Parliament, 2018). Personnel shortfalls are uneven across the organization, often dependent on trade and location, and although the CAF is yet to experience major operational failures, existing tasks and missions have already been adjourned in order to maintain broader readiness (Gransden, 2021). The most immediate effect of the shortage is also its most obvious: those remaining are being asked to pick up the slack, with deleterious effects on morale (Department of National Defence, 2022). Conditions for the RCN are particularly egregious (Ritchie, 2023); personnel shortages mean available sailors are often targeted for recurring postings to ships at sea, contributing to distress, dissatisfaction, and ultimately release from the Navy for many members (Anderson et al., 2018).

Although the causes of the CAF's personnel shortages are varied, they are becoming more thoroughly understood by the day. Restructuring is already taking place to accelerate the training process and modernize

the management of military personnel (Department of National Defence, 2022). However, at the level of initial intake, the pool is shrinking as the CAF draws from a public that is less enthusiastic about, and less qualified for, military service (Guérin and Howe, 2023).

Commenters are often keen to note the connection between public interest and the ongoing culture change effort being undertaken at all levels of the Defence Team (or rather, the scandals necessitating the reforms; Cnockaert, 2022). While the effort is worthwhile and long overdue, it is not a panacea, and observers may be disappointed at the lack of visible results reflected in recruiting figures. For instance, despite the attention given to changing dress regulations (Raycraft, 2022), it is difficult to ascertain the extent to which such changes have moved the needle at all on recruitment figures, in either direction. As for misconduct, there is little evidence to suggest any notable causal link between public concern over the media coverage of these events and the current personnel crisis. In fact, young women (those of typical recruiting age) are both much less concerned and much less aware of misconduct issues than older women more generally (Department of National Defence, 2023). Regardless, concerns over culture and sexual misconduct still represent a possible source of reticence for women regarding a career in the CAF.

There is instead plenty of evidence to suggest that the factors driving public unwillingness to join the CAF are more straightforward than anything resembling outrage. More than one's gender, race, education level, or income, the most

significant predictor of enlistment in the military is proximity to military service (often through familial connection to an active or former member) in one's personal life. Military service in Canada, as in the United States, is largely a family affair; nearly half (47%) of new CAF recruits surveyed in 2019 reported having family or relatives who were former or current CAF members (Otis and Ross, 2023). Figures for the United States are even more extreme, with approximately 80 percent of new recruits to the military having at least one family member that served in the Armed Forces, and nearly a third having a parent who served as well (Barno and Bensahel, 2023). Unfortunately, these statistics for other allies across the Five Eyes, which may be more similar to Canada in terms of the degree to which the military is integrated with mainstream society, are not collected. Considering that our allies are undergoing many of the same crises in personnel generation, it may behoove them to investigate this possibility. Given the demographic and compositional similarities, it is likely that figures across the Five Eyes would look similar.

There are other Canada-specific statistics which bear out this perspective. Unsurprisingly, the most productive regions (proportionately speaking) for recruitment across Canada correspond precisely to the presence of major bases and wings. Young people from areas near CFB Trenton, CFB Borden, CFB Gagetown, and CFB Petawawa, alongside neighborhoods across the National Capital Region, are the most likely to apply to join the CAF (Ueno and McDonald, 2023). Indeed, many of the least productive postal codes correspond to densely populated downtown cores, despite these areas having the greatest number of recruiting centres, following closures of centres in smaller cities in 2012 (Pugliese, 2015). In a similar vein, nearly 50% of CAF applicants report that they joined the CAF based on a direct engagement that they had with a CAF member (e.g., family member, friend; Otis and Ross, 2023).

Putting aside possible cultural gaps between communities that serve and those that do not (and the possible resistance of this "warrior class" to culture change), this undermines the ability of the military to effectively recruit from a diverse Canadian public. The reliance on this pipeline—the children, nieces, and nephews of members and veterans going on to enlist themselves—will necessarily lead to trouble in the future as the pool continues to shrink (not every child of members makes the decision to enlist).

This may provide another motivation for the CAF to improve support to families. Personnel are more likely than not to say that the CAF fails to look after members' families (Skomorovsky, et al., 2023). Members often cite damage to their family and relationships as contributors to dissatisfaction with postings and geographical stability, leading to early release (Department of National Defence, 2022). Any effort the CAF can make to foster working conditions that are more compatible with raising families will help mitigate unhealthy attrition and garner interest from family-minded applicants.

This is all compounded by the increasing national dependency on immigration as the primary source of population growth. Almost a quarter of people

in Canada are current or former landed immigrants or permanent residents, the highest proportion since Confederation (Statistics Canada, 2022). Analysts have previously noted that immigrants to our country have potentially different perceptions of a career in the military, often the result of a possible hesitancy towards the military in their country of origin (Scoppio et al., 2021). Immigrants to Canada may also have different career and educational prospects than native-born Canadians. Indeed, immigrants are underrepresented in the military: CAF members are less likely to be born outside of Canada than Canadians of the same age cohort (Otis and Ross, 2023). The growing ethnic diversity of Canada—the share of recent immigrants born in Europe has been in consistent decline for five decades (Statistics Canada, 2022)—has already been recognized by the CAF as warranting an institutional emphasis on a representative force, one which is able to attract visible minority applicants.

These ongoing demographic shifts have been noted by experts as a cause for concern, as the CAF's traditional recruiting pools (typically rural, male, Anglophone, and white) continue to shrink (Otis and Dale, 2020). However, this discussion belies a far more prosaic limitation of recruitment from immigrant communities: immigrants to Canada are much less likely to know someone in the CAF, or to have family in the CAF. This translates to reduced awareness as well; for example, awareness of the CAF among white Canadians is over twice as much as for Asian Canadians (Department of National Defence, 2023). A greater proportion of Indigenous and white Canadians, in contrast to other

Canadians, report knowing someone who have served in the CAF (Otis and Chiasson, 2021). This trend is unlikely to change, as over half of all recent immigrants to Canada settled in Toronto, Vancouver, and Montreal, precisely the regions with the least relative proximity to military life and military members.

Awareness of the CAF in general has been in decline since the end of combat operations in Afghanistan in 2011. The shift towards online recruiting following the aforementioned closure of recruiting centres plays a role in this decline, given the evidence that shallow awareness is a poor substitute for long-term proximity and familiarity. Face-to-face experience with recruiters is noted as the preferred form of communication for a majority of applicants, and both friends and family members in the CAF are repeatedly listed as strong influences on the decision to enlist (Otis and Ross, 2023). Members of the public who report knowing someone who has served in the CAF also report higher rates of trust and support for the CAF (Department of National Defence, 2023).

After recognizing the potential importance of such factors, one can better understand how the decommissioning and closure of bases near large urban areas (e.g., CFB Toronto, CFB Calgary, CFB St Hubert) may have had unintended second-order effects on CAF recruitment and attraction efforts, despite being touted as a cost-saving measure. Although these decisions were not taken lightly, the extent to which decision-makers at the time considered the role of proximity in attraction is not known. In any case, consolidation of military activities away from urban areas and towards more remote bases

also plays a role in attrition. For example, CFB Cold Lake is a notoriously difficult posting location for RCAF members, and has historically experienced substantial difficulties with personnel retention (Previsic et al., 2019).

Familiarity with military life must be a greater consideration for leadership going forward. If there is no viable means of increasing the visibility of serving members within the public realm, the CAF must be more deliberate in targeting those potential applicants who have no exposure to the organization. The decision in 2022 to begin accepting permanent residents is a great first step to acknowledging this shift, although a change in policy should be met with a concomitant change in recruiting emphasis. In this instance, permanent residents may be particularly sensitive to long processing times, and any such obstacles (such as security clearances) may lead to fewer applicants carrying through to enrollment (Burke, 2024). Regardless of the success of any given initiative, creative thinking may be necessary. The introduction by the RCN of a one-year "trial" period for new recruits may be useful in attracting an otherwise uncertain public, although care must be taken to ensure that policies like these have the desired effect, and do not merely pull from the existing pool of recruits (Department of National Defence, 2023). The costs associated with these kinds of initiatives may also be prohibitive, and may not be feasible in many instances.

The problem with proximity and familiarity, as described in this article, is not the most pressing issue for the CAF's capacity-building effort; Reconstitution is rightly concerned with the more manageable and identifiable short, medium-, and long-term barriers impacting recruitment and retention, including those that are addressed by changes to internal processes. The troubling element here is its inevitability. Although this demographic phenomenon may appear distant, there is little indication of abatement—all signs point in the opposite direction, and the CAF will reckon with this problem, one way or another. The CAF would benefit from becoming more visible in, and proximal to, Canadian life. Insulation from the rest of Canada will only serve to make the military and its challenges more easily ignored. Greater utilization of the reserve system, which straddles the military and civilian spheres, may be useful in generating this aforementioned familiarity across the Canadian public (Berndtsson et al., 2023); domestic operations are another possible avenue for increasing the CAF's presence. Additional research is needed on the subject in order to make sure the CAF is best positioned to navigate the future demographic realities of the recruiting pool.

The CAF is in the process of undertaking massive reforms to its personnel generation system in order to retain its ability to promote and defend Canada's interests. Canadians have cause for optimism given the seriousness of the effort and the commitment of the CAF's leadership. Despite this, further research is needed to identify and mitigate the more systemic obstacles which the CAF may face in its future; greater understanding of the role proximity and familiarity play in recruitment is just one small piece of the larger whole. As noted by Gen. Eyre, the problems with recruiting and retention are going to get worse before they get better (Brewster, 2022).

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Retention to the Rescue?

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INTRODUCTION

Over the past several years, the Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) Regular Force (Reg F) has been facing increasing personnel shortages and currently has an unprecedented shortfall of almost 8,000 members. In fiscal year (FY) 18/19 the Reg F's authorized strength[1] was 68,000, while its total strength was only about 400 short of this. Canada's defence policy, *Strong, Secure, Engaged* (SSE), released in 2017 announced that the Reg F would grow by 3,500 to 71,500, and this growth was planned over the course of several years, from FY 19/20 to FY 24/25 (Government of Canada, 2017). While some growth in the total strength occurred during FY 19/20, it was insufficient to keep up with the increase in the authorized strength, resulting in a gap of about 600. The onset of the COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated the gap as intake plummeted and never surged to make up for the unmet recruitment targets. The total strength declined from 67,751 in March 2020 to 63,288 as of August 2023 - a reduction of nearly 4,500. Meanwhile, the authorized strength increased by 2,800 (to 71,150), resulting in a shortage of 7,862 members.

Given the current unprecedented personnel shortfall there is an urgency to retain as many members as possible. However, retention cannot grow a population; at best it can maintain it. For the population to grow, intake must exceed releases, which means growing the Reg F is fundamentally a recruitment challenge, however, minimizing releases contributes to stopping or reducing the declining strength. So, is there opportunity to reduce releases? And if so, is the expected return on retention efforts worthwhile? This paper presents a preliminary analysis conducted by Director Research Workforce Analytics (DRWA) of Director General Military Personnel Research and Analysis (DGMPRA) to understand and quantify the potential opportunity (or lack thereof) for improving retention.

BENCHMARKING

Benchmark attrition rates can provide a useful yardstick to understand how Reg F retention compares to itself historically and to that of other organizations, yielding insights about how much room for improvement may be realistic (Pilat and Vincent, 2023). The more comparable the populations are, the more valuable the benchmark.

HISTORICAL REG F ATTRITION

Historical trends in Reg F attrition are considered first. Over the past 40 years, a few peaks and valleys were observed during periods of force expansion and reduction, yet overall, Reg F attrition rates were fairly stable,

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[1] Authorized strength is the approved total number of members that may be employed by the Reg F at a given time.

averaging 7.5 percent with a standard deviation of about one percent. They have
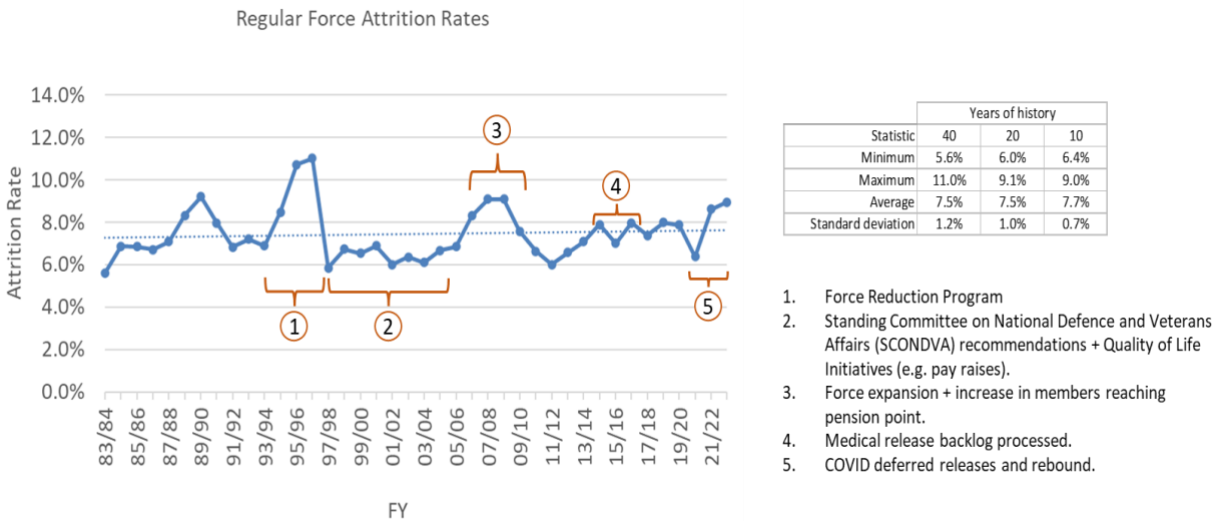

Figure 1: Historical Regular Force Attrition

rarely been lower than six percent or above eight percent. Even during a period of implementing quality-of-life (QOL) initiatives and pay raises around the early 2000s, attrition rates were stable between six and seven percent, and have only been higher than eight percent in exceptional circumstances, such as during the force reduction program of the mid-1990s and during a time where measures were put in place to accelerate recruitment. [2] Looking at more recent history, attrition rates over the past decade have shown a slight upward trend, averaging 7.7 percent with an even smaller standard deviation of 0.7 percent, despite the fluctuations that occurred during the COVID-19 pandemic. Intake plummeted in FY 20/21 due to the pandemic and consequently there were fewer first-year releases, which tends to be a peak attrition point. In addition, training was put on hold and

many releases were deferred. Consequently, releases dropped in FY 20/21 and then surged in FYs 21/22 and 22/23. The introduction of mandatory COVID-19 vaccinations also contributed to the surge, as some members refused to comply. Although attrition rates exceeded eight percent during the last two fiscal years, together with the drop in FY 20/21, attrition has averaged eight percent since the onset of the pandemic.

The stability of historical Reg F attrition, particularly considering the limited impact of the QOL initiatives on the attrition rates observed at that time, suggest there may be limited room for improvement, at least in terms of aggregate release numbers.

FEDERAL PUBLIC SERVANTS
Canadian civilian federal public servants were also considered for benchmarking. For this population, the total combined departure rates hovered between four and five percent (with

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[2] The first year of service is a peak attrition point due to members voluntarily releasing during training; therefore, surges in recruitment are accompanied by an increase in the attrition rate.

the exception of a couple years) with an overall average of 4.9 percent and a standard deviation of 0.7 percent over the last decade (Government of Canada, 2022a). Note the standard deviation is the same as that of the Reg F for the comparable period, demonstrating the same stability for both populations. However, a notable difference between Reg F attrition and federal public service departures is their composition — on the civilian side, resignations prior to retirement account for on average only 16.1 percent of losses, with a standard deviation of 1.6 percent, whereas for the Reg F, voluntary releases (the most comparable to resignations) account for 56.2 percent of all releases, with a standard deviation of four percent. The example of the federal public servants shows the impact of nearly maximal retention where the majority of the workforce is retained until retirement. The practical result of this is a workforce with an average age of 43.5 years (Government of Canada, 2022a). This is an age profile that is likely to be undesirable for a military force where physical fitness requirements and challenging work conditions typically call for a younger workforce. In the Reg F, the average age of serving members is 35 years. Furthermore, in the Reg F members join at the lowest rank and work their way through to the upper ranks, whereas in the public service personnel can join at any level. These differences suggest that comparing to civilian federal public servants may not be the most relevant yardstick, though it does provide a bound for a scenario in which the military's unique characteristics are removed, and where both populations are subject to similar external conditions (e.g., the unemployment rate).

MILITARY ALLIES

The Five Eyes militaries face many of the same unique cultural challenges as the Reg F and therefore make for another benchmark to consider (Straver, Boileau, Lai, Rollin, 2023). The COVID-19 pandemic affected different countries in different ways, but the pre-pandemic time period provides a good basis for comparison. On average during FYs 17/18-18/19, Canada's Reg F release rate was 7.7 percent, which is lower than those of New Zealand (9.1 percent), Australia (9.6 percent), the United Kingdom (9.7 percent), and the United States (12-13 percent) (Pezaro 2022, Roempke 2022, Government of United Kingdom 2022, Licari 2022). This suggests that the CAF Reg F may already be operating near the lowest realistically feasible rate.

The above benchmark comparisons suggest there may be limited opportunity to improve retention since Reg F releases as a whole are stable between six and eight percent and consistently lower than those of the Five Eyes allies. However, this does not preclude other benefits of retention efforts that focus on, for example, stressed occupations or mission-critical capability gaps.

POTENTIALLY RETAINABLE RELEASES
The impact of retention efforts is dependant on there being a population that is potentially retainable. All members eventually release, however not all releases are the same - some members cannot be retained, such as those who have reached the compulsory retirement age, some are not desirable to retain, such as those who are consistently poor performers or who do not espouse the ethos of the CAF, and there are several others who cannot be

expected to stay for various reasons. Accordingly, the goal of the Reg F is not to retain everybody but rather to retain talent and minimize unhealthy releases. Unhealthy releases are those that are both *avoidable* (the member chooses or feels forced to leave for reasons that are within the organization's control) and *dysfunctional* (the member was making a positive contribution to the Reg F) (Government of Canada, 2022b). An example of unhealthy release is when a talented member with several potential years of service ahead of them voluntarily releases due to dissatisfaction. Based on this definition, historical releases were examined to identify and measure the portion of releases that are unhealthy and therefore, potentially retainable.

When members leave the Reg F, their release is recorded as one of six different categories: misconduct; unsatisfactory service, medical, voluntary, service completed, and death, the first five of which can be further broken down as specified in the Queen's Regulations and Orders (QR&O) (Government of Canada, 2015). Immediately, one can see that all release categories other than voluntary ones fall outside the definition of unhealthy attrition. However, there is some nuance in deciding which categories should be excluded from the portion of potentially retainable releases. For example, it stands to reason that members who release for medical reasons cannot be incentivized to stay because they no longer meet the principle of universality of service (Government of Canada, 2006); however, historically women medically release at higher rates than men (Straver, 2023), which suggests there may be a systemic issue contributing to the releases of

women that can potentially be corrected to reduce future medical releases. However, data are not available to make that distinction, so for the purposes of this discussion, it was assumed that all medical releases are outside the Reg F's control and excluded from unhealthy losses. Another nuance is that of retirements — although they are not considered unhealthy, members who are of retirement age as specified in the QR&O are potentially retainable for a limited amount of time. However, these releases make up a small proportion of releases from the Reg F, so hold very little potential to increase retention. In general, some non-voluntary releases could be retainable, but it is debatable, therefore, herein the potentially retainable releases are narrowed down to voluntary releases.

Voluntary releases are categorized as "immediate annuity", "fixed service" and "other causes", with the majority of voluntary releases falling under "other causes", which does not currently provide any valuable insights into why members chose to leave. Given that members who release with an immediate annuity may be incented to "double-dip" with a post-release job, the question of whether these members are potentially retainable is currently being explored. Similarly, the question of how likely it is for members to extend their contract after completing their agreed upon fixed term of service is being explored. With that in mind, it is reasonable to focus initial retention analysis on those who release for "other causes". This population is leaving earlier in their career, without an annuity or having completed their terms of service, suggesting the potential opportunity for improved retention is

significant within this sub-group. Further research, leveraging DGMPRA's complementary social science research on retention and attrition drivers, is underway to understand who is voluntarily releasing and why, to accurately quantify the opportunity to improve retention.

Over the past decade voluntary releases have accounted for 56.2 percent of all Reg F releases, which consists of an annual average of 779 (14.6 percent) "immediate annuity", 406 (7.6 percent) "fixed service", and 1,815 (34.0 percent) "other causes" releases. This does not mean that Reg F attrition can potentially be improved by 56.2 percent or 34.0 percent (if we refine the potentially retainable releases to "other causes"). Since all members will eventually release, those who are retained are simply deferring their release to a later time and potentially to a different category. However, in general, the longer members stay, the lower the release rate, so postponing releases does result in a measurable improvement to retention. This further reinforces the approach of focussing on voluntary releases that fall under "other causes" because this population has the potential to contribute many more years of service. However, further research is required to quantify the potential additional years of service than could be realized, which will provide more insights on the bounds for improving Reg F releases.

CONCLUSION

Due to the current shortage in the Reg F there is an urgency to retain as many members as possible; however, comparing Reg F releases to benchmark rates revealed there may be limited opportunity to improve retention since Reg F releases are stable between six and eight percent and consistently lower than those of the Five Eyes allies. Examining types of releases to narrow down and quantify those who are potentially retainable revealed that the subset of Reg F releases that are most likely to be potentially retainable are those who voluntarily release for "other causes". These releases account for 34.0 percent of all Reg F releases; however, this does not mean current release rates can potentially be improved by the same proportion. Further research, leveraging DGMPRA's complementary social science research on retention and attrition drivers, is required to understand why members voluntarily release and which voluntary releases can potentially be prevented and for how long. Although retention efforts contribute to slowing the widening gap in Reg F strength, retention does not yield growth. Therefore, retention efforts should not distract from the need for sustained and focussed attention to scale recruitment efforts to meet the demand for growth.

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An Overview of Recent Trends Among Canadian Regular Force Members: The Focus on Retention, Well-being, and Culture

Carina Daugherty, MA.

INTRODUCTION

Canada's Defence Policy, *Strong, Secure, Engaged,* outlined the importance of recruitment and retention initiatives within the Canadian Armed Forces (CAF; Department of National Defence [DND], 2017). In response, several directives and strategies were developed within the CAF in an effort to reach the goals outlined in the defence policy. First, the *CAF Retention Strategy* was developed and implemented for the purpose of understanding the factors related to retention outcomes. Within the strategy, various factors that impact retention were highlighted, including the importance of strengthening families, optimizing the health and well-being of members, providing career support to members, creating a safe and inclusive workplace, and encouraging leaders to promote a supportive culture (DND, 2022a). Second, the *Chief of Defence Staff/Deputy Minister Directive for CAF Reconstitution* emphasized the importance of prioritizing the well-being of members, reviewing and revising policies to support modernization of the CAF, and creating a more inclusive work environment for members in order to support recruitment and retention efforts (DND, 2022b). Furthermore, the importance of member well-being, eliminating harmful behaviour, and creating an inclusive workplace was also highlighted within the *Defence Team Total Health and Wellness Strategy,* which was implemented to improve the overall wellness of defence personnel (DND, 2022c).

The CAF's ability to recruit and retain members has been notably hindered since the COVID-19 pandemic. For example, it has been reported that the percentage of filled Regular Force (Reg F) positions has decreased every year between 2019 (97 percent) and 2022 (89 percent) and the number of CAF occupation shortages has increased between these years from 18 percent to 70 percent (DND, 2022d, 2023a). To help improve and support the CAF recruitment and retention efforts, it is important to implement continuous measurement and monitoring to report progress against organizational priorities. Consistent measurement of these CAF priorities will help track progress and reveal trends in members' perceptions. To achieve this goal, existing survey items that are administered within Director General Military Personnel Research and Analysis (DGMPRA) were reviewed to identify the items that would best represent the aforementioned priority areas related to retention, culture, conduct, and

well-being.[1] The objective of this paper is to: 1) assess these key metrics to provide an exploratory overview of recent trends in members' attitudes and perceptions within these highlighted areas; and 2) provide an understanding of key satisfiers and dissatisfiers among CAF members across time.

METHODOLOGY

Metrics related to retention, family support, well-being, and culture are collected within cross-sectional surveys administered to Reg F CAF members for the purpose of tracking changes in perceptions, attitudes, and behaviours over time (see Table 1).[2]

TABLE 1. DGMPRA Surveys, Respondents, and Response Rates.

Survey	Year	Reg F respondents	Reg F response rate
CAF Reg F Retention Survey	2014, 2016, 2019	1,732–2,105	28–41 percent
Defence Workplace Well-being Survey	2018	7,061	33 percent
Your Say Matters: Defence Team Well-being Survey	2022	4,463	31 percent
Your Say Survey	2014-2017, 2019, 2020	1,484–2,232	36–47 percent

The surveys are cross-sectional by design (i.e., the results provide a snapshot during a point in time), however, historical results are used as a baseline to allow for comparisons to be made with more recent results. This article presents descriptive survey results between 2014 and 2022 to reveal trends over time.[3] Survey data were weighted to improve the extent to which results can be generalized to the Reg F CAF population.[4]

KEY THEMES

Survey metrics were grouped into key themes reflective of the identified CAF personnel priorities including: 1) member and family support; 2) job satisfaction and well-being; 3) leadership; 4) career and rewards; and 5) climate and culture. Survey metrics within each theme were presented to members using 5- and 7- point agreement (*strongly/completely disagree* to *strongly/completely agree*) and satisfaction (*strongly/completely dissatisfied* to *strongly/completely satisfied*) Likert-scales.[5]

MEMBER AND FAMILY SUPPORT

This theme reflects members' perceived level of support that they receive from their family and from the CAF, as well as members' ability to maintain a work-life balance. An area of strength within this theme is the support that members receive from their families (over 80 percent across all years). In contrast, members were less satisfied with the level of support received from the CAF. Specifically, in 2022 about three-fifths of members were satisfied with the family support received from the CAF, while less than two-fifths believe that the CAF really cares about their well-being or that

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[1] DGMPRA is a division within the CAF Military Personnel Command, and a partner to Assistant Deputy Minister Science and Technology within the Canadian Department of National Defence.

[2] While some metrics are also administered to Primary Reserve CAF members, in this article, only responses that pertain to the Reg F are presented due to the unique nature of each component.

[3] For many metrics, results are available since 2014, while other metrics were more recently added.

[4] Caution should be used when interpreting results due to differences in survey methodologies. The descriptive results provide an overview of key trends in the Reg F and should not be used to draw definitive conclusions.

[5] One exception was the Likert-scale used for the morale metric, which ranged from 1 (*very low*) to 5 (*very high*) and for the atmosphere of acceptance metric, which ranged from 1 (*not at all*) to 5 (*to a great extent*).

the CAF provides a reasonable quality of life for service members and their families. Further, these sentiments were less positive in 2022 compared to previous years. Members' ability to maintain a balance between their personal and working life has generally remained consistent across all years (see Figure 1).

Figure 1. Member and Family Support
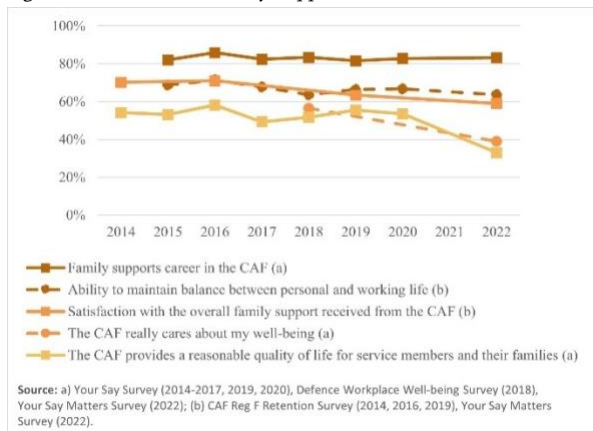
JOB SATISFACTION AND WELL-BEING

Metrics within this theme assess how members feel about their jobs, about the organization, and about military life. Pride is an area of strength, with most members reporting that they are proud to be in the CAF. However, in 2022, only 64 percent of members were proud to be in the CAF compared to about 80 percent or higher in previous years. Similarly, while historically over 60 percent of members reported satisfaction with their job and with the military way of life, satisfaction dropped to 54 percent in both regards in 2022. A main area of concern within this theme is morale. While historically about two-fifths of members reported high levels of morale, in 2022 only one-quarter of members reported high morale. On the other hand, intentions to leave the CAF has remained relatively stable

across the years. While intentions to leave increased slightly in 2022 (24 percent) compared to 2020 (19 percent), results were consistent with earlier years (see Figure 2).

Figure 2. Job Satisfaction and Well-Being
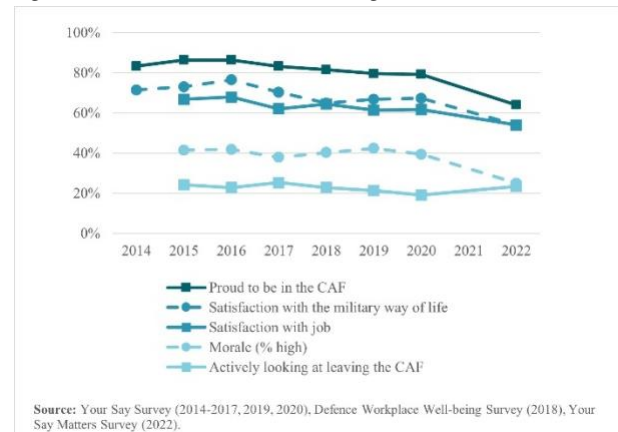
CAREER AND REWARDS

This theme included perceptions of the fairness of pay and benefits, satisfaction with promotion opportunities, as well as satisfaction with career management. Within this theme, members were least satisfied with the way their careers are managed, with about half or fewer reporting satisfaction in this regard. Conversely, roughly 60 percent reported fairness of pay and benefits and opportunities for promotion across most years. However, satisfaction among all areas of career and rewards decreased in 2022 compared to previous years (see Figure 3).

Figure 3. Career and Rewards
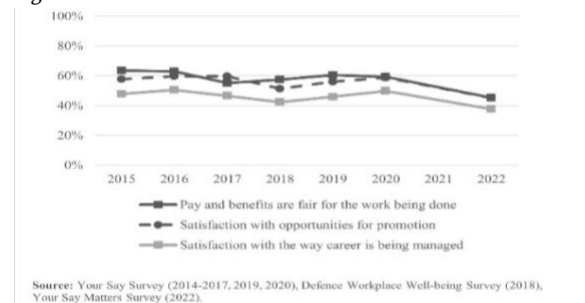
LEADERSHIP

Items within the leadership theme relate to members' perceptions of their immediate supervisor, as well as perceptions of CAF leadership. 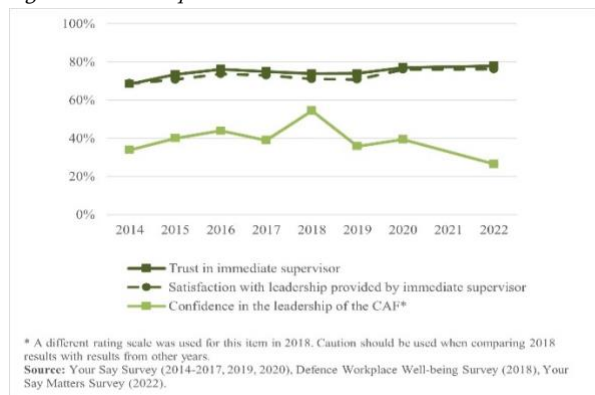Across all years, the majority of Reg F members (approximately 70 percent or higher) reported trust in their immediate supervisor and were satisfied with the leadership provided by their immediate supervisor. Further, members' trust in their immediate supervisor (78 percent) and satisfaction with the leadership provided by their immediate supervisor (76 percent) peaked in 2022 compared to all previous years. In contrast, members held relatively low confidence in the leadership of the CAF, with a relatively steep decline in confidence in 2022 (27 percent) compared to approximately two-fifths across most years (see Figure 4).

Figure 4. Leadership

* A different rating scale was used for this item in 2018. Caution should be used when comparing 2018 results with results from other years.
Source: Your Say Survey (2014-2017, 2019, 2020), Defence Workplace Well-being Survey (2018), Your Say Matters Survey (2022).

CLIMATE AND CULTURE

Within the theme of climate and culture, perceptions of ethical conduct in the work environment, acceptance, and fairness of decision-making processes are considered. Most of the metrics pertaining to climate and culture were only recently implemented in 2022, and as such, no historical results are readily available to serve as comparisons. The majority of members (85 percent) believe that ethical conduct is highly valued in the workplace. In contrast, just over two-fifths of members believe that there is an atmosphere of acceptance within the CAF (42 percent) and believe that decision making processes are fair and applied consistently across members (42 percent). While climate and culture metrics were only recently assessed, it will be valuable to continue to track these results in upcoming years.

DISCUSSION

Monitoring key personnel metrics using several years of survey data offered insight into some areas that may warrant improvement in order to support recruitment and retention efforts in the CAF. First, while the majority (over 80 percent across all years) of members feel well supported by their families, they feel less supported by the organization (approximately 70 percent or fewer across all years). Previous research findings have indicated that geographical relocations and postings are among the main challenges for military families, particularly families with dependents, as well as for single parents (Skomorovsky and Hujaleh, 2016). It is essential to ensure that services are available to assist families with relocations and that the organization understands the unique challenges that accompany various family compositions in order for families to feel supported. Further, while members' ability to maintain a work-life balance has remained relatively consistent, fewer than 70 percent of members reported an ability to maintain a work-life balance across most years. It has

been suggested that work-life balance is important to increase retention in the CAF and may be an area that can be improved by evaluating how to minimize the impact that postings and other military responsibilities have on members and their families (Yeung et al., 2020).

Second, there is a general decline within the theme of job satisfaction and well-being. Specifically, members are less proud to be in the CAF, are less satisfied with their job, and have lower levels of morale than in previous years (rates have declined in all regards by approximately 15 percent in 2022 compared to previous years). It is possible that CAF members may be experiencing job burnout from staffing shortages brought about since the COVID-19 pandemic, in which recruitment has been lower than average (Cnockaert, 2022; DND, 2022b). This shortage in personnel may be impacting current members' morale and positivity regarding their jobs and may also be creating additional job stress, which has been found to be highly related to burnout (Skomorovsky et al., 2023). Current CAF recruitment priorities are critical to help address these concerns.

Third, there was an overall decline in satisfaction within the theme of career and rewards (rates have declined by between 12 and 14 percent in 2022 compared to 2020). The area within this theme with which members were least satisfied was regarding their career management. Previous research among CAF Reg F personnel indicated that members are somewhat dissatisfied with the assistance received from their career managers. Specifically, members have reported wanting more input in their career planning and posting

decisions, and reported dissatisfaction with the fairness of the career system (Bremner et al., 2017; Yeung et al., 2020). Further, previous survey results revealed that about one-fifth of Reg F members who were voluntarily releasing from the CAF reported that career management was a prominent factor that influenced their decision (Bremner et al., 2017). As such, it would be beneficial to improve interactions between members and their career managers, and increase the extent to which members can be involved in their career decisions. Within the theme of career and rewards, there was also a decline in members' perceptions regarding the fairness of their pay and benefits (rates have declined by 19 percent between 2015 and 2022). This result is unsurprising given the challenges pertaining to housing affordability and the high cost of living (Cnockaert, 2022). This may especially be the case for CAF members who are posted to locations with a higher than average cost of living. It is important to note that since the 2022 survey administration, the CAF launched the new Canadian Forces Housing Differential on 1 July 2023, which may have already helped to increase satisfaction in this regard (DND, 2023b). Continuous review and revisions of relocation and housing policies and benefits may be necessary to ensure members feel supported by the organization and to improve the financial well-being of members.

Fourth, while members reported high levels of satisfaction with their immediate supervisors, confidence in senior CAF leadership was relatively low across all years, but particularly in 2022 (27 percent compared to approximately 40 percent across most

years). Confidence in CAF leadership may have been impacted by negative media attention that took place in 2021, in which several CAF leaders faced allegations surrounding sexual misconduct. The situation received heavy media attention and was even described in the media as a "crisis" (Burke and Brewster, 2021; Haber, 2021). Following such events that may have impacted members' confidence in leadership, it is important for the organization to restore members' confidence (DND, 2007). Another notable event that may have impacted members' confidence in leadership during 2022 was the publication of Justice Louise Arbour's external review on sexual misconduct in the CAF. In her review, Arbour notes that the recommendations made in the 2015 external review by Justice Deschamps were not fully implemented and that sexual misconduct remains an issue within the organization (Arbour, 2022). It is likely that members felt disappointment that more progress had not been made since Deschamps' 2015 external review (Deschamps, 2015). It is important for the organization to continue to take action towards culture change efforts, including implementation of recommendations from the external reviews. Further, it may also be beneficial to consider actions taken by The Technical Cooperation Program (TTCP) and North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) allies to assess lessons learned and to review and revise current and future policies.

Finally, regarding CAF climate and culture, relatively few members believed that the CAF atmosphere is accepting or that decision-making processes are fair. Previous research has found that a lack of perceived equality and fairness in the workplace was

among CAF members' main reasons for wanting to leave the organization (Skomorovsky et al., 2023). Emphasis should be placed on creating a safe workplace, where leaders demonstrate inclusivity and fairness, in-line with recent departmental priorities outlined in the aforementioned initiatives, such as the *Directive for CAF Reconstitution* and the *Total Health and Wellness Strategy* (DND, 2022b, 2022c). In addition, several initiatives have recently been implemented to improve the organizational climate, culture, diversity and inclusion within the CAF. For example, gender inclusive language was implemented within the French rank names, allowing members to use language they feel is appropriate when referring to their rank (Rehman, 2022). Dress instructions were also amended to include non-gendered dress code and loosening of restrictions pertaining to tattoos and hairstyles (DND, 2023c). Careful monitoring of these efforts will be essential to determine how these policies can be revised to improve the organizational culture. Doing so will help foster an environment where members feel more comfortable collaborating and in turn, may help improve member well-being, as well as confidence in leaders and in the organization as a whole.

CONCLUSION

Use of descriptive cross-sectional survey data only provides a glimpse into Reg F CAF members' perceptions. Future research would benefit from exploring perceptions of Primary Reserve members, since reservists generally have unique experiences (Anderson and Goldenberg, 2019). Further, use of inferential statistical analysis would build on this

exploratory research and help to confirm these findings. Nonetheless, this research provided key insights of Reg F CAF members' perceptions at the time of each survey, and continuing to publish these metrics will help to provide a broad understanding of key personnel strengths and dissatisfiers across time. Doing so allows changes in perceptions to be identified in order to determine areas warranting improvement to optimize organizational culture and member well-being, and to improve CAF recruitment and retention efforts.

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The Roles of Job Demands and Resources in Turnover Intentions of the Canadian Armed Forces Regular Force Members

Justin Chamberland, PhD., Alla Skomorovsky, PhD., and Joelle Laplante, PhD.

BACKGROUND

The COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated pre-existing challenges in the recruitment and retention of Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) members. In response, the CAF is currently "undertaking one of the largest and most significant reconstitution efforts in recent memory" (Department of National Defence [DND], 2022a). A key outcome of these reconstitution efforts is the improvement of all military personnel management processes (Minister of National Defence, 2017). This is particularly important for the retention of military personnel, as they have obtained specialized education, training, or experience not readily available outside the military. In addition, beyond protecting the government's investment in its personnel, this reconstitution effort is in line with Canada's Defence Policy—*Strong, Secure, Engaged*—which emphasizes the importance for the Defence Team (DT) to ensure "the needs of its people—whether military members and their families, or defence civilians—are appropriately met" and describes DT personnel as "the heart and soul of everything we do" (Minister of National Defence, 2017, p.25). Accordingly, a variety of strategies and policies have been developed to improve DT culture, well-being, and retention. Particularly, the *CAF Retention Strategy*, a key element of the larger *CAF Human Resources Strategy* that is in development, seeks to improve healthy retention (i.e., maintaining the employment of those with the necessary talents) and avoid unhealthy attrition (i.e., losing employees with the necessary talents due to avoidable and dysfunctional reasons) by emphasizing the need for organizations to invest in their employees' well-being and provide a positive and safe workplace. With these investments, it is posited that "employees will perform better and are more committed to the organization, increasing retention" (DND, 2022b, p. III).

As a key source for monitoring retention over the years, the *CAF Retention Survey* has been administered to assess affective commitment and retention intentions, and how those intentions are driven by a variety of work and organizational factors. However, this survey was most recently expanded to assess how job-related factors are associated with a wider range of organizational outcomes (e.g., job engagement, morale, burnout, and psychological distress) in order to examine the interrelationships between workplace well-being and retention in a more cohesive and consistent approach (Goldenberg

and Klammer, 2021, 2022). To better inform organizational strategies and policies, this new survey, the *Your Say Matters: Defence Team Well-Being Survey* (YSM), uses a number of measures to capture personnel's experiences, attitudes, perceptions, and opinions regarding a variety of work and organizational factors among Regular Force (Reg F) members, Primary Reserve (P Res) members, and DND public servants (Chamberland et al., 2023). Consistent with the CAF reconstitution efforts, this paper focuses on the most important factors (i.e., *key drivers*) related to retention intentions among Reg F members—as their job experiences may be expected to differ from P Res members and DND public servants.

Administered to a stratified random sample [1] of Reg F members in 2022 (*n* = 4,482)—the YSM survey adopted the framework of the Job Demands-Resources model, where job-related factors are classified as either job demands or job resources (Bakker et al., 2004; Demerouti et al., 2001; Schaufeli and Bakker, 2004). Specifically, job demands are defined as "physical, psychological, social, or organizational aspects of the job that require sustained physical, cognitive, and/or emotional effort and are therefore associated with certain physiological and/or psychological costs," and are posited to increase the risk of negative outcomes (e.g., turnover intentions; Bakker et al., 2023, p. 33). Conversely, job resources are defined as "physical, psychological, social, or

organizational aspects of the job that have motivating potential, that are functional in achieving work goals, that regulate the impact of job demands, and that stimulate learning and personal growth", and are posited to reduce the risk of negative outcomes (Bakker et al., 2023, p. 33). Specifically, the aim of this paper is to report the key job demands and resources related to retention intentions among Reg F members and provide informed program and policy recommendations.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results from the YSM survey indicate that, although most Reg F members do not have intentions to leave the CAF/DND, nearly a fifth (21.9%) reported turnover thoughts and behaviours (e.g., thoughts about quitting or planning to start searching for a new job during the next 12 months).[2] This rate is comparable to Reg F members' turnover intentions in 2018 (23.1%). For those who reported turnover intentions within three years, Reg F members listed the direction in which senior leadership is steering the CAF (24.7%), job dissatisfaction (e.g., type of work, workload) (21.8%), pay dissatisfaction (16.1%), and lacking energy or motivation / needing a break / wanting a change (16.1%) as at least one of

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[1] Members were excluded from the stratification if they had less than 1 year of service at the time of the stratification, were deployed or posted on foreign exchange at the time of the survey administration, were on the Basic Training List or the Supplementary Training List, were not in the process of releasing, or started their maternity leave or parental leave after May 30th, 2021.

[2] For more representative results across the Reg F, all response rates presented in the current study are weighted based on the following stratification variables: L1 organization group, occupational authority, rank, and designated group membership status.

their top three reasons for intending to leave the CAF.[3]

To understand the source of this level of turnover intentions among Reg F members, the roles of job demands and resources were assessed in relation to turnover intentions. Consistent with previous research (Yeung et al., 2020), all the job factors measured in the YSM survey were significantly associated with turnover intentions in the expected directions. Specifically, more job resources and reduced job demands were associated with reduced turnover intentions. However, to better inform and tailor personnel strategies and policies, the key drivers that had the strongest associations with turnover intentions were examined.[4] Members' sense of pride to be in the CAF was found to be the only key driver for turnover intentions among Reg F members. Indeed, there is evidence that when employees feel proud of their organization, they may have a stronger sense of identification with it, and, as a result, are more likely to experience job satisfaction, psychological well-being, and affective commitment (Sturm et al., 2022).

Although these results are based on data from the new YSM survey, first administered in 2022, some comparisons can be made to previous results. Specifically, revisiting data from the *Defence Workplace Well-being Survey* in 2018, autonomy was the only job factor that met the current study's criteria to be defined as a key driver of turnover intentions among Reg F members.[5] Pride to be in the CAF was not a key driver of turnover intentions among Reg F members in 2018. The apparent growth of the relationship between members' sense of pride in CAF membership and turnover intentions in 2022 compared to 2018 may be due to any number of factors. For instance, Reg F members also reported at an elevated rate that dissatisfaction with the direction in which senior leadership was steering the CAF was one of their top reasons for intending to leave within three years. As data for the YSM survey was collected during a tumultuous period, this dissatisfaction may be associated with the CAF sexual misconduct investigation, the new CAF directives and policies in response to the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic (e.g., vaccine mandates and return-to-work initiatives), or the CAF response to Russia's attack on Ukraine (DND, 2021a, 2021b, 2022c, 2022d).

Prior research with civilians has demonstrated that pride in organizational membership can be improved in many ways, but it is largely associated with employees' experiences with the internal working environment of the organization and their perceptions of how those external to the organization may view the organization

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[3] This can be compared to results with data from the Retention Survey in 2019 (Yeung et al., 2020), where the top reasons for intending to leave the CAF were the impact of military lifestyle on spouse or partner (25.4%), job dissatisfaction (21.5%), lack of meaningful, satisfying or challenging work (20.6%), lack of geographic stability (19.1%), occupation (MOSID) dissatisfaction (18.5%), and pay dissatisfaction (16.7%).

[4] Key drivers were defined by correlation coefficients with a large effect size ($r > .50$; Cohen, 1992).

[5] This measure of autonomy was not used in the YSM because analyses with data from the Defence Workplace Well-being Survey raised concerns that it did not have sufficient divergent validity with other measures in the survey (Blais et al., 2021). Instead, a measure of job control was taken from the Retention Survey, and the current results are consistent with results from 2019 (Yeung et al., 2020).

(Brammer et al., 2007). As such, recommendations for improving members' sense of pride to be in the CAF include: (1) promoting members' sense of organizational identity by not only describing the organization's mission and vision, but also explaining how their efforts contribute to the organization's goals; (2) organizing team building events that help members see themself as part of one team/unit and organization; and (3) organizing webinars and lectures on different topics related to the organization's missions and accomplishments. For more recommendations, future research should further examine the concept of pride to be in the CAF, its relationship with turnover intentions, and the specific factors that can contribute to an increased feeling of pride in the CAF.[6]

It is important to note, given recent reconstitution efforts, that several of the other organizational outcomes assessed with the YSM survey were associated with turnover intentions. Specifically, increased levels of job satisfaction, morale, and affective commitment, and reduced burnout were strongly associated with reduced turnover intentions among Reg F members. These results are consistent with data from previous surveys [7] and the current finding that job dissatisfaction and lacking energy or motivation / needing a break / wanting a change were often listed as one of the top reasons Reg F members intended to leave the CAF within three years.

Considering the relationships between these outcomes and turnover intentions, it is important to examine the roles of the job demands and resources with those other individual and organizational outcomes, as they may have an indirect influence on turnover intentions. Specifically, perceptions that their work is meaningful and perceptions that the organization is supportive were key drivers for the four outcomes that were strongly associated with turnover intentions among Reg F members.[8] Although these job demands and resources were not observed to be key drivers for turnover intentions directly, they may have an important effect on turnover intentions through job satisfaction, morale, burnout, or affective commitment. Recommendations for improving a sense of meaningful work include highlighting the importance of a good fit between the job and the member (e.g., identifying the member's

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[6] Qualitative analyses are currently exploring the aspects of their occupation and CAF employment, as a whole, with which they are satisfied and dissatisfied, and any general comments Reg F members included with the survey.

[7] Revisiting data from the Defence Workplace Well-being Survey in 2018, increased levels of morale and reduced burnout were strongly associated with reduced turnover intentions among Reg F members. Results from the Retention Survey demonstrate that increased levels of job satisfaction and affective commitment were strongly associated with reduced turnover intentions among Reg F members (Yeung et al., 2020).

[8] Reg F members' job satisfaction was additionally associated with several other job demands and resources, including career management, supervisor feedback, general posting satisfaction, overall satisfaction with work and personal life balance, person-job fit, and team psychological safety. Further, greater morale was associated with several job demands and resources, such as confidence in organizational leadership, members' satisfaction with how their career is managed and their work-life balance, perceptions that the organization cares about their well-being. Furthermore, burnout among Reg F members was strongly associated with contingent rewards, job stress, organizational cynicism, and members' satisfaction with and ability to maintain work-life balance. Finally, Reg F members' affective commitment to the CAF was strongly associated with several organizational factors, including confidence in organizational leadership, members' sense of organizational identity, organizational cynicism, and how well members perceive their skills and values to align with those of the organization.

skills and interests and providing the best fit with the job when possible) and promoting members' sense of purpose (e.g., describing the organizational strategy, clearly communicating any policy changes, and explaining how their efforts contribute to the CAF's goals). Perceptions of organizational support may improve by ensuring fairness in rewarding personnel, and by being respectful, transparent, and consistent in how personnel are treated (e.g., ensuring management practices are transparent, fair, and equitable). Fair procedures signal to personnel that the organization respects them and cares about their welfare (Rhoades and Eisenberger, 2002). The mediating role between these factors and turnover intentions should be examined in future research.

CONCLUSION

To conclude, in line with the CAF Retention Strategy, the YSM survey provides several considerations for improving retention among Reg F members. Of particular interest, increased pride in organizational membership was observed to be associated with better retention. Further, retention intentions among Reg F members were associated with greater levels of job satisfaction, morale, and affective commitment, and reduced levels of burnout. As discussed above, the implication that these outcomes may be drivers of turnover intentions is that several other work factors may have indirect influences on turnover intentions through these other outcomes. Specifically, although several job demands and resources were strongly associated with select outcomes, a sense of meaningful work and organizational support were the only two

job factors that had strong associations with all four organizational outcomes associated with turnover intentions among Reg F members. The current results and the recommendations listed above will allow for more tailored organizational efforts to increase retention in the CAF, focusing on specific areas of concern or satisfaction among Reg F members.

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Retention within Task Force Latvia

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INTRODUCTION

The Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) maintain a generally stable attrition rate of between seven and eight percent, which is lower than the typical international and Canadian industry turnover rates, lower than the armed forces of most allies, and similar to the rest of the Canadian public sector (Canada, n.d.;

HRReporter, 2018; Booz, 2018.). Although this may seem healthy, particular circumstances make avoidable attrition highly undesirable for the CAF, for at least four major reasons. First, the CAF forms a closed labor market where promotions come from within. The creation of a senior member requires many years, and no lateral recruitment from the civilian sector is possible. Secondly, training is expensive (e.g., $220,000 for a combat engineer (Office of the Auditor General of Canada, 2006, p. 23), and often not available outside the military. Thirdly, the Regular Force is currently 10,000 members below the required trained effective establishment (DGMPRA, 2023). Finally, the CAF is the country's existential insurance policy and must maintain enough combat-ready forces, but are increasingly called upon

to do non-defence-related tasks and react to natural disasters such as floods, forest fires, and pandemics. All this places a strain on the limited CAF personnel; hence, any avoidable attrition is undesirable.

Task Force Latvia [1] (TFL) suffers second order consequences from this talent shortage, as the shortage increases the difficulty of generating the forces required for each rotation of the operation. This issue is exacerbated by the recent political desire to increase the Canadian commitment to provide a brigade. Furthermore, it has critical implications for the participation of subgroups with particularly low staffing levels, which hold necessary specialist expertise. Moreover, some complaints have been voiced by the members of TFL regarding their experience within the mission and hints were given of intents not to return, or even to release from the CAF. This, of course, is symptomatic of a problem with retention implications. The general idea for improving this situation shared within TFL was to either provide exciting training opportunities or provide the means to improve morale and welfare (M&W). However, this contribution will argue that this binary view is too narrow to fully address the complexity of improving retention. Alternatively, considering the complete employee value proposition[2] (EVP) both from a wide work environment and a specific subgroup perspective is a more comprehensive approach that increases the chances to identify the key factors relevant to the improvements of TFL's retention.

MEMBER'S CHOICE

Not all turnover is undesirable. Indeed, the release of members who exhibit bad behavior and misaligned values, or who continue to underperform after a failed period of retraining, may be considered "needed attrition" (Yeung et al., 2019, p. 265). Accordingly, the real retention issue is related to the voluntary release of members who have the talent and capabilities to support the CAF, and whose departure is not desired by the organization (Department of National Defence, 2022). Voluntary releases are, by definition, the personal choice of the member to leave the CAF. Logically, members may often base their decision on a cost-benefit analysis compared to their next best alternative, commonly referred to the opportunity cost (Stevenson, 2019, p. 31). Specifically, the advantages and disadvantages of CAF employment are analyzed in the context of the member's preferences and compared, in the same context, to the advantages and disadvantages of the closest alternative employment. This results in the best overall offer being the one that is reasonably chosen by the member.

Some key deductions are highlighted using this logic-based framework. The first of which is the idea that the decision is based on a holistic view of the offer (Mortensen and Edmondson, 2023). This means that all factors

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[1] Task Force Latvia is the land component of Operation REASSURANCE which is the CAF contribution to the North Antlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) assurance and deterrence measures in Central and Eastern Europe.

[2] A differentiating, integrated and valued set of monetary and nonmonetary rewards, benefits and experiences that an organisation offers to attract, engage and retain existing and prospective employees in return for their effort and performance in the workplace (Theys & Barkhuizen, 2022).

of an EVP are considered in the decision of a member. For example, an offer with a high salary can be diminished in value by its poor opportunity for advancement. Mortensen and Edmondson (2023) suggest four categories of factors to measure to improve an organization's EVP: material offerings, growth and development, connection and community, and meaning and purpose. Whereas Theys and Barkhuizen (2022) proposes four different factors, and Benazić and Ružić (2023) propose six others. What seems notable in all these cases is that factors may vary in importance depending on the perspective of the employee, which makes their value, and the subsequent EVP, subjective to the observer (Keppeler and Papenfuß, 2022). This, in turn, implies that exciting training and M&W may not be the most valued factors amongst TFL's members, and opinions should be measured. Certainly, they are not the only factors to consider in TFL's EVP.

Secondly, the complexity of maximizing EVP resembles a "wicked problem," which could imply the impossibility of reaching a definitive solution. For instance, EVP factors of importance in a member's decision are personal to that member, so the set of possible factors to consider is limited only by the varying preferences of all possible members (i.e., essentially infinite). Similarly, the opportunity cost of a member's decision is the best alternative EVP to the CAF. This characteristic varies with each combination of member preference and competing employer offer and is also essentially infinite. Consequently, the problem can be defined from multiple perspectives, it can evolve as the

invested parties change and adapt, and has no definitive winning solution, but rather offers better or worse outcomes depending on the proposed solutions. Those are all attributes of wicked problems as defined by Rittel and Webber (1973). In this case, a definitive solution is not possible but constant improvements are, through active management.

Thirdly, humans often make irrational decisions. The availability heuristic, our tendency to use information that comes to mind quickly and easily when making decisions about the future (Pilat and Krastev 2021), often makes us fall for the grass that seems greener on the other side of the fence at first glance. This draws attention to a situation where TFL's EVP may have been logically better to a member's opportunity cost, but the member chose the competitor because their latest TFL dissatisfaction or the competitor's most recent offer may be foremost in their mind. For this reason, TFL must ensure it regularly communicates its EVP to its members or, at least, the advantages should be effectively brought back into the spotlight.

TFL'S EVP

The member's choice perspective highlights the incompleteness of TFL's view on retention factors, but does not suggest an evaluation of its importance. To gauge which factor is of most significance to TFL, we must look elsewhere. Simon Sinek's (2011) "Start with why" suggests that the clarity of purpose is the most compelling and inspiring factor to consider in the workplace. At the core of this idea is the "why" followed by the "how" in the

middle and the "what" at the edge, with the argument being that successful organizations start with "why" before addressing the "how" and "what." This suggests that focusing on exciting training may not be the most important factor as it emphasizes a "what" (training), and a "how" (exciting). Thus, focus should instead be placed on TFL's "why" i.e., deterrence and defence. This is corroborated by Viktor E. Frankl's (1985) argument that "the primary drive of human beings is the search for meaning" and that "finding purpose, especially in difficult circumstances, is crucial for mental and emotional well-being." In that sense, refocusing on TFL's purpose may provide a considerable advantage to its EVP. Purpose is important and the initial goal of the enhanced Forward Presence units of being a "tripwire" (The Economist, 2016) may not have been the most appealing from a member's perspective. Reemphasizing the noble cause of deterring and defending against a Russian invasion may change this perspective. This is especially true considering that purpose is unique to military organizations and cannot be easily copied amongst civilian employers, which provides a competitive advantage. Purpose is within TFL's manageable EVP factors and, although exciting training may be a way to reach it, it is deterrence and defence that must be reemphasized throughout all actions and messages.

Major sources of dissatisfaction are other significant factors to consider within an EVP. Studies conducted by the Director General Military Personnel Research and Analysis, including the descriptive and qualitative analyses of the 2019 CAF Regular Force Retention Survey, consistently indicate the same main reasons for problematic attrition. These reasons are job dissatisfaction, lack of meaningful work, postings and geographic stability, impact on family, dissatisfaction with one's occupation, career progression and/or career management, and dissatisfaction with pay (Myers et al., 2019; Yeung et al., 2019). Evidently, although those factors are important and should be focused on, not much can be done from the perspective of TFL except on the meaningful work side, touched on in the last paragraph, and the mitigation of impacts on family through some M&W programs. However, there seems to be a connecting trend amongst these high dissatisfaction factors, which is the lack of choice. Military members do not apply to postings or jobs and only have marginal influence by stating preferences to their career managers. Postings are more often dictated, having effects on all the factors mentioned above. The nature of the job and the work to be done is assigned through postings, which can contribute to dissatisfaction and perceptions of meaning. The location is dictated as well, which directly impacts geographic dissatisfaction, but can also greatly influence family satisfaction and even discretionary income, as locations vary in cost of living and allocated benefits. Career progression is also greatly impacted, as "high range" jobs completed by members are intimately linked to chances of promotion. The underlying theme is the lack of agency in the posting process, which could suggest this missing choice as a major source of dissatisfaction. Research has shown that a job application-based market process, combined

with a matching algorithm that provides stable matching where "no applicant and [employer] who were not matched to one another would prefer to be matched to the other than to their proposed match," has been shown to improve the satisfaction of all parties (Roth, 2018, p. 1623). This is an opportunity for TFL, as it controls a portion of the Canadian Forces Taskings, Plans, and Operations (CFTPO) process where members come attached posted for a short length tour. Modifying this to account for members' choices would not only increase satisfaction but may also shed light on the sources of dissatisfaction with certain less popular jobs. Finally, the factor of choice should also be used in other spheres under the control of TFL. Increasing members' choices in TFL's initial view of exciting training and increased M&W, for example, may provide a way to ensure members are satisfied.

Subgroups are another angle to this wicked problem that must be considered. Trends form around members sharing similar characteristics, such as elevated pilot turnover and increased release of women after 20 years of service, for example. These trends suggest different factors must be analyzed for certain subgroups and a targeted approach should be designed. TFL contains specific subgroups where the employer offer varies considerably. For instance, members of the battle group are attached posted on a tax-free tour with strict policies to remain on camp, some headquarters members are also attached posted on a tax-free tour but have an extra allocation to eat on the local economy and loose rules, and posted members are not tax-free and must balance work with family priorities. All of them work in the same team in similar circumstances.

However, not enough information is available currently to clearly identify key sources of dissatisfaction to address. It would be wise for TFL to measure and monitor its members' perception of the EVP to better devise targeted approaches.

CONCLUSION

In summary, the retention issue is fundamentally based on the member's choice between the CAF's EVP and their best alternative. For this reason, it is wiser for TFL not to only consider exciting training and improved M&W, as factors of importance vary between members and situations. It is thus better to measure members' sentiments and preferences, to tailor responses to provide better advantages and reduce sources of dissatisfaction amongst TFL, particularly within subgroups at greater risk for voluntary attrition. Finally, although exciting training and improved M&W may very well provide good outcomes, it is expected that focusing on purpose and the member's choice will deliver the best return on investment.

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Disability and Reconstitution in the Canadian Armed Forces: Directions, Challenges, and Opportunities

Elizabeth Suen, MSc.

BACKGROUND

The commitments that the Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) makes toward the health and well-being of its members are important to the retention of talent, logistical knowledge, and progress on culture change (DND, 2022c). CAF members are at an increased risk of injury and acquiring a disability due to the demanding nature and unique circumstances of work within the military (Cruz and Rincon, 2020; Hendel et al., 2023). The Department of National Defence (DND) and the CAF have made commitments toward optimizing the potential of a diverse workforce to maximize the organization's operational capacity, and as a social imperative to more effectively serve Canadians and their nation (DND 2016, 2020). As part of these efforts, DND/CAF is engaged in nascent policy changes that signify the recognition of persons with disabilities (PwD) as an important employment equity (EE) group in their efforts toward organizational culture change and reconstitution (DND, 2022a, 2022 b, 2022c). The terms that researchers, policy makers, and organizational leaders use to define concepts are inherently laden with ontological (i.e., the types of knowledge that are considered valid) and epistemological (i.e., how knowledge is formed, collected, and analyzed) assumptions that influence how issues are addressed and solutions are operationalized (Denzin and Lincoln, 2011; Eriksson, 2010). Notably, the Department of National Defence Accessibility Plan (DND, 2022b) draws upon the Accessible Canada Act (2019) and defines disability as:

> *Any impairment, including a physical, mental, intellectual, cognitive, learning, communication or sensory impairment — or a functional limitation — whether permanent, temporary or episodic in nature, or evident or not, that, in interaction with a barrier, hinders a person's full and equal participation in society (Section 2).*

This definition is based on the social model of disability, which rejects the notion that PwD are inherently impaired, emphasizing instead the socially constructed mechanisms of disability that results from systemic, societal, and environmental barriers to a person's participation in society (Oliver, 2013; Owens, 2015). This contemporary understanding of disability, compared to older biomedical models of disability, requires the CAF to consider how issues related to PwD are integral to discussions on culture change and reconstitution. Operationalizing this more nuanced understanding of disability may be beneficial to the retention of talent and

organizational knowledge within the CAF. Conversely, using a one-size-fits-all approach to managing disability in the CAF may deter talented and qualified individuals from entering, and remaining within, the organization. However, there is a paucity of both qualitative and quantitative research on the experiences of PwD in the CAF. This gap in knowledge is compounded by the fact that requirements of Universality of Service (UoS), related risks to career progression and stability, and systematic ableism pose serious challenges to the inclusion of PwD in the CAF's efforts to strengthen reconstitution initiatives through the implementation of diversity, inclusion, and equity throughout its organizations.

TENSIONS BETWEEN DUTY TO ACCOMMODATE AND UNIVERSALITY OF SERVICE IN THE CAF

The concept of disability is diametrically opposed to hegemonic ideals of self-sufficiency, masculinity, and ableism that are traditionally embedded in military cultures (Humphries, 2010; Shuttleworth et al., 2012). Consequently, CAF members and veterans with disabilities have been valued less than those without disabilities throughout CAF history (Humphries, 2010). While DND/CAF has a duty to accommodate employees with disabilities under federal law (Government of Canada, 1985, 1995, 2019), all CAF members are required to meet minimum operational standards related to UoS (DND, 2006a). Also

known as the *soldier first* principle, UoS states that CAF members must be deployable for general military duties, must be able to perform common defence and security duties, and carry out duties associated with their specific military occupation (DND, 20006b). The CAF has initiated several key initiatives to address this tension between UoS and human rights. In alignment with federal policies protecting the rights of persons with disabilities (Government of Canada, 2019, 1995, 1985), the CAF has created directives that outline the organization's duty to accommodate employees in the workplace up to the point of undue hardship (DND, 2005). The recent DND Accessibility Plan (DND, 2022) also contains policy directions that may act as anchor points upon which specific actionable change may be built. However, there continues to exist real risks of losing career opportunities and job security for CAF members with disabilities if their participation on the Defence Team is perceived negatively by colleagues and leadership (Cruz and Rincon, 2022; Hendel et al., 2023). Attrition of talented CAF members may continue if issues of discrimination and employment inequity are not addressed (DND, 2022c). Meaningful engagement is unlikely if the sociocultural landscape of DND/CAF remains culturally unsafe[1] for CAF members who disclose their identities as PwD. Reluctance to participate in the research process may contribute to the gap in knowledge concerning the ways that CAF members navigate the complex tensions

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[1] Originating from Indigenous epistemologies used in the field of healthcare, cultural safety is a concept that requires individuals and organizations to engage in critical self-reflection in order to identify and ameliorate the effects of biases, power, privilege, and systemic discrimination in both policy and practice (Parisa et al., 2016; Tremblay et al., 2023). A culturally safe workplace is an inclusive place where all individuals are respected, strengths are acknowledged, and differences are both honoured and celebrated (Wabano Centre for Aboriginal Health, 2014; Parisa et al., 2016; Tremblay et al., 2023).

between the CAF's duty to accommodate and the expectations of UoS (Cruz and Rincon, 2020; Hendel et al., 2023). Since disabilities can potentially be acquired, exacerbated, ameliorated, and resolved at any time for a CAF member, research into the experiences of PwD in the CAF may better support the health, capacity, and well-being of military personnel, both with and without disabilities.

DISABILITY, RECRUITMENT, AND GAPS IN KNOWLEDGE

Ableist assumptions of the capabilities of PwD can also deter and prevent talented individuals from joining DND/CAF. Unlike other recognized EE groups, the CAF's EE plan for next five years does not have any directive to actively increase the number of PwD within its ranks (DND, 2021). The complicated sociocultural realities for PwD within the CAF may be reflected in low rates of disclosure of disability status, and only 1.2% of the total Regular Forces and Primary Reserve population within the CAF self-identify as PwD on the mandatory EE self-identification form (DND, 2021). It is possible that a reluctance to disclose disability status may be a contributing factor to this representation rate, and that the true number of CAF members who are PwD is higher. Representation of PwD is the lowest of the EE equity groups within the CAF, with substantially more individuals self-identifying as Indigenous Peoples (2.8%), visible minorities (9.6%), and/ or women (16.4%) (DND, 2021). However, the overrepresentation of persons with certain disabilities, such as autism spectrum disorders (ASD), in the fields of mathematics, technology, engineering, and the sciences is a

testament to the adaptability, resilience, and unique strengths of PwD (Chapman et al., 2021; Turner, 2021; Wei et al., 2013). While some functional limitations of disability may be physically embodied due to the nature of an individual's diagnosis/ condition/ illness, disability and impairment are not necessarily synonymous in a practical context because functional limitations within the realm of disability exists on a spectrum (Agmon et al., 2016; Saunders, 2019). There exists a vast heterogeneity in abilities, functionalities, and limitations for PwD, and the elimination of barriers in a person's social and built environments may entirely remove impairments to an individual's ability to effectively work on the Defence Team (Agmon et al., 2016; De Schauwer et al, 2021; Saunders, 2019). An organizational recognition of the potential for PwD to achieve success within DND/CAF is demonstrated in the recently released Defence Administrative Order and Directive (DAOD) concerning the accommodation of persons with learning disabilities during recruitment, training, and education (DND, 2019). There is also growing recognition of the talents that neurodiverse CAF members bring to the Defence Team through individual advocacy and grassroots initiatives (DND, 2021b, 2024). However, other types of disability such as ASD are yet to be given similar consideration in formal DND/CAF policy. There also remains a need to determine whether this policy is being effectively implemented and how it is being operationalized at the level of practice. Accountability from senior leadership is required to enable meaningful assessment and

follow-up on policy changes related to the CAF's duty to accommodate its members.

OPPORTUNITIES TO LEVERAGE INTERSECTIONAL IDENTITIES IN RECONSTITUTION

Culture change and reconstitution are intrinsically linked when considering EE group members within DND/CAF. The extent to which CAF members with intersectional identities [2] are impacted by disabilities, impairments, challenges, barriers, accommodations, and available supports is yet to be adequately determined through systematic scientific research.

Nevertheless, innovation in retention and recruitment efforts require that PwD, and members of other EE groups, are offered opportunities to meaningfully engage with research and policy making. The principles of cultural safety may strengthen participatory approaches to research and engagement with PwD within DND/CAF. The realization of these opportunities may help DND/CAF leadership to build trust with traditionally marginalized groups and demonstrate sincerity toward sustained culture change within ongoing efforts toward reconstitution.

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[2] Within the context of the CAF, intersectional identities refer to an individual's unique experiences and social/organizational positioning that occur due to an overlap in their personal identity factors (e.g., age, gender, sex, ethnicity, rank, occupation, education, Indigeneity, religion, etc.). This phenomenon originates from Crenshaw's (1991) concept of intersectionality.

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Basic Training Leavers and Stayers in the Canadian Armed Forces: Insights from Project Horizon

Joelle Laplante, PhD., Matt Ross, PhD., and Andrew Woodard, MA.

BACKGROUND

In October 2022, the Chief of the Defence Staff and the Deputy Minister jointly issued the Directive for Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) Reconstitution, noting that "undertaking one of the largest and most significant reconstitution efforts in recent memory is now a critical priority" (Department of National Defence [DND], 2022). Two of the strategic priorities of the directive are personnel generation and retention. Attrition rates early in a CAF member's career, particularly in the first year of service, are higher than attrition rates at most other time points (Ueno et al., 2018), largely due to basic training attrition (Fang and Latchman, 2008). As early attrition rates directly impact reconstitution efforts, Project Horizon (PH) data were explored for insights into factors associated with completion of basic training (i.e., the initial training received upon joining).

PH is a longitudinal study of early career retention in the CAF, which seeks to understand and predict factors associated with organizational commitment and retention. PH follows cohorts of new recruits and naval/officer cadets through the early phases of their careers via the administration of surveys at key time points: at the start and end of basic training, upon voluntary release from basic training (where applicable), three months and nine months after basic training, and at six years of service (Laplante et al., 2016). Data collection for all phases of the study started in September 2014 and ended in August 2023. For this analysis, we focused on data collected at the start of basic training (during the second week), at the end of basic training (during the last week), as well as data from the PH basic training Exit Survey. Basic training, also known as Basic Military Qualification (BMQ) for recruits, and Basic Military Officer Qualification (BMOQ) for naval/officer cadets, teaches the basic skills and knowledge essential for success in a military environment. For most candidates included in the analyses, the duration of BMQ was 12 weeks, and BMOQ was 14 weeks. All surveys of interest were administered between September 2014 and November 2017 and completed voluntarily at the Canadian Forces Leadership and Recruit School (CFLRS).

STUDY AIM AND METHOD

The objectives of this study were to compare individuals voluntarily releasing from basic training (*leavers*) to those reaching the end of basic training (*stayers*), and to determine

whether they were distinguishable at the start of basic training. For this analysis, leavers were those who completed the PH Exit Survey, whereas stayers were those who completed the end of basic training survey and thus stayed in the CAF until at least this time. Their responses to these two surveys were compared. Leavers and stayers were also compared on their responses to the start of basic training survey. To avoid statistically significant group differences occurring by chance, and statistically significant results of small practical value, effect sizes (or the magnitude of group differences) were examined. Emphasis was placed on differences that were both statistically significant and practically meaningful (Ferguson, 2009).

COMPARISON OF LEAVERS AND STAYERS

When comparing the scores of leavers on the PH Exit Survey ($n = 446$; 93.5% recruits and 87.4% men) to the scores of stayers on the end of basic training survey ($n = 6,629$; 75.6% recruits and 84.6% men), a few meaningful differences emerged (summarized in Table 1). Leaver scores were stable across gender and rank group (i.e., recruits and naval/officer cadets); the only significant and meaningful difference emerging from these comparisons within the leaver group was in terms of the self-perceived physical performance of men and women leavers, as compared to the rest of their platoon: men perceived their physical performance more favourably (seeing themselves as slightly above average) than did women (seeing themselves as slightly below average).

Table 1. Leavers and Stayers — End of Basic Training

Leavers reported **higher:**	Leavers reported **lower:**
• Likelihood of seeing basic training as more difficult, and to a lesser extent, less rewarding/fulfilling, than expected • Stress (in garrison) • Quantity of sleep (in the field) • Anxiety • Homesickness • Satisfaction with the quality of food (in garrison and in the field) and the quantity of food (in the field)[a]	• Perceived performance (course grades) • Quantity of sleep (in garrison) • Satisfaction with work life balance (i.e., effects of training on personal relationships, family, and time away from family) • Perceived instructor support (i.e., making training interesting, comfort in asking them for help, giving helpful feedback, and caring about training completion) • Satisfaction with time away from loved ones (in garrison)

[a] This counterintuitive result could be attributed to leavers having consumed fewer meals, since they released before the end of training.

COMPARISON OF LEAVERS AND STAYERS AT THE START OF BASIC TRAINING

To shed some light on whether those who eventually left basic training and those who ultimately completed basic training were already different at the start of basic training, the scores of leavers ($n = 241$; 92.1% recruits and 90.0% men) and stayers ($n = 4,654$; 75.2% recruits and 84.7% men) on the survey administered at the start of basic training were compared. In this section, we will also refer to *leavers* and *stayers* for consistency, even though at the time of survey administration, most leavers were presumably not yet in the process of releasing. The main differences are summarized in Table 2.

At the start of basic training, leavers and stayers were not significantly and meaningfully different in terms of their exposure to the military via their family, their likelihood of having prior military experience (e.g., Cadets, Primary Reserve, foreign military), the level of influence of certain individuals (recruiters and current or former CAF members who were relatives, friends, or acquaintances) on their decision to join the CAF, their reasons for joining the CAF (although low endorsement of certain reasons, particularly among leavers, limited the ability to detect statistical differences), the organizational "promises" they perceived had been made to them either explicitly or implicitly, their values (e.g., self-direction, tradition, benevolence), and their levels of socialization (i.e., learning important information to facilitate adjustment), and they reported similarly high levels of socially supportive behaviours, and similarly low levels of socially undermining behaviours (e.g., making one's life difficult, criticizing them, or saying things to make them feel bad), from family, friends, and partners.

Table 2. Leavers and Stayers — Start of Basic Training

Leavers reported **higher:**	Leavers reported **lower:**
• Likelihood of intending to stay in the CAF only until the end of basic training, or not knowing how long they intend to stay in the CAF	• Levels of support for their career choice (from family, friends, and partners) • Person-organization fit (values congruence) • Likelihood of seeing their work as a *calling* (what they do for a living is a vital part of who they are) or a *social club* (camaraderie compensating for other less desirable aspects of their work) • Onboarding[a] (e.g., receiving information prior to the first day, receiving an orientation and being welcomed) • Levels of adjustment to their new situation and to the military environment (e.g., fitting in, feeling comfortable) • Levels of morale • Likelihood of intending to stay in the CAF: as long as possible, until receipt of pension, or until compulsory retirement age

LARGEST DIFFERENCES BETWEEN LEAVERS AND STAYERS

A comparison of the effect sizes of the mean differences observed revealed a few noteworthy trends (see Figure 1). Interestingly, the largest differences were not in terms of members' predispositions (e.g., reasons for joining, values) or their training and instructors, but more so in terms of their very early experiences (early adjustment, morale, and perceptions of fit at the start of basic training), general well-being (stress and anxiety), and factors related to family (homesickness, work-life balance, and family support for their career choice).

Figure 1. Largest Effect Sizes for Leaver-Stayer Mean Differences
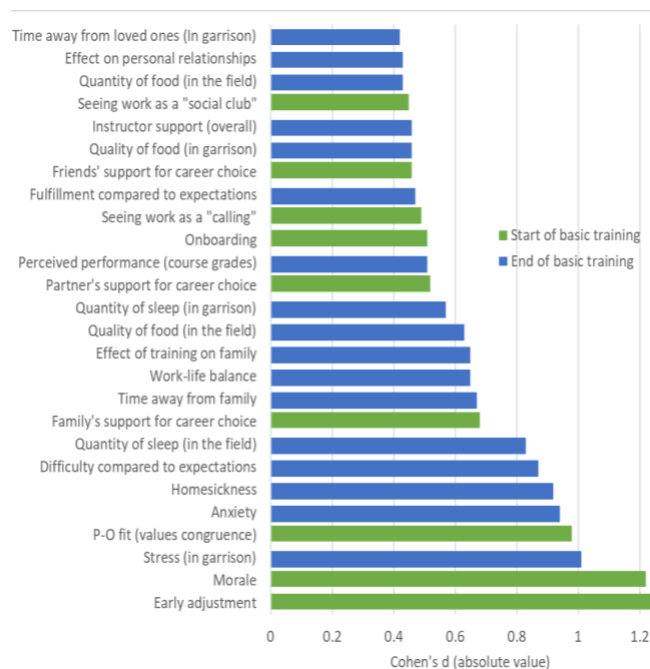
DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

As previously suggested (Otis and Laplante, 2023), highlighting important features of the military environment in realistic job previews, and emphasizing CAF values during the socialization process, could help ensure a good fit between the candidate and the demands and values of the CAF. Positive early experiences could be fostered by initiating discussions with recruits about their expectations for basic training to clarify preconceptions and promote perceptions of instructor support. This coaching, individually or in groups, could provide recruits with feedback on their performance to foster perceptions of organizational fit. Creating and reinforcing positive first impressions of basic training (e.g., seeing training as challenging and fun) could also serve this purpose. Devoting continued attention to onboarding and orientation, by ensuring that adequate and sufficient information is provided prior to arrival at basic training, and exploring the possibility of an optional CFLRS orientation visit prior to arrival, could be beneficial.

Ensuring that the CAF recruitment website contains easily accessible content targeting potential recruits' families to address common concerns and misconceptions, could help foster support from families regarding recruits' military career choice. In addition, ensuring that recruits can maintain continued contact with and receive support from families, friends and partners during basic training could foster adjustment and retention. For instance, a recent policy change at CFLRS allowing the use of cellular phones at pre-established times during training will facilitate communication and bolster the support received by recruits. On the other hand, although visitors are permitted at CFLRS, many candidates find that they don't have enough time for visitors due to a full training schedule, thus limiting the benefits of the visitor policy; protecting a

block of time for visitors during training could be beneficial for some candidates. Policies stating that weekend leaves are contingent on performance could be revisited as they may have undesired consequences for those who are declined leave on that basis. Candidates struggling the most may benefit the most from leave, at least in terms of stress management and support; the use of leave to recharge and alleviate homesickness might increase the likelihood of retaining some of these candidates.

Finally, offering additional support to recruits who may need it could promote adaptation and well-being, and ensure their success and retention. Recent BM(O)Q improvements are likely to help in this regard: weekly guided discussions have been implemented to learn and apply resiliency techniques, discuss challenges faced, and review and mentally prepare for upcoming challenges. Openly discussing these topics is likely to facilitate early adjustment (and perceptions of fit, seeing others discuss their struggles) and reduce stress and anxiety regarding upcoming challenges.

LIMITATIONS

As the PH surveys are voluntary, results represent the views of those who chose to complete them. Respondents were classified as leavers and stayers based solely on their completion of PH surveys and not on organizational attrition data. Although PH measured a broad spectrum of factors, leavers and stayers may differ in ways not explored in this study. Although the first PH survey was designed to measure individual predispositions, participants had already spent

approximately two weeks on basic training at the time of survey administration, thus impacting responses; conversely, results from the end of basic training survey may represent a state of euphoria, increasing differences between leavers and stayers.

Much like the CFLRS population, the samples of leavers and stayers studied were predominantly recruits and men, particularly in the leaver group. As such, the results may mask the views of naval/officer cadets and women leavers, because of their smaller sample size. That being said, few gender and rank differences were found for leavers. Furthermore, as the data analyzed for this study are several years old, this brings into question whether results are reflective of the current cohorts of recruits and naval/officer cadets enrolling in the CAF. Employment equity and diversity initiatives to increase the recruitment, representation, and retention of equity-seeking groups in the CAF (DND, 2021), as well as the opening of CAF enrolment to permanent residents of Canada, are likely to impact the profile of the new recruit population. Reviews of research on factors affecting the recruitment of women (Waruszynski et al., 2022) and of visible minorities and Aboriginal Peoples (Waruszynski, 2017) pointed to the roles of lower military familiarity, cultural perceptions of the military, higher importance of parent and community support, and concerns about being sent away from home; these reviews suggest that the increasing representation of equity-seeking groups has the potential to exacerbate the attrition factors identified in this study.

As stated previously, the CFLRS is already well-positioned to decrease the influence of some of these attrition factors, due to the improvements already implemented to the BM(O)Q training program. The second iteration of Project Horizon, which was launched in April 2023, will provide the necessary data to determine whether BM(O)Q improvements and policy changes have had the desired effect on homesickness levels, work-life balance, well-being, and overall adjustment to military life.

CONCLUSION

Building on past research pointing to family and organizational fit as important factors in voluntary release decisions during BM(O)Q (Michaud, 2010), this exploratory study further highlighted the role of perceptions of organizational fit and contact with / support from families, but also pointed to the importance of early experiences to foster morale and well-being (i.e., decreased stress, anxiety, homesickness) and to reduce leave intentions and behaviours. Reducing attrition during basic training is crucial to CAF reconstitution: in order to maximize the benefits from increased recruitment efforts, basic training completion is an important step, to overcome current personnel shortfalls, and ensure that the CAF has the numbers, structures, and readiness in place to meet its mandate (DND, 2022).

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Dr. Matthew Ross holds a PhD in Experimental Psychology from the University of Ottawa. His main area of expertise is at the intersection of machine learning, the development of artificial neural networks, and statistical analysis. He has published numerous peer-reviewed publications and has presented at many conferences both nationally and internationally with the Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers (IEEE). Dr. Ross is currently a member of the DGMPRA at the Department of National Defence, collaborating on research addressing recruitment and retention challenges within the Canadian Armed Forces, including Project Horizon.

Andrew Woodard holds an M.A. in Psychology from Carleton University, working in the Legal Decision-Making Lab. At the time this research was conducted, he was a research assistant working with the Recruitment and Retention Team in DGMPRA at the Department of National Defence. He was involved in a variety of studies including Project Horizon, and the Canadian Armed Forces Retention Survey. Mr. Woodard is currently an Acting Senior Research Officer at Correctional Services Canada, working with the Special Projects and Data Management team on their projects involving Sexual Coercion and Violence and Structured Intervention Units.

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