



Original Article

## **CHALLENGES WITHIN THE CANADIAN MILITARY: AN EXPLORATORY STUDY OF FEMALE VETERAN LIVED EXPERIENCES<sup>1</sup>**

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### **ABSTRACT**

The Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) have continuously struggled to address female inclusion and concerns surrounding inappropriate behaviour, sexual violence, and discrimination within its ranks. In recent years there have been different missions directed at understanding and responding to issues of sexual misconduct and toxic work culture within the CAF. Unfortunately, these programs have not adequately captured or mitigated these issues, and the current academic literature lacks lived experiences that could inform such policies and mitigations. As a corrective, this study sought to provide an account of lived experiences of these issues. This phenomenological case study utilized snowball sampling to recruit 55 female CAF veterans for one-on-one in-depth semi-structured interviews. Thematic analysis followed three research questions that surrounded: 1) Leadership, 2) Segregation and Demeaning Treatment Towards Integration, and 3) Violence and Inappropriate Behaviour. This study should be of interest to Canadian and other national forces looking to enhance their understanding of the issues faced by female veterans.

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**Keywords:** military, qualitative, gender issues, Canada, military culture

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) continue to struggle with adopting adequate policies that address recruitment, leadership issues, and concerns of inappropriate behaviour and discrimination within its ranks (Mayer, 2020). Indeed, previous policies such as *The Royal Commission on the Status of Women* have led to the inclusion and advancement of female CAF members (Davis, 2007). However, women persist in being disproportionately underrepresented in the CAF (Government of Canada, 2020). Furthermore, CAF policies and programs have failed to address the ongoing experiences of misogynistic and toxic culture that female CAF members face (Taber, 2020; Deschamps Report, 2015). Policies such as *Operation Honour* and *The Path to Dignity and Respect* are recent examples of policies that have inadequately addressed the causes of harassment and sexual misconduct in the CAF (Government of Canada, 2020). It is concerning that the CAF continually fails to overcome its dark history of female exclusion, oppression, and violence. Authors have suggested that previous and existing policies led by masculine leadership have contributed to the perpetuation of issues faced by female members, as male leaders have been noted as supporting and reproducing the current male-dominated culture of the CAF (von Hlatky, 2019; Taber, 2018; Perron, 2017; Febbraro, 2007).

CAF leadership is predominantly male, while women have difficulty obtaining and maintaining leadership roles (Febbraro, 2007; Kovitz, 2003). Masculinity is found to be privileged for leadership roles and selection, which place women and other groups at a disadvantage for leadership selection and advancement (Hayes & Goodlet, 2014). Febbraro (2007) contends that the CAF finds masculine characteristics essential for leadership roles while women and feminine traits are not seen as effective. This belief still exists in the military despite evidence that indicates that such views are founded on gender bias rather than actual ability (Febbraro, 2007; Eagly, Karau & Makhijani, 1995). This gender bias has led women to adopt more masculine traits such as avoiding looking or acting feminine, such as dressing more masculine and hiding compassion or caring qualities (Febbraro, 2007). Regardless of women's abilities, they have been continually compared against their male counterparts, are segregated into more feminine roles, and are seen as less capable of performing work typically occupied by men (Grube-Farrell, 2002). When women occupy male-dominated positions, they can experience demeaning attitudes from their male colleagues (Grube-Farrell, 2002).

Concerningly, there is evidence that women in the military experience high levels of sexual violence and more so than other professions (Bostock & Daley, 2007; Street, Gradus, Stafford, & Kelly, 2007). Furthermore, women's minority gender status within the military is theorized as placing them at increased risk of sexual violence (Korabik, 2005). Targeted

policies and military leaders have been failing to address the issue of perpetuated violence, oppression, and minority female leadership (Taber, 2020). Furthermore, the power dynamic between male leaders and female subordinates creates opportunities for further sexual misconduct and makes it difficult for women to speak out against sexual violence in the CAF (Taber, 2020).

There are intersections between leadership, segregation, and violence within the CAF which is the focus of this study. There is a considerable lack of literature that explores women's experiences with these factors within the CAF, and as such, this study contributes to filling this knowledge gap. Furthermore, Febraro (2007) indicates that more research is needed regarding women's experiences in the military, especially across combat arms, navy, and air force, and this study acknowledges this by including voices more broadly across the CAF. The purpose of this study is to explore the following questions by focusing on the voices of CAF female veterans: 1) What are the female experiences, perceptions, and interactions with leadership roles in the CAF, 2) How do females experience segregation and demeaning interactions in the CAF, and 3) What forms of inappropriate behaviour and sexual violence have been experienced by females in the CAF?

## **2. METHOD**

This study relied on a social constructionist perspective to better comprehend women's lives while integrating into military culture (Creswell, 2013; Charmaz, 2006). Furthermore, this study employs a phenomenological approach (Creswell, 2013) and data collection based on in-depth interviews to provide an opportunity "for eliciting rich description, valuing participants' perspectives, and designing a process that is emergent and inductive, from data collection through analysis" (Iverson et al., 2016, p. 156). In using this approach, we sought to uncover the meanings people have constructed about their everyday experiences to understand women's military experiences and better understand the actions they take based on those experiences (Creswell, 2013). This combined approach allowed for the flexibility to explore both the individuals themselves and the cultural environment they navigate.

More specifically, this study conducted 55 in-depth semi-structured interviews with female veterans who previously served in the Canadian military. Participants were recruited through snowball sampling - primarily through word of mouth and calls to participate on social media. Participation criteria included any person who identifies as female, speaks and understands English, and has previously served in the military for at least one year. The method of interviewing was left up to the convenience and comfort of the participant, which included in-person (n=13), over the phone (n=33), or through Skype video conferencing (n=9). Interviews took place from February to December of 2019. Overall, the average time served by all participants was 20 years and included participants who served across all three elements: Land (Army), Air (Royal Canadian Air Force), and Sea (Royal Canadian Navy).

Interviews were transcribed and analyzed using Atlas.ti software, which allowed for a much more profound and organized analysis. Themes were primarily developed according to the interview questions, with subthemes representing common responses among participants. The authors of this study discussed themes and common responses until there was a consensus. Due to the qualitative nature of this study, results are highlighted using participant quotes that best illustrate each theme. It is important to note that this manuscript only reports a proportion of the interview results. The interview questionnaire captured more data than is possible to convey in a single article.

We obtained informed consent from all participants included in the study. To assure participants' confidentiality and anonymity, we removed all identifying information from the transcripts, and we do not include any identification codes for any quotations in the results section. This study received ethical approval from the General Research Ethics Board at Queen's University.

### **3. FINDINGS**

The results section is organized across three themes that follow our outlined research questions: *Leadership, Segregation and Demeaning Treatment Towards Integration, and Violence and Inappropriate Behaviour*. The results are presented to respect the narratives and stories of the participants themselves. While we group common responses, we attempt to withhold much of our own interpretation. Furthermore, please be advised that some of the stories and accounts presented below might disturb or trigger some readers as they deal with aggressive behaviour and sexual assault.

#### **3.1 Leadership**

Many participants felt that poor leadership created barriers to inclusivity which impacted their occupational advancement. The findings affirm that participants were constantly being overlooked, subjugated, and needing to work harder than their male cohorts - often not recognized for their efforts. As one participant put it: "men were appreciated more". Participants also noted that leadership would often use demeaning language towards female militants. One of the study participants exited the Air Force as a warrant officer after serving eighteen years and recalled how angry she would get when the men she served with some in leadership roles would use demeaning comments and language when addressing her:

The military has a long way to go to actually making [its working environment] welcoming. I cannot count how many times I would get called 'dear'.... "I have a name, I have a rank, I am not your fucking dear! You would never call one of your male co-workers that, do not call me that." There is a lot of terms that I do not think people realize just how condescending it feels to constantly be called that.

Numerous participants felt that their male colleagues were being promoted despite having fewer qualifications. Additionally, several participants expressed how attractive and feminine women were often targeted for their sexuality, resulting in some receiving more attention from male leadership. Furthermore, a few participants stated that some women were negatively targeted by male leadership depending on their appearance, behaviour, and mannerisms. According to a majority of the women in this study, the culture was not conducive to healthy integration, and the men and male leadership mistreated women. Participants explained that if women are attractive, they receive unwanted male attention, and if viewed as being too masculine, they were treated poorly and thought of as a "butch".

Participants shared that women who were viewed as too feminine were subjected to adverse and oppressive behaviour, or their gender was questioned. This experience sometimes resulted in some being investigated then arbitrarily being released based on the assumption of being gay. According to some of the women who served during the purge era, the leadership was always on the lookout. Leadership had their ears to the floor for any suspicious behaviour that reflected flirting with the possibility of being gay. Some participants shared how women would then be approached by the Military Police, escorted to an area on base and interrogated. All occupational advancement would cease, and they would be released on suspicion of being gay.

For participants who served in the CAF in the 70s, 80s and into the 90s, many felt that there was little leadership support towards occupational advancement. Some of the participants felt that there needed to be more women in senior leadership ranking positions, which could foster the advancement of women within the ranks of the CAF. Several Participants revealed that they were motivated by women who occupied leadership positions, except many of those participants stated that they were constantly being watched and overshadowed by a dominant male presence. Thus, impacting how they led and interacted within the militaristic space they navigated within.

All participants encountered barriers to inclusivity while serving, such as a glass floor preventing a firm occupational footing and the glass ceiling preventing upward mobility in occupying a leadership role. One participant shares their experience:

I knew it was going to take me longer than a man to get to where I wanted to go, and the women that I know and knew who have all been in the military for some time, all had smaller goals. Men join and say, I want to be a chief, but that wasn't my goal, because I didn't see any female Chiefs.

The lack of female representation and role models in higher ranks made it harder for others to be motivated, see the possibilities, and envision the upward occupational ladder. Participants who served before and after the implementation of Operational Honour all stated that advancement barriers and inappropriate behaviours still exist, and women are not being promoted as quickly as men despite attempts to address leadership concerns.

Interestingly, with regards to support from leadership, when participants were challenged by male leadership, several participants indicated that they lacked support from their male colleagues in fear of reprisal from that leadership. One participant stated that male leadership doesn't know how to socialize nor have a firm understanding of how to engage with women. A participant who served in a combat role stated that the men who were in positions of authority did not know how to approach dealing with women, nor did they genuinely accept them in a combat position:

I think a lot of people were uncertain, so there were certain calculated responses to making sure that I was not put in a position where I would have, um, social power, I guess is the best way to say it. So, I witnessed a lot of things that I was physically excluded from, and I think that is because people were worried that I would complain and that I would be listened to.

This participant served as a senior ranking officer and stated several differences between male and female officers and how they tended to lead. The participant further explained how such qualities may have impacted women's inclusion into senior ranking positions.

I guess men are more task-orientated, it's a matter of the team, a good boss knows how to create a team, and they value your opinion and it's all about getting the mission done and moving toward the mission, I think sometimes women get involved, sometimes lose track a bit of the mission. [They are] not as focused on the outcome and they take things more personally; men don't take things personally. Women take things personally, and that can sometimes be a detriment for women. They've got to watch that... but that's also an advantage, having that personal aspect too, understanding people. And not thinking them as cogs in the wheels.

According to several participants, when comparing junior male leadership to junior female leadership, males are more supportive toward other males, accept criticism more openly than women in similar roles, and are task-orientated. In contrast, female junior leadership were perceived as overarching and conforming to the masculine ethos. When comparing gendered leadership within the military, one participant stated that women approach situations from a "humanist side to [dealing with] things...they listen and pay attention. If you really did not like what was going on, you knew you would be heard." Most participants stated that male leadership was not welcoming nor promoted equitable and inclusive working environments.

### **3.2 Segregation and demeaning treatment towards integration**

Participants indicated that integration was complex and often nearly impossible, claiming that rather than integrating women, they assimilated them into the military culture by adapting to masculine expectations. This lack of integration and male expectations further led to dealing with a misogynistic cultural working environment that was not equitable nor inclusive. This participant recalls her experience:

I had a sergeant that basically groomed me, took me down and shaved my head and called me a little boy when he came back into the classroom. I experienced quite a bit of discrimination, and, in the end, he ended up breaking me, which I'm, yeah. It is what it is, and I soldiered on and learned to adapt, but yeah, it was rough...

Dealing with abusive positions of power, male chauvinistic attitudes, and the objectification of women was common ground for all the participants and were techniques used to disparage women and erode their self-esteem. The majority of participants experienced discriminatory behaviour, and almost all experienced forms of harassment while navigating toxic and misogynistic working environments. At the same time, others experienced some form of segregation while being posted to a military base.

When participants were posted to a military base following their recruit training, nearly all participants who served during and after the Cold War felt disadvantaged. Many stated that they were not given the same opportunities as men, while others claimed an uneasiness of being a woman in training. This participant echoes what other participants felt during the early stages of their training - during battle school:

I was excited, for battle school, and that's when the segregation and the treatment began to change. It wasn't good, but... it's weird you sense something isn't right, but you don't really know what it is. And then you think it's you. You don't really know what's going on, and you just figure you have to change your own behaviours to be more masculine, to kind of fit in. I was quieter. I was learning, just trying to take it all in. It's a different language, it's a different culture, it's a different everything. So that's when it started, and it was very subtle, with the little things, like instead of saying: 'Guys come over here, we are going to do a training run,' they would say: 'Guys, come over here, oh, I mean, and the women...you guys can come as well.'

After serving over thirty-three years in the Navy, a retiring senior officer stated that she was constantly tested and challenged. She revealed that she had to deal with segregation, and demeaning cultural settings where she had to learn to be self-sufficient and not dependent on men. She claims that the working environments proved to be quite challenging for many

female colleagues and that succeeding in the military required women to persevere and support each other because the male population was not supportive.

You learn to deal with your own issues, like you didn't ask men to help you, you sort of had to sort out your own self without being a burden, and I guess that's something I sort of learned, is not to be a burden, is to be self-sufficient. I felt that there was always this glass ceiling, in that, sometimes, the men would get promoted before you, or if you did achieve something, then it was probably because you slept your way into the job. So, there's always that subtle reality; that to get the job, you must've been screwing around to do that, that you didn't get it on your own right.

Many participants stated that women are left to figure out how to assimilate and never truly integrate into military culture. Women were on their own to learn to be self-sufficient and navigate the military culture. Most participants had to work harder than men and could not take credit for their accomplishments. This participant states that she was:

Always minimized, any of my accomplishments were always minimized. So, I wouldn't step on anyone else's toes. I would always work the hardest, but I would come up with excuses as to why I would not succeed. So, that does a lot to your self-esteem and the way that the women were viewed.

Many participants explained that men were predominately viewed as natural candidates for senior leadership positions. This type of masculine dominance can be quite daunting for women, often impacting how they see themselves in senior leadership positions. One participant stated, "you could not be yourself...you had to hide your true identity and present a [masculine] front." It was also revealed that some female supervisors would take on the masculine role and personify the dominant masculine presence attempting to demoralize newly indoctrinated young female members. Participants noted experiences where female leaders tended to learn to fit into the misogynist culture and prided themselves by demeaning other women. Several participants discussed how the culture they experienced was demeaning. One of those participants recalled how she kept hearing the screaming voices of men she served with, which constantly reminded her "that she was not good enough...and that she was not meant to be in combat." Nearly half of the participants felt they never had a future in the military, and almost all of the participants believed that the CAF was unwelcoming.

*Women were thought of as an oddity and some of the women that had been around for a while expected you to conform to the masculine social culture - we were in some cases maybe an oddity...but you weren't welcomed.*

The early 90s marked a time of numerous attempts to shift the CAF culture that attempted to tackle issues such as gender integration into combat roles, segregation, and discriminatory

and demeaning behaviour. Several participants expressed that the military needed to change while they also recognized some of the efforts of the CAF to deal with cultural issues towards diversity and inclusivity.

### **3.3 Violence and inappropriate behaviour**

The findings within this research affirm that Canadian military culture poses a threat to positive integration for women. According to participant testimonies, the socialization of women within the military culture is strategically strategized to attempt integration. The participants claim they negotiated their movements and actions when trying to integrate into the military culture while avoiding unnecessary criticism and harassment by men - including the leadership with whom they served. Many stated that men felt it was perfectly "okay" to demean them and sexually assault or stalk women with no fear of consequences because systemic injustice muted female voices.

The participants who served throughout the 70s and 80s were exposed to working environments that were quite difficult to navigate, especially where women were quite limited. Many participants indicated that "working conditions were deplorable" and reflected that "workplace harassment policies were rarely enforced." Some participants stated that harassment policies were not always automatically enforced and that the responsibility to mitigate toxic working environments fell on the female soldiers. A female veteran who served thirty-five years in the Navy and was responsible for handling several types of grievances and dealing with processes of mediation highlighted that:

If a woman did not want to have pictures of naked women all around her or in her workspace, she would have to grieve it. She would have to say that she did not feel that she was in a harassment-free workplace, and that these men she worked with all had naked pictures around her, and she would have to try to convince her bosses that she has a legitimate case. In some cases, she would lose her grievance, and was told to put up and shut up.

This participant suggests that:

There was a double standard. Women had to be very careful about what they said and how they said it, so [that] it was not taken the wrong way. Men did not have to be so careful, and women were not [able to be] sexually suggestive or aggressive, but men were allowed.

Many of the participants claimed that it did not matter where you were and what rank you had, as the military possessed a culture that manifested "toxic behaviour which was considered normal by [the] men, with working environments possess[ing] elements of harassment, abuse and sexual misconduct." One participant felt that it got to the point of

allowing herself to be sexually touched and assaulted by a male superior as the only way to preserve her career. The responses indicate that women were exposed to inappropriate behaviour outside their specific workplace. Bases across Canada have mess halls (bars) structured around rank where officers visit their mess halls, junior ranking members visit theirs, and junior leadership have specific drinking venues. This participant describes her experiences of abuse in the drinking mess as a young ranking officer:

These are guys that I have known my whole career, they would pick me up by my feet and hold me upside down for upwards of thirty minutes when I would come into the bar on a Friday night. If I walked into the mess in the evening, I was treated like some kind of pet, and I would walk in and they would grab my ankles and hold me upside down, pour beer down my pant legs. Porn was always on the television in the mess. It was a pretty abusive environment to be in as a junior woman. Yeah, it was abusive. I would say in the first four to six years of my career, I had to live with that kind of abuse.

Responses also suggest that alcohol consumption exacerbated the aggressive and inappropriate mistreatment of women. One participant recalls when she first enrolled and was introduced to the culture within mess halls: "Alcohol was a large part of the culture; during my first three years, there was just a lot of it. The culture was very, I would say aggressive. Being degraded verbally was considered normal routine and part of the training."

Exposure to violence and inappropriate behaviour were common occurrences among all the participants. The majority stated that they experienced sexual harassment and/or sexual bodily harm. Furthermore, many participants experienced verbal abuse that included inappropriate language, and several others were exposed to sexual type verbal abuse. To a lesser scale, some participants experienced voyeurism, stalking and spousal abuse.

Many participants stated that sexual assault and other forms of inappropriate behaviour happen more than people know or report. Reporting was considered and spoken to be an issue due to the lack of privacy and preserving anonymity. A majority of participants did not report their experiences of inappropriate behaviour for several reasons. Reasons included ineffective reporting mechanisms and fears of reprisal from either leadership or the perpetrator. Of the participants who reported adverse experiences and inappropriate behaviours, the majority felt they wasted their efforts. Concerningly, more than half believed that there is no social justice. Victims of inappropriate behaviour are not looked at seriously and their cases are dismissed, or the perpetrator is not seriously dealt with or convicted.

Many of the participants who were harassed stated that they knew the perpetrator but did not report it out of fear of being identified as a whistle-blower. There were also fears that reporting would risk retribution by those within the reporting chain of command. According to some of the participants, the supervisory person dealing with inappropriate behaviour was the person committing the assault or sexualized inappropriate behaviour. Therefore, reporting an incident was problematic and was rarely pursued. Subsequently, participants felt that

reporting would bring unwanted attention, jeopardize career progression, and hamper occupational opportunities. Interestingly the responses reveal that women who were victimized but did not report inappropriate behaviour were less likely to endure the exact targeting and career stalling as those who did report. One participant recalls that she did not report and submit a complaint "because there was nobody to report it to, [other than] my boss." Therefore, "you dealt with it in your own little way, because they would not have seen it as unwanted behaviour, they would have seen it as a joke."

Another participant stated that she did not complain nor report "because then, your career becomes that complaint, your career is no longer about your ability, nor your performance, it is about that complaint." Participants felt that the current policy to protect women ensures a false sense of security, does not promote anonymity, or preserves a victim's identity. This participant recalls contemplating on submitting a complaint but decided, "What was the point, my warrant officer and this Chief were drinking buddies, so obviously they're not going to listen to my side of the story." This perception was a common sentiment among the participants.

#### 4. DISCUSSION

This research aimed to shed light on the challenges women experienced while serving in the Canadian military, highlighting possible cultural issues that exist and directly impact the integration of those who serve. Although the findings in this research cannot be generalized to include all women who serve, the results do expose cultural issues that impact female integration. The findings illustrate how leadership, inappropriate behaviour, and sexual violence intersect in military culture. To date, the research in this area has been fragmented. Although there is literature regarding gender, "an understanding of the core issues has been incomplete," and the Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) has "not been effective in addressing the social environment in which [wo/men] are embedded" (Okros, 2021, n.p.). This research then contributes to this issue by adding additional voices and experiences to help progress such a meaningful conversation.

This study speaks to and lends support to research conducted by Kovitz (2018), who suggests that the Canadian military possesses a cultural working environment that is "sexualized and misogynistic" (p. 1), further referring to it as a "conflict zone for women" (p. 2). While there have been policies like employment equity, multiculturalism, and the *Canadian Human Rights Act*, such policies have failed to overcome these issues. According to the *Canadian Human Rights Act*, Canadians have the right to be treated and represented fairly in workplaces and be free from discrimination and harassment (Government of Canada, 2021). Unfortunately, even with these rights and rules written into law, systemic issues about inappropriate behaviour and discrimination based on race, gender, and sexual orientation

continue to exist within institutions like the CAF and the Department of National Defence (DND).

Within the last decade, the CAF has attempted to create policy initiatives specifically designed to eradicate forms of violence, discrimination, and inappropriate sexualized behaviour to create equitable, diverse, and inclusive working environments. The challenges faced within these institutions are not foreign to other militaries, nor are they absent in different male-dominated working environments. The findings within this research support Taber (2020; 2017) in how the CAF and DND likely continue to struggle with systemic issues surrounding poor leadership, gender discrimination, and the preservation of traditional ideals.

Over the last several years, these institutions have been faced with the daunting task of investigating high-ranking leadership personnel for engaging in inappropriate behaviour and dealing with several class-action lawsuits relating to discrimination based on race, gender, and sexual orientation (McKelvey, 2020). Recently, Canada's top military officials, including the prime minister, have acknowledged that systemic discrimination surrounding gender and race is insidious and continues to challenge the Canadian military (The Canadian Press, 2020; Flanagan 2020; Paas-Lang, 2019). The findings highlight how military culture supported by poor leadership can contribute to the culmination and persistence of toxic masculinity. The women in this study experienced discriminating behaviours and sexual violence under the leadership in which they served. Their lived experiences indicate how an imbalance of relational equality can impact an individual's identity, including health and wellness. Their experiences further support past authors (Bostock & Daley, 2007; Street et al., 2007) in how women who work in heavily male-dominated working and leadership environments are at a higher risk of experiencing segregation, sexual violence, and unwanted negative attention. For many decades women experienced inappropriate behaviour with no proper measures in place to report or make claims against perpetrators without running the risk of being singled out and or penalized (Mercier & Castonguay, 2014; Taber, 2017). This parallels the voices in this study in how the system to report inappropriate behaviour is ineffective in protecting individual anonymity and that leadership contributes to the perpetuation of this issue.

Furthermore, attention must be paid to reporting processes involving leaders in positions to determine the occupational progression of reporting women. There are signs that changing the old guard within the Canadian military is rigorously attempting to address inappropriate behaviour. For example, investigating allegations regarding leaders who are being accused of committing crimes in which they are in positions to oversee "result[s] in a loss in confidence in the member's ability to effectively lead and conduct the[ir] duties associated with his appointment as a commanding officer and immediately relieved" (Le Bouthillier as cited by Burke, 2021, n.p.).

A recent Federal Supreme Court ruling led to a class-action lawsuit settlement of nearly one billion dollars (\$900 million) to compensate members of the CAF and employees of the DND who experienced forms of violence and sexual misconduct (Brewster, 2019). This settlement is another example of the CAF's constant battle with sexual violence and

inappropriate behaviour. Eradicating toxic and sexist culture require drastic changes and immediate ongoing additional research to have an impact on the creation of inclusive and equitable working environments where women can navigate free of discriminating, sexual, and oppressive behaviour (Taber, 2018; Tait, 2019; Van Hlatky, 2019; and McCristall, 2020). Furthermore, the information within this study supports how "leadership [has a] responsibility for the shaping of culture [which] has been overlooked" (Zandvliet, 2018, p. 10). Therefore, we support a need for a collaborative effort from all who serve and engage within military culture supporting the CAF/DND. The authors specifically call for more social scientists to contribute to this much-needed conversation to make the CAF and other national militaries more inclusive and safer for all, including its female members.

This study only presents a small sample of 55 female veterans and includes an extensive range of various generational experiences that have understandings rooted in different histories and timelines. The results should not be generalized to all female experiences within the current CAF but rather provide some insight into possible experiences that may exist more broadly and warrant further investigation. Furthermore, this research relied on snowball sampling for interview recruitment and is subject to participation bias. More specifically, the topic of this study may have attracted participants who had grievances during their time in the CAF while possibly deterring participation from those who have had more positive experiences within the CAF.

## 5. CONCLUSION

As the Canadian military and other national military institutions look to become more equitable and inclusive, they would benefit from investigating the lived experiences of female members. Such investigations could further identify issues associated with a historically masculine and toxic dominant culture and improve on the themes discussed within this article surrounding *Leadership, Segregation and Demeaning Treatment Towards Integration*, and *Violence and Inappropriate Behaviour*. This study sought to uncover the experiences of women who served in the Canadian military to highlight how a military culture supported by poor leadership can contribute to the culmination and persistence of violence and exclusion against women. We hope this research will positively influence and inform more extensive future studies and policies. While this study is limited in its generalisability, this research does provide some much-needed insight from female CAF veterans about their experiences within these critical topics. Therefore, the researchers call upon other social scientists to explore these important issues in a way that could further expand and generalize the responses found here. We hope the findings in this article are conducive to the positive development of future policy, investigation, and/or inclusionary interventions that lead to cultural change that embraces diversity and creates an equitable and inclusive working environment free of discrimination and sexualized inappropriate behaviour.

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