



OPERATION HONOUR

Like all big organizations, the Canadian military has had its share of bad behaviour among its personnel and over the years there have been incidents of sexual misconduct in the Canadian Armed Forces (CAF).¹ Militaries are designed to be fighting forces, and the abusive behaviour of certain personnel reduces the effectiveness of the forces as a whole, and is contrary to the tradition of honour in the military.

It is also contrary to the desire expressed in the 2017 defence policy *Strong, Secure, Engaged* to increase the number of women in the CAF. If women are to join the CAF, they must not be subjected to a workplace that harms or demeans them. Women must know that misconduct will be taken seriously and they must feel able to report incidents without a negative impact on their career progression.

The problem of sexual harassment in the CAF was recognized in the late 1980s and there were attempts to address it, but incidents continued to be reported. In the late 1990s, the CAF implemented more intense training in an attempt to address the problem. The early training programs were a start, but sexual misconduct continued. In 2014, the CAF was back in the media. In the wake of the media reports about sexual misconduct, then-Chief of the Defence Staff, General Tom Lawson, announced that an external, independent review of the military would be undertaken. Former Supreme Court Justice Marie Deschamps was asked to investigate and make recommendations on an action plan. In 2015, former-Justice Deschamps released her report and recommendations. Shortly after the report was released, the incoming Chief of the Defence Staff, General Jonathan Vance, issued the order to initiate *Operation Honour*, with the goal to eliminate inappropriate sexual behaviour in the CAF. The report's 10 recommendations were later enshrined in *Strong, Secure, Engaged* (Initiative #18).

The CAF leadership has stated that inappropriate sexual behaviour of any kind is unacceptable. Both *Strong, Secure, Engaged* and *Operation Honour* emphasize that support for CAF personnel is essential to creating an effective military. As *Op Honour* states “[a]ny attitudes or behaviours which undermine the camaraderie, cohesion and confidence of serving members threatens the CAF’s long-term success.”²

Op Honour takes action in four areas – understanding, supporting, responding and preventing. The focus of the operation is to:

- improve support for CAF members who had been affected by sexual misconduct;
- modify harmful behaviours; and
- increase understanding and vigilance at all levels of leadership and, in support of this, training about *Op Honour* has been added to leadership courses.³

¹ This Briefing Note focuses on sexual misconduct relating to women. But there have also been instances of misconduct relating to minorities and LGBTQ+ personnel, and this too is being addressed in the CAF. This will be the focus of a future Briefing Note.

² CAF, *Operation Honour*, available at <https://www.canada.ca/en/department-national-defence/services/benefits-military/conflict-misconduct/operation-honour/about-operation-honour.html>.

³ Ibid.

As we can see from this list, addressing abusive behaviour is not a simple process. There are three main elements of change – institutions, processes and attitudes.

Since the Deschamps report and the implementation of *Op Honour*, a number of institutions/agencies to support victims have been set up within the CAF. In 2015, the Sexual Misconduct Response Centre was established to provide counselling and advice. The centre exists outside the military chain of command which is important because it can assuage concerns among victims about career progression and is helpful if commanding officers are the source of the misconduct or do not take the problem seriously. Victim Support Services (VSS) have also been expanded to assist CAF members who have been affected by harmful/inappropriate sexual behaviour.

A variety of response teams have been formed: in 2016, the Sexual Offence Response Team was formed as part of the Canadian Forces Military Police; the Director of Military Prosecutions created the Sexual Misconduct Action Response Team (SMART); and there is the CAF Strategic Response Team on Sexual Misconduct. The Sexual Offence Response Team investigators are dispersed in three-member teams at regional offices located in Victoria, Edmonton, Borden, Ottawa, Valcartier and Halifax. The teams are specially trained and dedicated to supporting the investigation of criminal sexual offences throughout the CAF and Department of National Defence.

A necessary element of the program to address sexual misconduct is having data. Until recently, the CAF did not have a method to collect information on the scope of the problem in the military because no standardized reporting or tracking system was in place. Since 2016 monthly tracking has enabled the organization to ascertain the rates and locations of incidents and analyze the progress of *Op Honour*. The early system was replaced with an automated information management system. To address gaps, the CAF sexual misconduct tracking protocol was re-engineered, and the Operation Honour Tracking and Analysis System (OPHTAS) began operating in 2018. Better data, including regular Statistics Canada CAF-wide surveys, enable enhanced understanding of sexual misconduct, as do research initiatives that have been undertaken.

Processes have also been implemented and streamlined to encourage victims to report unacceptable behaviour and to shepherd them through the complaint process. Victim Support Services, for example, attempts to mitigate the impact by providing advice/options for reporting, guiding victims through the reporting, investigative and judicial proceedings, and providing a network for support. The Integrated Complaint and Conflict Management System (IC2M) was developed to address recommendations of the Deschamps report to simplify the harassment complaint and conflict resolution processes. It became operational in 2017. In 2018, the Integrated Conflict and Complaint Management (ICCM) service was implemented to help CAF members submit, track and resolve complaints.

Updates on *Op Honour* are provided at the weekly Chief of Defence Staff (CDS) Operations Brief to inform senior leadership of initiatives, problems and progress. The high-profile nature of *Op Honour* is to illustrate the commitment the senior CAF leadership has to ending the problem.

In order to measure how successful the program has been, it is assessed on an annual basis. The 2019 report lists a number of successful outcomes. These include:

- Enhanced CAF-wide awareness of sexual misconduct within the institution and *Operation Honour's* role in eliminating it;
- The CAF's ability to assist and advise victims through the focused institutions and

awareness training of CAF personnel such as military police, legal and medical staffs about sexual misconduct and its impact on victims;

- Improved response to victims' complaints via the Integrated Conflict and Complaint Management (ICCM) program;
- Growing ability of the CAF to track incidents of sexual misconduct nationally, enabling more informed leadership engagement and intervention;
- Improved military police capability to support victims and process incidents;
- A more victim-centred approach to the prosecution of cases within the court martial system;
- The implementation of steps to ensure that cases are tried in an efficient manner;
- Evaluation and revision of sexual misconduct-related training and education content;
- Amendments to CAF release policy for victims. Specifically, that all CAF members known to have medical employment limitations that are attributable to sexual misconduct are not administratively disadvantaged by their illness or injury while they recover, during their transition to another occupation, or to life outside the CAF.⁴

Conclusions

Addressing sexual misconduct in the CAF is not an easy task. It will require sustained effort over many years. As we have noted, there have been a variety of institutional and process-related changes implemented to address sexual misconduct. These are good steps. What we have not discussed here is the hardest element – changing attitudes and behaviour. Institutions and processes can be created with the stroke of a pen but changing attitudes is a long-term endeavour. But it's a key element. As *Op Honour* states “[t]o succeed, we must realign behaviours and attitudes of personnel with the military ethos of Duty with Honour.”⁵

The Department of National Defence recognizes that changes must start at recruiting centres and permeate through all training institutions, from junior members to the most senior – including Bystander Intervention training to encourage CAF members to report incidents they have witnessed. It also recognizes that the change in behaviour and attitude cannot be implemented by the CAF alone so it works with other government departments and groups within Canadian society.

In the long term, the hope is to create a culture change beyond just the elimination of sexual misconduct. The CAF hopes to reinforce the principle of Duty with Honour and incorporate initiatives on diversity, inclusivity, health and wellness to ensure a culture of respect for all its members.

⁴ Government of Canada, “Canadian Armed Forces Progress Report #4 Addressing Sexual Misconduct,” 2019, available at <https://www.canada.ca/en/department-national-defence/corporate/reports-publications/sexual-misbehaviour/progress-report-four/part-four.html>.

⁵ *Operation Honour*.