



HOUSE OF COMMONS
CHAMBRE DES COMMUNES
CANADA

Standing Committee on the Status of Women

FEWO • NUMBER 143 • 1st SESSION • 42nd PARLIAMENT

EVIDENCE

Tuesday, May 14, 2019

Chair

Mrs. Karen Vecchio

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● (0850)

[English]

The Chair (Mrs. Karen Vecchio (Elgin—Middlesex—London, CPC)): Good morning, everyone, and welcome to the 143rd meeting of the Standing Committee on the Status of Women. Today's meeting is public.

We're continuing our study of the treatment of women within the Department of National Defence. For this, I am pleased to welcome Sandra Perron, Laura Nash, Natalie MacDonald and Julie Lalonde who are appearing as individuals.

We're going to start with seven minutes of testimony by each individual before we go to our round of questions. We'll begin with Sandra Perron.

You have the floor for seven minutes.

Ms. Sandra Perron (Senior Partner, A New Dynamic Enterprise Inc., As an Individual): Good morning, ladies and gentlemen, distinguished guests. Thank you very much for this invitation.

Recently, I wore the same T-shirt I am wearing now at an event. It says, "you owe me 21 cents". The T-shirt was meant to provoke discussion about the pay gap between men and women. A friend of mine, a veteran whom I served with in service battalion, said, "Luckily, we don't have that problem in the military because of equal pay for equal rank." I said, "Excuse me?"

Today, I would like to share with you my response to him. I said, first of all, when 15% of service personnel are women and only 10% of those serve as flag officers and general officers, you owe me 21¢. When 90% of deployed troops are men, it means that close to 90% of spouses who stay in the background, hold up the fort, keep the house going—and the children, and often undertake elderly care as well, to the detriment of their own careers—are women, so you owe me 21¢. When less than 38% of men take parental leave, and most of them don't even take those two weeks, again we can conclude that women are holding the fort to the detriment of their careers, so you owe me 21¢.

This is why the issue is so important. I am currently holding retreats across the country with women veterans and women spouses of military members. They have been uprooted and been away from their family and don't have the "tribe".

These are the general themes they are experiencing. Apart from the harassment and the abuse, these are the general themes.

The first one is that they are tired. They are leaving the military exhausted. They've tried to do it all, and above all, they've tried to juggle children, their home, their career, their womanhood, and they feel exhausted as they transition out of the military into civilian life.

The second is that they are resentful. They are resentful because for all of those years, they have put somebody else's career ahead of themselves. They are also fearful: fearful of being alone, fearful of the next chapter of their lives. Their bodies have changed; many of them are broken; they've moved around a lot; the kids have grown. Now their centre of gravity is no longer existent. They don't have a tribe.

This is what I'm seeing across the country. I just got back from Comox, from my last retreat, and these themes are very present.

This, then, is my opinion on what we need to do. The first thing is, we need to continue supporting and finding ways to support our military families. We're doing amazing things right now in the CAF. We—and I say "we" even many years after leaving the military—need to continue doing this.

We also need to put pressure on men to be more present caregivers, with children but also with elderly care. We need to change the stigma in the military with regard to paternal leave and encourage and recognize and acknowledge those men who are taking parental leave. We need mentoring programs and exit interviews. We need data; we need to measure those who are being mentored—how many exit interviews we are doing of designated group members.

Most of all, we need to stay the course.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We're now going to move over to Natalie MacDonald.

You have the floor for seven minutes.

Ms. Natalie MacDonald (As an Individual): Thank you, Karen.

Good morning, members of the committee and distinguished guests. Thank you very much for inviting me to provide testimony today on this very important issue pertaining to the treatment of women within the Department of National Defence.

I have been practising employment law for over 20 years and have authored a textbook on the subject. One of my specialty areas is in fact employment law and workplace harassment and sexual harassment. It is through this that I have met the distinguished hero here beside me, Laura Nash, whom I have been proud to represent for the last four years.

Ms. Nash chose to dedicate her career to serving our country. In return, within the CAF, Ms. Nash faced a culture of discrimination and harassment on the basis of her sex, marital and family status that was so pronounced it not only caused her to attempt to take her own life, but has now left her in dire economic, social and physical circumstances.

Ms. Nash joined the Canadian Armed Forces in 2010 and was stationed at Naval Officers Training Centre Venture at CFB Esquimalt. That same year, she became pregnant with her son, Ronin, and found herself to be a single parent. Because of her pregnancy, Ms. Nash was immediately removed from the naval environmental training program. She was also denied the opportunity to take the two alternative courses she had applied for because of her removal from the program.

Due to the demands of her military training, the lack of accommodation offered to single parents by the CAF and struggling to afford child care for an infant on a junior officer's salary, Ms. Nash made the heartbreaking decision to send her one-year-old son to live with her parents in Ontario and return to sea.

• (0855)

The Chair: Natalie, if you could slow it down a little for the interpreters, that would be wonderful.

Ms. Natalie MacDonald: Certainly, Karen. Thank you.

Alone at CFB Esquimalt, Ms. Nash faced a culture of discrimination and harassment because she was a single mother. She was ultimately removed from the six-month long MARS course with only three days remaining because, according to the training review board, she had way too many “family matters to deal with”. This decision was also based on false evidence provided to the board in a grievance that was never corrected.

When Ms. Nash applied to change to another occupation that would not require long stints at sea and allow time for Ronin, this request too was denied and she was told that “everyone” has stuff to worry about “when they deploy”. When I deployed, she was told, I had to worry about changing “my cellphone plan”.

Ms. Nash repeatedly asked to transfer positions within the military so she would not be away from home and her child for extended periods of time; however, these requests were never granted.

As a result of the discrimination, harassment and separation from her child, Ms. Nash's mental health deteriorated to the point that she contemplated taking her own life. Sadly, Ms. Nash's plight was borne out in the 2013 Statistics Canada report, which found that women in the Canadian Armed Forces are 815 times more likely to commit suicide than are women in the general population.

On November 29, 2013, Ms. Nash filed a complaint with the Canadian Human Rights Commission alleging discrimination on the basis of sex, marital status and family status. However, the Canadian Human Rights Commission declined to hear the complaint until Ms. Nash had exhausted the grievance and review procedures that were available through the CAF. This is despite the fact that those grievances would be heard by the very individuals responsible for perpetrating the harassment and discrimination—with no expertise in human rights.

Laura Nash filed two grievances accordingly. One challenged the decision to remove her from the MARS course on the basis that it was unjust, unfair and based on false information. That was filed on February 11, 2014. The second was on February 28, 2014, when she filed a policy grievance alleging that the policies of the Department of National Defence and the CAF were discriminatory and adversely affected single mothers.

It took over two years to get a final determination of Laura Nash's grievances from the CAF grievance system. Ultimately, neither was successful. The internal CAF grievance process failed to acknowledge that the decision of the TRB was biased and did not find that the policies of the department or CAF were discriminatory.

On June 26, 2016, I wrote to the Canadian Human Rights Commission advising that both of the grievances had concluded and formally requested to have her discrimination complaint heard. The CHRC responded by stating that they needed to assess whether the allegations had been fully determined by the CAF grievance. We later discovered through a Privacy Act request that the CAF had been advising the CHRC that Ms. Nash's grievances had not been finally determined.

On July 31, 2017, Laura Nash was released from the regular force after having been diagnosed with a “service-related condition”, namely, chronic adjustment disorder. This designation meant that the CAF had deemed her medically unfit to serve in active duty because of a chronic failure to adjust to military life.

Because of her pregnancy and choice to be both officer and mother, Laura Nash was forced to give up a bright career in the military and is unable to work due to the severe anxiety and depression that she developed as a result of the deplorable treatment she received in the military.

• (0900)

Currently living with her son, she receives disability benefit payments from Veterans Affairs and SISIP Financial. Despite her diagnosis and her status as a veteran having served our country, over the course of time, Ms. Nash has had to continually fight to receive support, including therapy and medical and dental care. The resources provided to veterans have been shockingly scarce.

The CAF inexplicably failed to respond to the commission's final deadline of January 19, 2019, to provide them with the final authority decision. Instead, the CAF waited until the commission had issued a report with its recommendations before finally producing this long-awaited decision, which has caused years of delay with respect to Ms. Nash's complaint.

The CAF is now taking the position that the CHRC should not hear Ms. Nash's complaint because they have allegedly dealt with it, concluding that Ms. Nash had not been discriminated against. Ms. Nash's claim is for discrimination on the basis of sex, meaning that the comparable group are males in a position similar to Ms. Nash's. She has experienced adversely differential treatment as compared to her male counterparts.

Ms. Nash's claim is also for discrimination on the basis of family and marital status. The policies and programs that the CAF has are clearly designed for military parents who have a partner and are not single parents. CAF policy that provides flights for military members disadvantages single parents. In addition, when it provides monetary assistance to relocate furniture and personal effects, it provides higher compensation to married members, rather than single members with children.

Ms. Nash's case was covered extensively in the media in the summer of 2017 by the CBC. I was interviewed, as was Ms. Nash, and I expressed that this was a despicable situation, after which Prime Minister Justin Trudeau said the following:

It's very simple: The choice Laura had to make is not acceptable. It is not acceptable in Canada.

This is a very difficult situation for Laura, but we also know it's one that has to end. It's not the first time, I can only imagine, in the history of the Canadian military [that] this has happened, but I certainly hope it will be one of the very last times.

Since then, elated with Mr. Justin Trudeau's words, we wrote to Prime Minister Trudeau, yet we have heard absolutely nothing to date.

Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thanks very much, Natalie.

We're going to pass the floor over to you, Laura. Thanks very much for sharing your story.

Ms. Laura Nash (As an Individual): Thank you, everyone, for having me here today and hearing me speak. It's quite an honour to be with everyone here.

My background is that I'm an ex-professional athlete. I was on Team Canada numerous times. I graduated from the University of Victoria. I was a champion wrestler in high school. I won two awards in basic military training, and I was near the top of my class in navy environmental sea training.

I do very much believe that I had a very bright future ahead of me, but in the middle of my navy training, my abusive husband left me and my one-year-old son. I had no assistance. I couldn't afford a nanny. I had no family to help me within thousands of miles. The base out there in Victoria offers only 20 day care spots for a base of about 3,000 people. There are not enough spots. My son was placed on a two-year waiting list, but only for regular hours of day care. That really doesn't help at all for sailing.

In the meantime, I was flying my child across the country for child care with my parents so that I could sail, so I was deployable, but after I let the naval school know what had happened to me, I began to be treated very differently by the senior officers at my school.

Three days before my graduation, after training for a whole year, and when I was already posted to HMCS *Winnipeg*, I was scheduled to get my promotion and a pay raise that would help me with the cost of child care and the flights, but James Brun, my course training officer—

• (0905)

The Chair: I'm sorry, but could you slow down just a tad? Thank you.

Ms. Laura Nash: Oh, yes. Sorry about that.

James Brun lied to the school board and said that I had 17 requirements left and not enough time and so they should kick me off the course. That wasn't true. I only had four requirements, and I had a book showing the truth. I put that in my grievance, and they did find that I was telling the truth and he wasn't. But I lost my job. He got away with it.

Karen Belhumeur, at that board meeting, told me that based on that information, effective immediately they were ceasing my training; I had too many family matters to deal with. My son was thousands of miles away at that time. I was kicked off the ship and I lost my pay raise, my promotion, and I was removed from the ship's roster. I submitted a harassment complaint against James Brun, and a grievance, but years ago it was found that they weren't going to do anything about it.

I then went to the BPSO, who was the human resources person who helps us switch trades. I told her that I had an unsustainable cost flying my baby back and forth for day care and that I would like to have any other trade. I would do any other job in the forces. There were a hundred other jobs I could have done, even though it broke my heart that I could no longer sail, because that was what I wanted to do. The BPSO told me that the CAF does not recognize a baby to switch trades and she wouldn't help me.

I went to Karen Belhumeur, the head of the department at my school, and another female superior, Kim Chu, for help. They brought me into their office and told me behind closed doors that if I didn't get rid of my child, I would be fired. I couldn't believe that my own Canadian government would force me to give away my baby, or terminate my employment if I didn't, when all I wanted to do was serve my country.

I was willing to do any job that I could. I had already missed that second whole year of my child's life so that I could serve in the navy and be at sea, and I was threatened with loss of employment if I didn't get rid of him on a more permanent basis. It was a catch-22. I didn't want to live without him, but I didn't know what to do without a job, so I started at that point becoming suicidal.

I volunteered for logistics and I worked there for a year, hoping to get a trade transfer into that trade because it sails much less. I told the female CO of base logistics there, Commander Roberts, that there was a lot of discrimination going on against me. She told me that I should have had an abortion and that these problems were my own fault for having a baby too early in my career. She also told me that being on the wait-list for military day care for two years was just the way it is for everybody and she would not help me.

After asking the padre for help and receiving none, I then went to the mental health unit and told them that my chain of command was trying to force me to give away my child. The doctor put me on a temporary medical category. This prevented me from going to sea. I thought this would be a good opportunity to fill out my paperwork and hopefully get to Cornwall back in Ontario, to train as an air traffic control officer so that I could be close to my family, my support network. I would no longer sail with these erratic schedules that are impossible for a single parent. I was ready to switch trades, but my female doctor, Dr. Boylan, told me that she was not signing my transfer papers because I had been to mental health for three different reasons.

I was stuck in the military without a trade, without belonging to a unit fully, without any chance of promotion or advancement for four years. I was a pariah, and it took a very big toll on my health.

The only thing I could do was volunteer again, so I worked at public affairs. I made much less money than everyone in the office because I was stuck for seven years at the lowest rank possible. I did a really good job there. I waited for my medical chit to expire so that I could transfer to public affairs because I was doing a good job, but Dr. Boylan wouldn't sign my medical papers. I was trapped.

I went to work every day stuck in that lowest officer rank, for seven years. There was just no chance of me developing my career. All around me all of my peers were advancing in their career. They were getting promotions and they were earning more money. I was stuck.

Depressed and trying to push suicide from my mind, I tried to use my leave travel assistance, which Natalie mentioned, to fly home for Christmas to see my family. I found that when I gave birth, I lost that benefit to be flown home to see my family because my son became my next of kin. All of my single friends in the military had two free flights per year, but I had to pay because I gave birth.

• (0910)

I got an email saying that because I had a baby, I was bumped down to a second-tier category to fly on the military Airbuses to go home for Christmas, while everyone else who was single got free rides. I waited. A month later I applied, and then I was denied because all the flights were full.

I was denied the benefits, based on my family status, and the discriminatory policies are still in place today.

The military also took \$700 off my paycheque for day care when my son finally got in after the wait list, and \$915 for my rent. However, a male officer who sat next to me on the same course got his room and board paid for by the military because he had a wife and a house back in New Brunswick, pursuant to the policy called "furniture and effects". There was a \$3,000 pay gap between me and my married male counterpart who didn't have a child. That was not even including salary.

Suicide became an everyday battle for me as I was surrounded by enemies in the workplace. My training officers ganged up on me. Those whose job it was to help me switch jobs refused, and the medical support basically stabbed me in the back. If I had never gone to the mental health unit for help, I wouldn't have lost my job because they would have switched me into a trade.

Everything I went to the mental health unit for was actually a direct women's issue, and there was no support for any of it.

I knew that I hit rock bottom as I was biking to work because I was crying, and I had tears streaming down my face. I was sobbing and gasping for air while I was biking, so I knew that I was in trouble. At night, I would wake up doing the same thing, in a panic because I was forced to choose between my child or losing my career and my home because the military was providing a home for me and I knew that I was going to lose that, too. The choices were too hard.

The navy was trying to force me to go back to sea, where I had been harassed by James Brun, and I knew that I had to empty my bank account once again to fly my child across the country to say goodbye to him so that I could sail. That was the only way.

At that point, I made up my mind that if I got on a plane one more time to give my child away for the military that was torturing me, I would give my boy to my parents one last time and end my life—

The Chair: Just take your time, Laura.

Ms. Laura Nash: —and I would end my suffering that way.

I couldn't live without my child any longer, and I couldn't live with the harassment and ostracization that I was feeling on a daily basis in the military.

Since being kicked out of the military, I have also felt the burn of how veterans are treated by our government, too.

I was kicked out of the forces medically, but I was given no family doctor or assistance to get one. The waiting list for a family doctor in my city was eight months long, so I was medically released without any medical care. If that's happening to me, I think that it's probably happening to a lot of people.

I had to fight Veterans Affairs for eight months just for help with one of the things I have, which is bruxism. When treatment was finally approved after eight months, it just didn't make any sense: VAC approved only half of the treatment, but the other half was necessary and took only 20 seconds.

It's very clear that the VAC employees are not doctors and are not dentists, and it's clear that they're denying veterans medical care while last year there was \$360 million for veterans that sat unused.

The problem with VAC isn't funding. The problem is bad staff who are cruel and unqualified to be making life-threatening medical decisions on behalf of veterans. They are denying us the care that we need.

I had another severe bout of depression last Christmas when VAC case managers told me that I'd be unlikely to qualify for benefits much longer because I have an English degree. Three times I've been threatened by VAC employees to have my benefits terminated, and it's very stressful.

I'm here today to make sure that this never happens to another woman, and I am willing to do whatever I can to change the discriminatory practices and policies that still exist in the CAF. Now that I can clearly identify the problems with VAC, I'd also like to help make positive changes there, too. I think that we need to recognize that veterans can get the help they need and also that female veterans do have different issues—not just me, but all women who have been to war or not. Whatever issues they have might be different from the status quo and the policies that we have in place because, typically, the benefits are for men.

Thank you very much for listening.

• (0915)

The Chair: Thank you very much, Laura.

As the committee knows, we've gone a little over the time with some of our testimony, but I hope that you have given me the lenience to say, "Yes, just keep on talking."

Julie, we're now going to move to you for seven minutes, plus or minus.

Ms. Julie S. Lalonde (As an Individual): Thank you.

[Translation]

Good morning, everyone.

[English]

I want to start by saying thank you, Laura and Sandra, for your courage, not just for this morning but for going public with your experiences. What happened to both of you is horrific, and it's preventable. It's preventable, and we need to talk about it in that way.

My name is Julie S. Lalonde. I have spent the last 16 years working to end male violence against women in this country. My father was a proud CAF member, but I have been thrust into this conversation because of my experience in presenting to the Royal Military College in the fall of 2014.

I was engaged by the Royal Military College, because of my expertise, to come to train every cadet at RMC—that's about 1,000 students—and give them training on bystander intervention and sexual violence.

I was quite excited about the opportunity. It feels like a lifetime ago, but 2014 was before the Ghomeshi story broke and before #MeToo. Nobody was talking about sexual violence—not even close to the way they are now—so an institution asking me to come and train every single cadet felt progressive.

Unfortunately, when I arrived, it was clear that not only was this not taken seriously, but they were clearly checking off a box and really setting me up to fail in a number of ways, which I can get into later. That was a institutional failure on the behalf of the institution, then, but the cadets were some of the worst people I have ever had to deal with in my entire life.

They were rude. They were disrespectful. I was catcalled. I was accused of hating men. This is what I was told: "Why did you think we were going to take you seriously? You came here in a dress and you're a civilian." I had women cadets tell me that they just weren't going to take me seriously because I was a woman, to which I

replied: "You're a woman in this institution. That means they're never going to take you seriously either."

It was a horrific experience. I think what is noteworthy is that the third-years were the worst. These are people who had been in that institution for three years; we're not talking about 18-year-olds off the street. These are people who had been indoctrinated in that institution for three years.

I filed a complaint with the institution. It was clear that the cadets knew that I wasn't going to take it, so they filed a complaint against me. They had access to the chain of command and I did not. Therefore, I was investigated by RMC for five months under allegations that I had called all men "rapists", something that is laughable, I would hope, but that was taken seriously by RMC. About five months later, they concluded that I had in fact been harassed, and I was issued a written apology by DND.

Shortly afterwards, Justice Deschamps wrote her report and, if folks remember, the CAF was not too pleased with her recommendations. This was under General Lawson at the time. There were crickets. There was nobody in a position to come forward and back up what Justice Deschamps was saying.

Because I'm a civilian and because I had a written apology, I was well positioned to come forward and back up her claims, so I did. The result was that it was a national news story, which was great for starting the conversation, but I was inundated with threats of violence and death threats. In fact, someone was arrested and charged with threatening to kill me, and I'm a civilian with a written apology recognizing that I was harassed by DND.

For me, what I want folks to understand is that as an expert Governor General's award-winning civilian with a written apology, I was absolutely slandered. Also, I wasn't just slandered by random trolls on the Internet. General Lawson was asked directly about my experience by Peter Mansbridge on national television, and he insinuated that I was lying. For the general—who at the time was giving an exit interview to Peter Mansbridge on national television—to insinuate that I was lying is horrific. It's not okay.

Again, I am a civilian. I owe nothing to the military. I could never walk into those institutions ever again and be fine. Unlike the women sitting at this table who have dedicated their lives to that space, I had little to lose and I was treated in that way, so I don't understand how we think we're going to get to the core of this issue when nobody is safe if they call out what's going on.

There are answers, but part of the military institution, which is something I see when I work with campuses as well, is the mistaken belief that unless you are part of the institution, you don't have the answers. The military is a notoriously closed door environment. They are notoriously a non-welcoming environment to outsiders, and there's a real belief that they have the answers. Every time a military institution tells you that they have the answers to sexual violence, they are dunking on themselves by recognizing that they've had the answer for years and years and they've just never implemented it. We need to frame it in that way. They do not have the expertise.

● (0920)

General Lawson was a pilot, so he could go on the news and talk about how to fly a plane, and I could not correct him on that. But he did not have more authority on addressing sexual violence than people who have been doing this for decades. We really need to frame it as “expertise”. If you're building a bridge, you're going to hire an engineer. If you're trying to address sexual violence that is rampant in the institution, then you need to bring experts to the table.

Lastly, I think it's important to recognize that part of the reason I have received so much heinous backlash, which continues to this day, is that we believe the military is the last place where men can be men. I think we need to be bold and say that. There is a real belief from women within the RMC, who are proud cadets, that they are there on borrowed time: “They are letting us be here, and the second we step out of line, they will remind us we are here only because they're allowing us to be here.”

Again, that's in the context of gender, but it's also in terms of race. RMC is a very white institution. The military is very white. It's very straight. Folks who are marginalized in any way, shape or form are constantly reminded, “If you toe the line and you act like us, we will allow you to be here, but fundamentally this is where we let men be men.” For me to challenge that institution was seen as challenging all of masculinity, and that's why I think the response was so heinous.

As a civilian, this is how I have been treated, so I cannot imagine the level of courage it takes to speak out as folks who are current or former members of the CAF. Again, my incredible gratitude to Laura, Sandra and all of the others who have come forward. It takes an immense amount of bravery, and I recognize that.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Julie.

We're going to begin this round with our course of questioning, and we're going to begin with seven minutes.

I'm going to turn the floor over to Rachel Bendayan.

You have seven minutes.

Ms. Rachel Bendayan (Outremont, Lib.): Thank you.

I want to echo what Madame Lalonde was saying. Thank you very much for coming forward today and with your story generally. It must take incredible courage.

I was especially touched by your story, Ms. Nash. I was elected only two months ago. My baby girl is home, and I commute to Ottawa. It's nothing compared with what you've lived. I do it for one week at a time, and I'm still getting used to it. For you to have been without your son for so long in order to do the work that you love.... It's very difficult, and it's absolutely incredible.

I would like to ask you a bit about how we can address some of these issues for single moms as well as single parents in the CAF.

I will address my question to you, Laura, as well as to you, Ms. MacDonald, as a professional in the field.

Ms. Laura Nash: There are some policies that I outlined in my second grievance that I think would make a really, really big difference.

One of them is not taking away our flights the moment we give birth, so changing things around the next of kin. I was never asking for my baby's seat to be paid for. I just wanted the same rights as everyone else, so at least my ticket.

The “furniture and effects” policy is tough. If you move your furniture and effects, then you lose all your board—your rent and your food and stuff like that.

There are not enough day care spots.

● (0925)

Ms. Rachel Bendayan: But even the day care spots would not help if you're at sea.

Ms. Laura Nash: They don't at all. Right.

In that case, and in my case, if there were a policy for the BPSO to allow someone who comes to them for help to switch trades.... There are a hundred different trades in the military. There are places for everyone. I just happened to be very ambitious before I had a baby. I really wanted to go to sea. That's what I wanted to do. When my husband left me, I couldn't anymore.... I could if I gave my baby away.

If there were a policy where the BPSO could consider people with special child care needs as a reason to switch trades and go into a different career, I think that would be a very good solution.

Ms. Rachel Bendayan: Ms. MacDonald, do you have anything to add?

Ms. Natalie MacDonald: I do, actually. Thank you very much, Rachel. I certainly can tell you that I've thought quite a lot about this. I think there are three ways we can fix the problems, and I welcome the opportunity to advise in terms of what I've seen.

First, I believe we need to overhaul the grievance system within the CAF, because it cannot and should not take five years to reach a decision. To do that, the CAF needs to develop checks and balances so that if a lie is found in the middle of a grievance and is proved to be a lie, it needs to be recognized. That was never corrected in Ms. Nash's case, and that was the start of the worst part of her life. To obtain these checks and balances, I believe that the CAF needs to have an impartial party moving the grievance process along that's not part of the CAF. I say this because the people who are deciding the grievances are the same people who are perpetuating the discrimination and harassment. In criminal law, the decision that the Supreme Court of Canada handed down of Jordan had tremendous impact on moving criminal cases forward quickly and effectively. Why not the same with the CHRC? We need to legislate that, but we need to have a watchdog.

I believe there's a second way to overhaul the grievance process. The CHRC cannot be the last place a griever can go after the grievance is exhausted, because that allows the CHRC to be able to adopt a passive role. Quite frankly, it requires an amendment to the act, to paragraph 41.1(a), to allow anyone in the federal sector to be able to go to the expert tribunal to get an expert decision in place. I think it's something that has to happen, because throughout Ms. Nash's case, she did not have individuals who were actually expert in the matter of human rights.

Ms. Rachel Bendayan: Just to be clear, that would be an appeals process from decisions of the CHRC?

Ms. Natalie MacDonald: Honourable member, it would probably be more than that. I would say get rid of paragraph 41.1(a) in its entirety. I would be as blunt as saying that. People could have the choice of whether they wanted to go through the grievance system or whether they wanted to have their case heard by the Canadian Human Rights Tribunal. I have been doing this awhile, and I have seen this wall that has constantly gone up. Paragraph 41.1(a) is something that prevents human rights cases from moving forward, because they send them back to another grievance process and then they tend to languish. Third, I feel that we cannot allow the same people who perpetuate the discrimination and harassment to decide upon it. It's as simple as that. There is certainly a bias there, and there's every reason to believe that Ms. Nash couldn't possibly have been successful against the individuals she was accusing.

There's a second way that I feel the system needs to be fixed. Policies within CAF that are discriminatory need to be addressed and amended. That starts right away with definitions of sexual harassment and sexual misconduct in current policies, which are too narrow and do not refer to the issue that jokes and innuendo in the workplace can actually be considered within the definition. Additionally, sexual assault is not defined in the same way as it is in the Criminal Code. I also believe that policies are defined for two-parent traditional families....

I'm sorry, Madam Speaker. I have quite a bit to offer; I apologize for going over.

• (0930)

The Chair: Absolutely. Perhaps we can get some of that in as the questions go around, just for fairness for the entire committee.

Ms. Natalie MacDonald: Certainly. May I just say the third, and then I can expand upon it?

The Chair: Please do.

Ms. Natalie MacDonald: The third way is to really pay wholehearted attention to medical care for individuals within the CAF—women in the CAF—who are much more likely to commit suicide than the general population.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you so much.

Rachael Harder, you have the floor for seven minutes.

Ms. Rachael Harder (Lethbridge, CPC): Ms. MacDonald, do you want to expand on that any further? I'm happy to give you another minute or two.

Ms. Natalie MacDonald: Thank you very much, Ms. Harder. I would because I actually did quite a bit of work to understand it.

The issue with policies is that they are defined for two-parent, traditional families and not for the single parent or the non-traditional family. That needs to be recognized. The military needs to move into 2019. The fact is that we have more single women who are doing everything that they can to be mother and officer at the same time, and we need to recognize that.

The flight policy that Ms. Nash referenced is the leave travel assistance. When she gave birth, she lost the benefit to be flown back to see her family while all her single friends got two free flights. There is something drastically wrong with that. It's blatantly discriminatory. The email she received that told her that, because she had a baby, she was being bumped down to a second-tier category to fly on Airbuses is blatant discrimination.

The furniture and effects policy that Ms. Nash referenced is about the relocation of furniture and personal effects. Ms. Nash was in the very same class as a male officer; he got room and board, and she didn't. I can't see anything more blatantly discriminatory than those policies that I referenced.

Then there is the day care. Having 20 day care spots for 3,000 people and a two-year wait list does not assist anyone. With great respect, the child will be grown by that time. People need day care if they are going to serve our country. Our children need to be looked after. If it's a single mom who is as courageous as Laura Nash, we need to have those day care spots available.

In the failure to accommodate, which I have seen for years and years, the CAF is allowed to discriminate. In the private sector, that really results in a huge lawsuit, but it's not the same in the CAF. There is a fine of maybe up to \$2,000, and that's not adequate. The CAF has to recognize that someone's having a baby as a reason to move careers is an accommodation, not a blatant barrier to being able to switch jobs or redeploy. The CAF has to realize that it cannot threaten to terminate a woman's employment if she has a baby. If you do that in the private sector, as we all know, that will result in extraordinary damages, and that is the subject of my book—moral, punitive, tort actions, you name it in employment law. Those failures to accommodate are based on family status and marital status, and if it's not okay in the private sector, why is it all right in the CAF? There is no recognition of those rights.

Lastly, my third point that I spoke about is that the medical care is so lacking at this point. When on a temporary medical leave, such as Ms. Nash was on, or while on release under VAC, it is imperative that women get the therapy and the counselling that they need. It's the same situation as that of a man who has had his leg blown off. The woman needs the same therapy, and it is not there. There are no resources for counselling. There is no resource for depression, anxiety or chronic adjustment disorder. The suicide rate that has been stated in the Canadian statistics report frightens me, and we're only going to see an increase if we don't, in fact, provide these necessary things. You heard Ms. Nash's testimony about what she has been through. I've been with her every step of this four-way journey, and I can tell you that it broke my heart when Ms. Nash told me that she had been struggling to get a physician and to get a dentist to fix the bruxism that is a direct result of the discrimination and harassment.

• (0935)

I believe we have the ability to do this. I believe we need to turn our minds to it and really get into the legislation and changing the attitude of the CAF.

Thank you very much, Ms. Harder, for giving me more time. I appreciate that.

Ms. Rachael Harder: You're welcome.

Ms. MacDonald, who's responsible for implementing these changes? How does this happen?

Ms. Natalie MacDonald: I think this happens on a threefold level. I think that the individual CAF senior officers have to be involved with this. I think we have to have the Canadian Human Rights Commission involved to understand the blockage that's being created. Quite frankly, we need an excellent human resource organization to go in and revamp these policies and procedures. They need to be gender-blind and cognizant of what a woman goes through.

The Chair: We're now going to move over to Christine Moore.

Christine.

[Translation]

Ms. Christine Moore (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, NDP): Thank you, Madam Chair.

In 2005, I did my officer cadet training, which was provided at Saint-Jean-sur-Richelieu at the time. The harassment course was a one-hour mandatory class given in basic or officer cadet training. Most of the courses were given by male instructors and they also had to give the harassment class. Our impression was that the person giving the course saw it less like a reward and more like a punishment.

It was quite another matter for the first aid classes, for example. They were often given by other instructors. Medics were brought in to teach the first aid classes because it was considered that the on-site instructors perhaps did not have the necessary skill level.

In your opinion, should harassment classes be given by experts, civilian or military, who would be properly trained in the area, instead of giving the task to general training instructors?

Do you feel that one hour is enough? If not, how much time should be spent on the class in basic training or officer cadet training?

Ms. Julie S. Lalonde: That is an excellent question.

In my opinion, we clearly need the training to be more thorough. We know that one hour is absolutely not enough, whether it is in an office, on the Hill, or in a primary school. One hour is useless; it is just a start.

Also, if people do not have follow-up courses six or eight months after training on the role of peers and on bystander intervention, they will forget what they have learned and they will lose the confidence they need to act.

At the moment, a lot of people intervene as bystanders, but without the victims' permission. So they witness something happening and tell themselves that they have to do something so that, if it becomes public, people will know that they have done the right thing. So they rush to file a complaint without the victims' permission. The victims lose the courage to do anything, because they did not give permission. That then dissuades other people from doing anything because complaints are left with no follow-up.

We clearly need training on the role of bystanders that is at least three, four or five hours long. The training should be followed by a refresher course after six or eight months to focus on the tools and also to give people the confidence to do something. That is what is missing.

We absolutely know that the people giving the training must be experts. I have no confidence that the army currently has any experts. We also know that the most effective model is a course given by a man and a woman together. That way, they can consolidate their power, and can also give each other more confidence. In fact, we know that the format that works best is when the woman is the expert and the man is there to support her and corroborate what she is saying. We are seeing that this works in any context. In my opinion, particularly in the army, the training must be given by a man and a woman together. I feel that that is the key.

• (0940)

Ms. Christine Moore: If we made changes, for example, so that a one-day training course is given by specialist instructors at the beginning of one's career, with refresher courses every six months, you believe that it would be more effective than what currently exists. Is that correct?

Ms. Julie S. Lalonde: Absolutely.

Ms. Christine Moore: Thank you very much, Ms. Lalonde.

Ms. MacDonald, could you tell me what you think about the following practice? It is an open question.

Before they start their basic or leadership training, all future soldiers must go to a medical centre where they go through various tests to check their proficiencies. All women also have to have a pregnancy test to prove that they are not pregnant before they begin the course.

What do you think of that practice?

[English]

Ms. Natalie MacDonald: I think it's blatant discrimination.

[Translation]

Ms. Christine Moore: Thank you very much.

Of course, women often end up as heads of single-parent families, but there are also men in that situation. I get the impression that the army has a major problem with heads of single parent families. Generally speaking, it is more difficult to manage their postings. So they are pushed to leave the armed forces, especially if they are in the lower ranks, like private, corporal, officer cadet, second lieutenant and lieutenant. The situation is not as bad for members with 20 years of service, because they can be found more administrative jobs where they will not have to be deployed.

In your experience, are single parents pushed towards the door or made to feel that they no longer want to stay because of the atmosphere and the comments? I am not talking about the administrative or financial aspects.

I feel it was very clear in Ms. Nash's case.

What do you think about the whole thing, Ms. Perron?

Ms. Sandra Perron: My career was a little before Ms. Nash's. Those who have read my book know that I made another decision. For those who do not know me, I was in the infantry. During my career, I had two abortions in order to make my career the priority. My first abortion was because I had been raped in the Canadian Armed Forces; the second was because I was going to lose my career in the infantry if I had a child. So I arranged things for the benefit of my career so that I could succeed in the infantry.

People talk about changing policies and rules. I feel that the Canadian Forces will never have enough policies, rules, standard operating procedures, orders and royal decrees to solve the problems or the challenges faced by heads of single-parent families.

The leadership culture in the Canadian Armed Forces must be changed so that leaders can make decisions without always going by the book. I am sure that, if Ms. Nash's superior officers were in court, they would say that they had followed the rules. They have to be given the power they need so that they can say that they have dealt with each particular situation.

• (0945)

[English]

Leadership is not treating everybody in the same way; it's treating everybody fairly.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Sandra.

Mrs. Salma Zahid, you have seven minutes.

Mrs. Salma Zahid (Scarborough Centre, Lib.): Thank you, Madam Chair, and to the witnesses. Thanks, Ms. Nash and Ms. Perron for sharing your stories with us. It's very heartbreaking.

My first question is for Ms. Nash. I'm very saddened to hear about the choice you were forced to make between your child and your career. As a mother of two boys, I know that as a mother I would always put my child first.

Could you please help us understand, given the demands of a naval career and the likelihood of a time away at sea, how the CAF should adjust its policies and structure to recognize the challenges faced by mothers, particularly single parents?

Ms. Laura Nash: I've heard that some seagoing vessels have schedules that are, for example, three months on, three months off. That would work, because I could have sent my son to my parents for three months and sailed, and then come back and spent three months with my son. It's a big sacrifice. I would have been sad being away from him for three months, but that's what I was doing anyway in my trade. It would have been fine.

The problem with the navy schedule now is that you can go to sea for one day and then come back for five, then go to sea for three days and then come back for a week, then go to sea for three months and then come back for a month. It's completely erratic.

That's okay because it's operational, so if the ship needs to sail that way, that's fine, but if you had the option for members to be there for three months, so they could do the erratic sailing for those three months, and then the other three months would be with their families or be doing administrative work, training or something, that would really help.

Mrs. Salma Zahid: We have heard in previous testimony for this study that they were also challenged by the Human Rights Commission process, requiring that all internal avenues within your workplace be exhausted first and that those internal processes be stalled. One suggestion we heard is that the complaint process within CAF be handled by a separate organization outside the complainant's chain of command. Do you think that would be beneficial?

Ms. Laura Nash: Yes. The first grievance I filed was about a woman named Karen Bellehumeur, and the person who took that grievance on to solve it was her friend who had his office right next to hers. When I had my grievance meeting, I had to wait outside their offices while they were laughing, joking and talking. Maybe they were purposely doing it to me. When they were done being friends, they would go into their offices and he would say, "Okay, you can come in now." I don't see how that was fair or that any result would have gone in my favour.

Mrs. Salma Zahid: Ms. MacDonald, would you like to add to that?

Ms. Natalie MacDonald: I certainly agree with Ms. Nash. From what I, Ms. Nash and my firm have been through, we have to do something about that, because that's not justice. It's not helping us, and it's certainly not helping Ms. Nash.

Ms. Nash has been put into economic, physical and social peril as a result of what's happened to her. She absolutely needs to have her complaint heard in front of individuals who would have expertise in her grievance. That's what I fear is lacking in the grievance process, which is why I spoke about the idea of actually getting rid of paragraph 41(1)(a) of the act. It's simply to stop the CHRC from blocking legitimate complaints from coming forward. As we all know, the tribunals across Canada, both provincially and, of course, federally, are there because they have the expertise, so we need to allow individuals, particularly within the CAF, to use them.

• (0950)

Mrs. Salma Zahid: My next question is for Ms. Perron. You mentioned in your testimony support for military families. We have a low ratio of women in the armed forces and spouses, women, who are looking after their families. Although it was not in Canada, I grew up as the daughter of an army officer, so I know the stress that families go through. What suggestions do you have with regard to support for families?

Ms. Sandra Perron: Presently the MFRCs, the military family resource centres, are doing some initiatives to help support the families. They are developing networks of support so that people like Ms. Nash will perhaps have a clan or a network where they can help out with day care and extended leave care. The family centres need to not always follow the rules and regulations and policies in the military. They need to go outside of that and look at specific cases and ad lib as they go in order to support the individual cases with very particular situations.

One of the things I currently hear as I do the recruits across the country is that women have been from the get-go of their careers unrooted, derooted, uprooted from their families. They don't have the parents or the mothers-in-law to take care of their children. The MFRCs, most of their initiatives right now are addressing or targeting how to help women rather than also putting pressure on the men to help women. That's my primary focus, as well as things like the Silver Cross Mothers.

We have an initiative wherein a Silver Cross mother is chosen every year to lay a wreath on November 11 at the Cenotaph. This perpetuates the notion that women are the primary caregivers and more responsible for the children. We should have Silver Cross families or Silver Cross parents so that, first of all, the stigma is removed. Men should be treated fairly, too. We ought not perpetuate this idea that only women suffer when they lose a child. It also signals diversity. Our soldiers today have sometimes two fathers or two mothers or grandparents. How do you chose? Let's have Silver Cross parents, Silver Cross families.

By the way, I have suggested this to the Royal Canadian Legion, the Governor General, the Minister of National Defence, and the Minister of Veterans Affairs. They all got a letter from me, and yet we still have Silver Cross Mothers.

The Chair: We'll turn now to Rachael, and then go to Sonia.

Ms. Rachael Harder: Ms. Lalonde, in reference to the Canadian Armed Forces, you said that nobody is safe if they call out what is going on. Can you expand on that statement a little further?

Ms. Julie S. Lalonde: Yes, I think Sandra's and Laura's testimony today and the stories that Sandra is hearing criss-crossing the country are indicative of that, but then again, I'm a white, educated, bilingual civilian woman with a written apology from the Department of National Defence. I was thrown under the bus by the general at the time on national television. The media allowed people to have comment sections open where people could threaten me and my safety. Mine was a pretty open-and-closed case. The commandant apologized for how I was treated at that institution. To me that's very telling.

I don't know a single woman who has come forward to challenge the institution, whether you're talking CAF, the RCMP, or the

firefighter. Who has come forward and actually been lauded as a hero in that moment? Nobody. Maybe years later we will look back and recognize the sacrifice that those folks have made, but we don't have examples of someone coming forward and getting unequivocal support. It is a struggle.

You have to hire lawyers if you can afford it. You need to find supportive folks to come to your rescue. History looks back on you and you know you're on the right side of history, but that doesn't do anything to protect your livelihood in the moment.

I'm a civilian who could not speak in public without a security detail, and I speak to end violence against women in Canada as a white lady. I don't think it gets any more blunt than that. I couldn't go into community groups and talk about ending violence without requesting that the OPP be there to make sure someone doesn't come after me. People threaten me to my face and online, and I had to get the police involved. This actually happened to me. How many women are just leaving the military and not bothering to come forward? Tons of them.

This is an institution that has a ceiling; they're aiming for 21% of the CAF to be women. That is so embarrassingly low that it's laughable. We're not going to get there when the people trying to change things are pariahs within that community.

• (0955)

Ms. Rachael Harder: I understand that Ms. MacDonald has outlined some concrete systemic steps that need to be taken within the organization of the CAF. If, based on your expertise, you were to further outline some practical steps on how to increase the number of women within the Canadian Armed Forces, what would you say they are?

Ms. Julie S. Lalonde: Well, first of all, I wouldn't encourage more women to join the CAF at this point. I think that's the wrong goal to have. You have to fix the problem. You can't just add women and stir, which has traditionally been the approach.

One, I think CAF is missing this massive opportunity, which is that the forces are changing in many different ways. The idea that it's brute force and that you're in the trenches like back in World War II.... You want smart people to do diplomacy, to do code breaking, to sit at computers, to do IT work. That is the face of the new military.

You could do an overhaul that says, "The Canadian Armed Forces is changing in a lot ways." That could be targeting diversity, but it could also target the fact that we're looking for smart people, right? That's what the Canadian Armed Forces is looking for: a more educated military. They could rebrand in that way. I think that would take the focus away from just Operation Honour and we need more women, to "The whole thing is changing and let's do that in an exciting way."

Secondly, they need to have outsider expertise. People need to report to someone who's not in the chain of command. The new sexual assault centre service is great, but not awesome. I mean, it's not there yet. I think overall, the conversation needs to be had that we're having as a nation, which is, should the CAF be investigating sexual assault within the military system? That's a hard no from me. Again, they don't have the expertise, and we keep allowing them to defer to "We'll figure it out."

It's external support, external advisers, external experts in to train your folks, external people to deal with your complaints, and then also having a massive conversation about how the military is changing. View that as a positive rather than making the men who will want the system to stay the same feel so threatened. That's where the defensiveness comes from.

They feel like we're taking something away from them by having paternal leave. What does that say about that institution?

The Chair: We are going until quarter after 10, so we have some time following Sonia as well.

Sonia, I'm going to switch the floor to you for five minutes.

Ms. Sonia Sidhu (Brampton South, Lib.): Thank you very much for sharing your experiences.

With regard to the non-welcoming atmosphere to outsiders in the Canadian Armed Forces, Ms. Lalonde, you said that we can change that culture.

Can you comment on that?

Ms. Julie S. Lalonde: Well, first, we need to stop saying it's a big ship and that it takes a long time to turn it around. I've heard that ship metaphor a hundred times in the last five years, and I'm bored to death of it.

The other one is, "Well, sexual violence is not unique to the military. Sexism is not unique to the military. We see this across the board." That is the pettiest cop-out I've ever heard in my entire life.

This is an institution that monitors what your underwear looks like. Let's be blunt here, right? Every facet of your life is controlled when you join the Canadian Armed Forces, and we're acting as though we can't do anything about these childish buffoons who are harassing women, the people who are laughing in women's faces when they make complaints.

We need courage, frankly, and we need bold leadership, to be able to say that this isn't just about sexual violence eradication, that we just have to find the 20 rapists within the military and get rid of them. We need to talk about how it is embedded in the military to be masculine. The uniform is masculine. You have to erase every part of your femininity to join the Canadian Armed Forces. You have to choose between your child and a career. You have to look like a man.

Literally, it is adding women and stir. We need strong leadership to name it as such, to say that masculinity for too long has been the key to succeeding in this job and we're not going to do that anymore. As well, being white has been clear to being part of the military, being straight—all of those things—and we're moving away from that direction.

It's a hierarchical institution, which means that General Vance could be making bolder statements and putting bolder things in place, and that will trickle down. It is a hierarchical institution; they look to him for direction.

• (1000)

Ms. Sonia Sidhu: Ms. Perron, thank you for taking that initiative with Silver Cross Mothers. I'm from Brampton South, where we have Diana Abel. I met with her. So thank you for the Silver Cross Mothers initiative. You sent the letter.

We also heard about 20 spots for child care. Who made the decision for just the 20 spots for child care in the CAF?

Anyone can answer. It's an open question.

Ms. Laura Nash: Actually, I don't know.

It's the MFRC building that had the day care in Esquimalt, and it was a very, very big building. They kept one of the day care rooms empty so that people in the community could rent it out for birthday parties on the weekend. Because we're all paying \$700 a month, that's \$7,000, it should be a self-funding program. It shouldn't cost the military any more money than that, or the MFRC.

I'm not sure who exactly is in charge of it, but I think there is a lot of opportunity to increase those day care spots, and put them closer to the base. The one in Esquimalt was closed, and the only one was about nine kilometres away and about 40 minutes in the morning and during traffic. My day care spot was 40 minutes away, in traffic, from the base.

Ms. Sonia Sidhu: In terms of a family-friendly CF, do you think increasing day care support is one solution for that?

Ms. Laura Nash: Absolutely, yes.

Ms. Sonia Sidhu: Ms. Perron, do you have any comment on that?

Ms. Sandra Perron: I totally agree. We need to better support families, and that means providing day care on the bases and everything else that goes with it. There will be a cost, of course, but it shouldn't be that they only have so many spots. We should have as many spots as we need for our soldiers and our officers to be deployed.

Ms. Sonia Sidhu: What else can the federal government do? My colleagues asked that question. Do you have more, or any other, solutions or suggestions?

This is for anyone. It's open.

Ms. Sandra Perron: Go ahead.

Ms. Natalie MacDonald: Thank you, Ms. Perron. I'm going to say it as bluntly as I can: We need to bring the military into 2019. We need to do that by recognizing that it is broken in many places, and it needs to be fixed.

Ms. Sonia Sidhu: Thank you.

The Chair: Rachael, we'll turn it over to you. You have five minutes.

Ms. Rachael Harder: Really? That's great.

The Chair: Yes, we're here till quarter after.

Ms. Rachael Harder: Ms. MacDonald, I don't know if you recall saying in your opening remarks that you had written to Trudeau with regard to his words, you said, but then you didn't explain what those words were. You also said that you had yet to hear back from him. What were those words of his stated that you wrote to him concerning—

The Chair: Point of order. One moment.

Go ahead.

Mr. Scott Simms (Coast of Bays—Central—Notre Dame, Lib.): Sorry, it's not a point of order. I just want to ask a question.

The Chair: Oh, okay. Is the question for one of the ladies, or—

Mr. Scott Simms: I want to have my five minutes, if that's possible.

The Chair: You're not on the list of the members to speak. If you want to speak with Salma within your own group.... We'll continue with Rachael.

Mr. Scott Simms: I wasn't trying to interrupt. Sorry.

The Chair: It's all good. It's not a problem.

Go ahead, Rachael. Continue.

Ms. Rachael Harder: Ms. MacDonald, I was just wondering if you could tell us what those words were.

Ms. Natalie MacDonald: Certainly. We held high hopes, Ms. Harder, after Prime Minister Trudeau declared that this was a really horrible situation for Laura. We were very, very hopeful that things were going to change.

Unfortunately, we didn't see anything, so I wrote in September 2017 following the segment on *The National* that we had both appeared in, to advise him that I wanted to refresh his memory as to Ms. Nash and what she had done. I asked specifically for his assistance in bringing the matter to a resolution, because we were stuck in limbo with the Canadian Human Rights Commission. We hadn't been able to get anywhere, as Ms. Nash and I have referenced. I needed some help. I needed someone to be able to do something, and I'd hoped that Prime Minister Trudeau would be that person. Unfortunately, we didn't hear back from him or his office.

• (1005)

Ms. Natalie MacDonald: Thank you.

Ms. Rachael Harder: Ms. Nash, I'll give you an opportunity. If there were one thing you wanted to leave this committee with going forward as we consider the treatment of women in the Canadian Armed Forces, what would you hope we would take away from your experience and having the opportunity to present today?

Ms. Laura Nash: I'm concerned about the quotas—and Julie touched on it a little bit—that if we're just trying to increase the number of women in the military, there are still a lot of traps for them and a lot of really bad places they can go. If we can just get in there and change some of the policies.... I don't think it will be that difficult a task to change some of the things that could make it better for them.

I'm just concerned that we are setting women up to fail if they have babies and end up.... If their husband leaves them, if they have any other issues, or if they're sexually assaulted or anything like

that.... Also, there should be a little more women-specific health care. I don't think that's really there yet either.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We are going to turn it over to Emmanuella Lambropoulos.

Emmanuella, you have the floor.

Ms. Emmanuella Lambropoulos (Saint-Laurent, Lib.): Thank you to all of our witnesses for being here with us today.

Ms. Nash can correct me if I'm wrong as I have no experience in the military. I once saw a documentary that makes a lot of sense now that I hear you guys talking about the culture that exists in the military. Soldiers were talking in the documentary at their training camp about the main goal of what the military does to them while they're in training. You said that as the years go by, it probably gets progressively worse because third-year people were the worst behaved toward you.

I was wondering if anything that I had heard was true. Basically, they were saying that the main thing was to dehumanize someone in order to build them into a soldier and to make someone who can do things that they're not raised to do from a very young age. They're raised to have certain values and to have a moral compass and to act in a certain way. When they go into the military, they have to unlearn certain things in order to relearn how to be a soldier.

Do you think that process is what lends itself to this manly and masculine culture that exists? In what ways can we maintain effective training that would allow soldiers to be effective when they're out on the ground, while not adding to this discrimination against women, and not making it about being masculine, but about other things that would make them tough soldiers?

Ms. Laura Nash: I think it's important to recognize that there are nearly 70,000 DND employees, if I'm not wrong, and only a few thousand are actually going to be snipers or special forces. There are literally tens of thousands of people in the military who are in support roles and work office jobs, just like so many other Canadians. I don't think that those Canadians need to be dehumanized for those specific roles. If someone wants to go and be special forces or wants to be a sniper, then maybe that would be a part of it.

Ms. Emmanuella Lambropoulos: In your training, you didn't feel that you were taught to live life differently because you were in the navy or because you were doing training in whatever you were doing there?

Ms. Laura Nash: Yes. I mean, we learned how to fold our clothes, pack our bags and take care of our stuff, which is different. As far as dehumanizing soldiers, we're not at war, so I think it's different. There are so many administrative roles that the training is office training.

• (1010)

Ms. Emmanuella Lambropoulos: Why is such a tough environment needed? Why do you think that, as the years went on, people became more and more negative toward women? Can you comment on that?

Ms. Julie S. Lalonde: I think that the core of your question is really the nature of the military itself, frankly. I think that it does tie into high rates of people taking their own lives and high rates of trauma within the military. If you have to suppress how you feel because your masculinity and machismo is a key characteristic to help you succeed in the military, then that is conducive to men having high rates of trauma and not being able to address it, and also not being able to talk about the importance of care work for them and being parent, to speak to Sandra's point.

To me, what's important in the context of the RMC is that, in my experience, there were two sexual assaults and two suicides within a short period of time. RMC is a mess. I think it's embarrassing because it's a prestigious military institution that people leave with rank and a degree. It is a fancy place to go to school, so if we can't even get that in order, what does that say about the rest of the CAF, frankly?

You could argue that first-year students are just wild and are all pumped to be a part of the military. If it's a third-year student—which means they're about a year out from possibly leading troops—and they think it's appropriate to get up in a presentation and yell, “Why do you hate men so much? This is embarrassing. Why are you here? I shouldn't have to listen to this woman”, that tells you that the institution made you that way, or it fostered something that was already within you. Part of that is the idea of being super tough and being a fighter and a warrior.

Again, speaking to Laura's point, that's not what the military is in practice, so why are we recruiting people with this idea, as in the commercials, that they're going to jump out of a helicopter and are going to.... That's not what most people are doing.

First of all, we're attracting people who are looking for something that they're not going to get, and then we're also fostering this idea of what it means to be a good member of the CAF—everything from morale-boosting exercises or obstacle courses and things—that is not reflective of what life is like in the military.

That needs to change if you want to recruit women, but what I also care more about is retaining women. If you want to hit a 21% ceiling, first of all, have a conversation with yourself because that ceiling is embarrassing. What other sector would we allow to have that low of a ceiling? Also, what's your retention plan? I don't think you have one because you really have this “add women and stir” approach.

The Chair: Excellent. Thank you very much.

We're going to turn it over to Christine Moore for our final question.

Christine.

[Translation]

Ms. Christine Moore: With recruits, we often see that a female recruit who may have chosen to be a cook is treated differently from

another female recruit who may have chosen a combat career, in tanks, for example.

That is also perpetuated inside the unit. When you have chosen a combat career where you are almost the only woman, there's a lot of pressure. In the beginning, those women want to show that they have the ability, but, after a certain amount of time, they give up and go to work with the quartermaster. Often, they realize that they will never be able to get into the courses to become master corporals and that they will always be stuck in the rank of corporal. Certainly, that's my perception from my experience in the forces.

In your opinion, has that changed? Have women who choose non-traditional careers seen any change of culture in the army, or is there still a problem in the Canadian Forces? Although, on paper, women are allowed to be in the combat trades and in the more difficult trades, the fact remains that, culturally, after a certain time, you realize that it's simply impossible and you're just being masochistic in wanting to continue along those lines.

Ms. Sandra Perron: Perhaps I can answer that.

Combat trades are difficult, with a lot of physical, emotional, moral and intellectual challenges. It is wrong to say that they want soldiers who are not good human beings. But we cannot be deployed with a child at our side. They are operational trades.

The culture is changing. With combat trades, it has to be understood that we have the trade, and then there are times in life when we have obligations and other priorities. So the combat trades should be more flexible, and adjust to families, single parent families or people taking care of their aging parents. They have to adjust more than the other trades because their soldiers are deployed.

This is coming from someone who was in Bosnia and Croatia. I did two tours with the United Nations and I can tell you that our best soldiers are the ones that are better human beings and who adjusted to it. They also make better leaders.

● (1015)

[English]

The Chair: Excellent.

On behalf of the committee, I would like to thank Sandra, Laura, Natalie and Julie for coming and providing their expertise today.

I thank you for all of your stories. Thanks for sharing them with us.

We will be adjourning, but we will be meeting once again at 3:30. We'll be at 425 Wellington for our next set of panels.

The meeting is adjourned.

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