The Diversity Recruitment Challenge

Factors Shaping Visible Minorities' and Aboriginal People's Perceptions of the Canadian Military

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Diversity in the Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) embraces values of respect and fair treatment of all military members. The Canadian Chief of Defence Staff highlighted the importance of fostering a diverse culture in the new CAF Employment Equity (EE) Plan 2015-2020:

> Military personnel who are culturally diverse, multiethnic, and multilingual represent force multipliers during both domestic and international operations. With the recent dominance of coalition led operations, leveraging CAF personnel with wide ranging backgrounds facilitates integration and synchronization with global partners. With the preponderance of international operations evolving from high intensity warfighting to full spectrum operations, possessing personnel with both gender and cultural variety better facilitates interfacing with civilian populations, non-governmental organizations, and other actors within the operating environment (Department of National Defence, 2015, p.1).

Over the past decade, military members' perceptions of diversity have been largely positive in the CAF. However, challenges in attraction, recruitment, and retention of designated group members (DGMs) continue to impact the representation rates of visible minority groups and Aboriginal people in the Canadian military. Challenges have included issues related to recruitment, training and development, career management, workplace accommodations, and EE and discrimination practices. Accordingly, it is important to review the current research on attracting, recruiting, selecting, and retaining visible minorities and Aboriginal people. The effectiveness of the recruitment and retention strategies rests on understanding why the existing recruitment practices are failing to meet the required targets for enrolling visible minorities and Aboriginal people in the Canadian military.

This article examines the key challenges impacting visible minorities and Aboriginal people in the CAF. It aims to answer the following question : what are the key factors that are impacting the recruitment of visible minorities and Aboriginal people ? To help answer this question, several research studies are summarized that identify the salient issues influencing visible minorities' and Aboriginal people's perceptions of a military career. The discussion incorporates a few recommendations to help inform and supplement the current recruitment and retention strategies for enabling a more diverse, inclusive, and representative Canadian military.

Literature Review

Recruitment Challenges with Visible Minorities and Aboriginal People

Over the past ten years, the Caf has been increasingly responsive to fostering a diverse and inclusive environment. Diversity is recognized as a key enabler to cultivating a responsive and inclusive military. As illustrated in Table 1, the most recent Caf EE representation rates for Officers and Non-Commissioned Members (Ncms) in the Regular Force and Primary Reserve indicate that both visible minorities and Aboriginal people are underrepresented (Department of National Defence, 2015). An Employment Systems Review (Esr) report in 2004 revealed that visible minorities represented only 2.1% of the Caf [1.7% in the Regular Force and 2.7% in the Reserves] (MacKey, 2004). Just a little over a decade later, the number had increased to 5.9%, with 5.1% in the Regular Force and 8.1% in the Primary Reserve (Department of National Defence, 2015). The 2004 Esr report also noted that the representation of Aboriginal people was 2.3% across all of the Caf (i.e., 0.8% for officers and 2.8% for Ncms). This representation was even lower when the total number of Aboriginal people excluded Canadian Rangers. The Canadian Rangers is a detachment of the Caf Reserves, and include many Inuit, First Nations, and Métis members who patrol Canada's northern, coastal, and isolated regions. A more realistic representation is that Aboriginal people represented 1.3% of the Caf, with 1.6% in the Regular Force and 0.9% in other components of the Reserves. Currently, Aboriginal people represent 2.5% overall, with 2.4% in the Regular Force and 2.8% in the Primary Reserve (Department of National Defence, 2015).

Table 1 : CAF Employment Equity Representation [*self-identification*]

	CAF Strength	Women		Aboriginal People		Visible Minorities	
		#	%	#	%	#	%
Regular Force							
Officer	16,564	2,818	17.0	255	1.5	1,097	6.6
NCM	49,282	6,615	13.4	1,333	2.7	2,229	4.5
Total	**65,846**	**9,433**	**14.3**	**1,588**	**2.4**	**3,326**	**5.1**
Primary Reserve							
Officer	4,622	769	16.6	70	1.5	323	7.0
NCM	22,398	3,708	16.6	695	3.1	1,872	8.4
Total	**27,020**	**4,477**	**16.6**	**765**	**2.8**	**2,195**	**8.1**
CAF							
Officer	21,186	3,587	16.9	325	1.5	1,420	6.7
NCM	71,680	10,323	14.4	2,028	2.8	4,101	5.7
Total	**92,866**	**13,910**	**15.0**	**2,353**	**2.5**	**5,521**	**5.9**

Source : Department of National Defence, 2015.

To improve the representation of Dgms within the Canadian military, the Caf has developed a new diversity strategy to help foster a diverse, inclusive, respectful, and

operationally relevant environment. Mirroring the diversity found in the general population to the CAF membership continues to be a key priority for the Canadian military. As a result, the CAF is looking at recruitment strategies that will help to increase the representation rates of DGMs in the Canadian military. The aim of the new diversity strategy is to promote the vision, principles, goals, and objectives that will help to cultivate a culture of diversity and inclusion. Effective recruitment strategies will play a significant role in attracting visible minorities and Aboriginal people to select a military career path.

CAF Recruitment – Visible Minorities and Aboriginal People

Visible minorities and Aboriginal people in the CAF have been faced with several challenges related to recruitment practices, training and development, career management, workplace accommodations, and EE and discrimination. Although several reports highlight that CAF members are generally positive towards diversity, it is necessary to determine why perceptions held by visible minorities and Aboriginal people tend to be less positive than those of non-DGMs.

Several studies have noted that specific groups tend to hold more negative perceptions and also to lack knowledge of the CAF. For example, the 2013 ESR discovered that although the CAF culture is amenable to diversity and EE, there are several recruitment challenges that continue to emanate from the DGMs' perceptions of the CAF (Skomorovsky & Lalonde-Gaudreault, 2013). This study revealed that challenges around recruitment were associated with negative perceptions held by DGMs or the lack of information in making a career choice with the CAF. In this study, the respondents were asked their level of agreement whether the CAF climate was regarded as being "*highly positive and accepting towards diversity*". The results indicated that although the CAF members are mainly positive about diversity in the Canadian military, non-DGMs were more likely than DGMs to rate the diversity climate as being "good" or "very good". In comparison to women and Aboriginal people, visible minorities expressed the least positive perceptions of diversity in the CAF.

Military Career Path – Visible Minorities

Public opinion research on visible minorities' attitudes toward a military career has yielded negative perceptions about a CAF way of life. These studies have explored visible minorities' insights into selecting the military as a primary career choice, and the factors that influence career selection. Ipsos Reid conducted a series of three studies in 2011, 2012, and 2014 to better gauge the perceptions of visible minority groups in their career choices. Ipsos Reid (2011, 2012, 2014) was mainly interested in understanding the reasons for visible minority members choosing or not choosing a military career path, and the key areas that would attract visible minorities to join. The Ipsos Reid studies focused on the perceptions of Chinese-Canadians, Asian- and Arab-Canadians, and Black-, Filipino- and Latin American-Canadians. The key findings stem from the quantitative and qualitative components of the studies and are summarized in Table 2 (next page).

Table 2 : Ipsos Reid Public Opinion Research on Visible Minorities (General Findings)

	CHINESE-CANADIANS (2011)	ASIAN- AND ARAB-CANADIANS (2012)	BLACK-, FILIPINO- AND LATIN AMERICAN-CANADIANS (2014)
STUDY PARTICIPANTS	• Qualitative Component : 10 focus groups with Chinese-Canadians (16-34 years) and separate focus groups with parents/ influencers (35 years or older) across Vancouver and Toronto • Quantitative Component : Interviews with 1014 Chinese-Canadian youth (16-34 years) and 593 Chinese-Canadian community members (35 years or older)	• Qualitative Component : 12 focus groups with Asian- and Arab-Canadians (18-24 years) and separate focus groups with parents/influencers (35 years or older) across Vancouver, Edmonton, Toronto, Ottawa, and Montreal • Quantitative Component : Interviews with 1338 Asian- and Arab-Canadian youth (18-24 years) and 765 Asian- and Arab-community members (35 years or older)	• Qualitative Component : 12 focus groups with Black-, Filipino- and Latin American-Canadians (18-24 years) and separate focus groups with parents/influencers (35 years or older) across Ottawa, Vancouver, Winnipeg, Toronto, Halifax, and Montreal • Quantitative Component : Interviews with 965 Black-, Filipino- and Latin American-Canadian youth (16-34 years) and 873 Black-, Filipino- and Latin American-Canadian community members (35 years or older)
TOP-OF-MIND CAREER OPTION	• 1% chose military as preferred career option	• 1% chose military as preferred career option	• 1% chose military as preferred career option
CAREER PATH	• Military least desirable career choice • Preferred professions : healthcare, banking/ finance, information technology and entrepreneurship/ business • CAF good training environment for people interested in information technology and healthcare • Use CAF to gain experience in police work and public service/government	• Military least desirable career choice • Preferred profession : healthcare • CAF good training environment for people interested in information technology, engineering, and skilled trades • Use CAF to gain experience in healthcare • Use CAF to gain experience in police work and public service/ government	• Military least desirable career choice • Preferred profession : healthcare • CAF good training environment for people interested in information technology, engineering, and skilled trades • Use CAF to gain experience in police work and public service/ government
LIKELIHOOD OF JOINING THE CAF	• Unlikelihood of joining CAF attributed to influencers at home (parents) or in community who would not recommend CAF as primary career choice	• Unlikelihood of joining CAF attributed to influencers at home (parents) or in community who would not recommend CAF as primary career choice	• Unlikelihood of joining CAF attributed to influencers at home (parents) or in community who would not recommend CAF as primary career choice
MILITARY CAREER	• Military profession perceived as a career of last-resort	• Military profession not widely perceived as a career of last-resort	• Military profession not widely perceived as a career of last-resort
ADVANTAGES & DISADVANTAGES OF JOINING THE CAF	• Barriers and drawbacks outweigh benefits of joining CAF • Reasons not to join, namely obligation to carry out orders; periods of separation from family (posted away from home); and loss of one's freedom	• Recognize benefits and drawbacks, namely less prestigious profession, limited opportunities, and waste of talent • Reasons not to join, namely obligation to carry out orders, periods of separation from family (posted away from home), and loss of one's freedom	• Recognize benefits and drawbacks • Reasons not to join, namely obligation to carry out orders, periods of separation from family (posted away from home), and loss of one's freedom
FAMILIARITY WITH THE CAF WAY OF LIFE	• Not very familiar with CAF way of life • Engage in discussions with Chinese community about career opportunities in CAF • Promotional recruitment campaigns that showcase successful Chinese-Canadians who gained beneficial experience in the military and became successful inside and outside the CAF	• Not very familiar with CAF way of life • CAF recruitment strategies and initiatives require greater integration of ethnic community members • Promotional recruitment campaigns to include former CAF members who successfully established themselves outside and inside the military	• Not very familiar with CAF way of life • Promotional recruitment campaigns through cultural events to include ethnic members who have become successful through a career in the CAF

Based on the research reported, the CAF is not considered to be a top-of-mind career choice for the visible minority groups studied (Ipsos Reid, 2011, 2012, 2014). Only 1% of the visible minority group members regarded it as a first career choice. The studies

determined that familial and cultural factors play a significant role in influencing the career paths of visible minority youth. The main reasons for not joining revolve around the following perceptions : the military is a dangerous profession ; there are frequent postings away from home and communities ; members are obligated to carry out the issued commands; and members have to relinquish their freedom by adhering to a strict discipline and culture. For example, the results of the Black-, Filipino- and Latin American-Canadians stud indicate that members of these groups generally have a lack of interest in joining the military and perceive it as being primarily a dangerous occupation (Ipsos Reid, 2014).

Moreover, Chinese-Canadian youth are less likely to be encouraged by their parents to seek a military career (Ipsos Reid, 2011). Just over three-quarters of Chinese-Canadian parents surveyed felt that they would be less likely to recommend a military career to their children. Similarly, the majority of Asian and Arab parents and community members would be less likely to recommend a career in the military (Ipsos Reid, 2012). Based on past experiences in their respective countries of origin, the Asian and Arab community members felt that, as new immigrants in Canada, they would prefer to avoid the conflicts associated with the military. The results were similar for the Black-, Filipino- and Latin American-Canadians.

The three studies by Ipsos Reid outlined the main factors that affect the career selection of visible minority groups. It is important to highlight that both parents and community members have a major influence over the youth. As social influencers, parents and community members play an important role in helping youth to decide on their career path or career selection. These social influencers may also have a significant impact on youths' propensity to join the forces. As a result, the unlikelihood of joining the CAF may be attributed to those influencers at home (parents) or in the community who would not recommend the CAF as a primary career choice. For example, in the Chinese-Canadian study, "*a common view was that if a person did not have the grades needed to get into a university and did not otherwise have good job prospects, the military might seem like an attractive option worth the physical labour and risks involved*" (Ipsos Reid, 2011, p.6). In other words, the military profession is not equated with higher education.

Pursuing a career would involve investing in higher education in professional domains, such as healthcare. For example, the majority of Black-, Filipino- and Latin American-Canadian youth and community representatives perceive the field of healthcare to be the career of interest. However, Black-, Filipino- and Latin American-Canadians felt that the military would be a good training environment for people interested in information technology, engineering, and trades (Ipsos Reid, 2014). Also, Black-, Filipino- and Latin American-Canadian youth and community representatives felt that the CAF was a good environment to advance in the areas of police work and public service/government. Similar results were highlighted with Chinese-Canadians and Asian- and Arab-Canadians.

A more recent study examined visible minority members' perceptions of the CAF (Wright & Fonséca, 2016). It looked at the challenges experienced by visible minorities in

the Canadian military ; their role and influence in their respective ethnic communities ; and suggestions on how to improve the existing CAF recruitment strategies to better attract more visible minorities. The results are based on focus groups that were conducted with visible minorities in the military. Although the majority of visible minority communities were mainly aware of the CAF, there were several challenges.

Recruitment experiences were based on participants' familiarity with the CAF (e.g., being in the cadets ; joining the Reserves as summer employment ; or enlisting with the Royal Canadian Mounted Police). Growing up near military bases also created greater familiarity with the CAF, as well as having a family member or friend who was part of the Canadian military. The majority of participants revealed that their initial recruitment experiences were generally positive (e.g., communicating with professional and courteous recruiters, and receiving adequate information to make an informed decision to join). However, participants who expressed negative experiences during recruitment felt that they were not well informed about the different career choices offered in the military. Some of the participants felt that the recruiters were mainly interested in filling positions that were combat arms-related (i.e., for the Afghanistan mission). However, the majority of participants did not attribute their negative recruitment experiences with being a person from a visible minority group.

Some participants stated that they had limited exposure to the CAF. These participants noted that the military were not always effective in their recruitment approaches (e.g., career fairs or TV advertisements). Some participants felt that the information sessions were somewhat limited and mainly geared towards males. Other participants felt that they were unaware of the CAF and had limited knowledge of the Canadian military prior to joining. Participants also revealed that there are many visible minority communities who feel that they do not receive adequate information on the different educational and career options that are offered by the CAF.

Reasons for enrolment were mainly attributed to pride in serving one's country, training and education opportunities, and job stability (Wright & Fonséca, 2016). Participants also attributed reasons for not enrolling with the CAF to a lack of information and awareness related to educational and job opportunities in the Canadian military. These participants also stated additional challenges that are linked to the application process and poor perceptions of the CAF (e.g., cultural stereotypes). Motivation to enrol in the armed forces mainly focused on providing a good life to family members, and attaining a higher social status and prestige. Participants who felt that their expectations were fulfilled generally expressed satisfaction with job stability, opportunities for greater training and education, traveling and fun, and the prospect of working in a well-structured and equitable military environment. Participants whose expectations were unfulfilled attributed their lack of satisfaction with negative recruitment experiences (e.g., receiving inadequate information about the CAF). Although the majority of the experiences were positive, there were participants who reported experiencing subtle forms of racism, discrimination, and cultural insensitivities.

The majority of participants stated that they would recommend a career in the military. However, some participants found it difficult to recommend a military career (Wright & Fonséca, 2016). Among the reasons mentioned were the constant need to prove oneself as a visible minority member and difficulties in adapting to military life. Participants recommended that visible minority members should serve as recruiters. Participants also recommended that community influencers need to spend time talking to parents of potential candidates about developmental opportunities for their children (e.g., attaining a good education and career). According to the participants, distributing information pamphlets was not as effective as engaging in conversations with community members. As a result, participants stated that the existing recruitment process needs improvement. Diversity in recruitment staff would enable better communication between the recruiters, community members, and potential applicants. Improving cultural awareness through cultural sensitivity training programmes would also foster better representation of visible minorities in the CAF.

Military Career Path – Aboriginal People

To achieve a greater representation of Aboriginal people in the CAF, it is important to determine their perceptions of the military, and to examine the current recruitment practices that may be deterring them from considering a military career. For example, the results of the 2013 ESR revealed that of the DGMs (i.e., women, visible minorities, Aboriginal people, and persons with disabilities), Aboriginal people agreed the most that the CAF needs to be representative of Canadian multiculturalism (Skomorovsky & Hujaleh, 2013). In the 2013 ESR, the majority of members did not perceive discrimination towards Aboriginal people and visible minorities in the forces. However, both Aboriginal people and visible minorities expressed more negative perceptions about being discriminated against than the remaining DGMs. As a result, issues of underrepresentation and perceptions of discrimination may impact the attraction, recruitment, and retention of Aboriginal people in the Canadian military.

A recent study focused on the recruitment of Aboriginal people into the Canadian military and their recruitment experiences (Fonséca & Dunn, 2012). Aboriginal members took part in focus groups that examined their perceptions and experiences during recruitment. The main findings were that although the participants were generally positive about the CAF and its Aboriginal recruitment programmes, increasing their visibility in Aboriginal communities would be the most effective method for attracting and recruiting Aboriginal people into the Canadian military (Fonséca & Dunn, 2012). The study underlined that the attraction and recruitment of Aboriginal people are contingent on creating stronger community engagement (Fonséca & Dunn, 2012). While some participants were familiar with the CAF's web site and television advertising campaigns, they generally felt that these attraction and recruitment mechanisms did not necessarily influence Aboriginal people to join the Canadian military. Instead, they strongly believed that increasing the military's visibility in Aboriginal communities (e.g., extended presence

of Caf or Aboriginal recruiters in schools and at cultural events) was the most effective way to attract and recruit Aboriginal people (Fonséca & Dunn, 2012).

According to the report, it is important for Aboriginal Caf members to participate in the recruitment process as they are able to relate to the existing challenges and issues affecting their communities and people (Fonséca & Dunn, 2012). Recruiters who are knowledgeable about the Caf Aboriginal programmes would further contribute to a better understanding of the armed forces and create more interconnected relationships with the communities and peers. The authors also highlighted that social influencers, such as families and community members, have an impact on Aboriginal people's decision to join (Fonséca & Dunn, 2012). The study revealed that although some of the participants ignored the wishes expressed by the community members and their respective families, the participants pointed out that the majority of Aboriginal people would not go against their families' or community's wishes.

According to Fonséca and Dunn (2012, p.iv), the most salient reasons why Aboriginal peers would not join the Caf or its Aboriginal programmes were :

> [F]alse perceptions of the CF within their respective families/communities; not wanting to move away from home ; anticipated culture shock ; and negative perceptions concerning the treatment of Aboriginal Peoples in Canadian society (e.g., the World Wars, residential schools, the Oka Crisis, etc.).

Discussion

The challenges attributed to the attraction, recruitment, and retention of visible minorities and Aboriginal people into the Caf will continue to impact the policies and strategies for fostering a more diverse and inclusive Canadian military. The above studies outlined several challenges that can be summarized under two major themes, namely cultural and ethnic implications of recruitment strategies and career selection ; and collective training and education to advance ethnic tolerance, diversity, and inclusion in the Canadian military.

Cultural and Ethnic Implications on Recruitment Strategies and Career Selection

The above studies suggest that improving recruitment practices among visible minority groups and Aboriginal people requires greater integration of their cultures and ethnic community members in recruitment initiatives. For example, the Ipsos Reid study (2011) of Chinese-Canadians stated that the Caf should look for opportunities to demonstrate to the Chinese community examples of successful Chinese-Canadians who have gained beneficial experience from being in the Canadian military. Similarly, the Ipsos Reid study (2014) of Black-, Filipino- and Latin American-Canadians also suggested that promotional recruitment campaigns need to include cultural events that present ethnic members as being successful as a result of a career in the Caf. Similar findings were reported on improving recruitment practices for Aboriginal people (Fonséca & Dunn, 2012; Skomorovsky & Hujaleh, 2013; Wright & Fonséca, 2016).

The above studies have also highlighted the importance of engaging visible minorities and Aboriginal people members to encourage young people who come from different ethnic communities to join the forces. For example, the need to communicate to the diverse societal groups on the advantages of joining the CAF was reported in the 2013 ESR (Skomorovsky & Hujaleh, 2013). Better representation of visible minorities and Aboriginal people in recruitment initiatives would create greater cultural awareness and understanding of the military. Moreover, the CAF visible minorities also pointed to the importance of giving them greater prominence in ethnic communities (Wright & Fonséca, 2016).

Outreach strategies within the visible minorities' and Aboriginal people's communities will need to demonstrate the merits of a military career. The new CAF EE Plan 2015-2020 suggests that the CAF will need to look at more effective ways of reaching out to particular DGMs. This will involve more effective outreach strategies with individuals, organizations, and communities who represent the diverse groups. The 2013 ESR recommended the need to create more effective recruitment strategies by communicating to the diverse societal groups on the role of the CAF and the realistic benefits that stem from selecting a career in the Canadian military (Skomorovsky & Hujaleh, 2013). This would entail greater participation of CAF visible minorities and Aboriginal people in recruitment initiatives. A greater representation of DGMs at recruitment centres would augment better engagement with different cultural and ethnic groups, and would provide more effective cross-cultural communications and counsel to those requiring additional information about the military (Skomorovsky & Lalonde-Gaudreault, 2013).

Collective Training and Education for Promoting Ethnic Tolerance, Diversity and Inclusion

Collective and on-going diversity training and education will enable greater cohesion among diverse members. Cultural awareness and sensitivity training, and improved employment of cultural competencies will help to promote diversity and inclusion in the military. For example, research on the perceptions of visible minorities on recruitment in the CAF revealed that enhanced cultural awareness training for recruiters and training instructors would help to create a more culturally responsive and diverse environment (Wright & Fonséca, 2016). Moreover, a 2012 report based on a *Training Needs Assessment on Employment Equity and Diversity and Education for Employment Equity Practitioners* purports that better training is required for those employed in human resources positions such as recruiters, career managers, and EE officers (Vaillancourt, 2012).

Effective and on-going cultural awareness and diversity training will be necessary for new recruits and existing personnel to ensure that the current training components incorporate the concepts of diversity and inclusion. The CAF's new EE Plan and Diversity Strategy highlight the importance of fostering an agile and inclusive Canadian military.

Cultural diversity training and related mentoring programmes will help to create greater collective cross-cultural awareness. This will contribute to the operational effectiveness challenge where there is a need to better understand the impacts of diversity on the operational environment. As a result, further research will need to explore the merits of collective training and education for promoting ethnic tolerance, diversity, and inclusion.

Conclusion

Cultural diversity remains a priority for the Canadian military. The under-representation of visible minorities and Aboriginal people will require the incorporation of more culturally-based attraction and recruitment programmes. Current research on the attraction and recruitment of visible minorities and Aboriginal people to the CAF have demonstrated that overcoming cultural resistance to a military way of life will be contingent on creating better engagement with ethnic communities. An enhanced presence of visible minorities and Aboriginal people will help to promote the benefits of a military career to various ethnic communities. This article provided an overview of some of the current research and challenges that are impacting the attraction and recruitment of visible minorities and Aboriginal people to the CAF. Several key challenges were put forward to enable a better understanding of the cultural and ethnic implications on recruitment strategies and career selection and the collective cultural awareness training. Further research in these areas will help to advocate greater ethnic tolerance, diversity, and inclusion in the Canadian military.

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